

Exploring the Leadership Practices of County Leaders
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Purpose: A study was conducted during spring 2007 to determine the leadership practices of 288 county officials in North Carolina. A primary focus of the study was to identify and compare demographic characteristics of these county officials, paying specific attention to any existing gender differences that might appear in their leadership behaviors and practices.

Procedures: A web survey was developed to collect data relating to the leadership practices of top county officials in each of the 100 counties in North Carolina. All names and email addresses that appeared on the main page of the county's websites were compiled. A random sample of these names was performed and an email message was sent to each of these people inviting them to participate in the web survey. The response rate for this survey was 42 percent.

To assess the leadership practices of these county leaders, the survey instrument consisted of a variety of basic demographic questions, along with a series of leadership practices or behavioral questions. These questions of leadership behaviors or practices reflected the same leadership components identified by Kouzes and Posner (1993)¹ in their Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI). Permission was obtained from Kouzes and Posner to modify the LPI for use with community leaders. The LPI has five subscales, each containing 6 items for a total of 30 variables. The five subscales are: (1) Challenging the Process, (2) Inspiring a Shared Vision, (3) Enabling Others to Act, (4) Modeling the Way, and (5) Encouraging the Heart. The Statistical Program for Social Scientists (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics and T-tests were used to identify the demographic characteristics of the county officials, as well as determining statistically significant differences that exist between male and female leaders.

Findings: A total of 288 respondents completed the web-based survey. Of this total, 72 percent of the respondents were males and 28 percent were females. The respondents tended to be between 46 to 55 years of age. Nearly 67 percent of the total respondents reported to have at least a four year college degree, with many having a master's degree (42 percent). Eighty-one percent were married and 89 percent reported their total annual family income to be in excess of \$50,000 per year. Of the 30 variables measuring leadership practices, 12 of the variables were found to be significantly different when comparing male and female leaders. Significant differences (<.05 level) between males and females were found in each of the five subscales. The greatest number of significant variables was found in the following three subscales: Modeling the Way, Enabling Others to act, and Challenging the Process, while only one variable in the subscale, Inspiring a Shared Vision and two variables in the subscale, Encouraging the Heart were statistically significant.

Implications: Differences between the leadership behaviors of males and females have been argued and explored in the past. For this study, females were significantly more likely to report behaviors that fostered collaboration, strengthened others, and challenged the status quo. What remains unanswered is whether these behaviors reflect the skills required for the positions females hold or whether the skills reflect the population of female leaders. Either way, questions remain about why male's and female's leadership behaviors differ. Clearly, further study could explore leadership behaviors based on positions held, subordinate's and superior's evaluation of leaders compared to self evaluations, or leadership behaviors of females across a range of professions, positions and work environments.

¹ Kouzes, J. M. & Posner, B. Z. (1993). Psychometric properties of the leadership practices inventory—updated. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 53, 191-199.

Where:

■ = < .01;

■ = < .05;

■ = < .10

mwquestion1	Female	80	8.55	-2.726	0.007
	Male	202	8.98		
mwquestion13	Female	80	8.18	2.203	0.028
	Male	202	7.79		
mwquestion24	Female	76	7.32	-1.716	0.087
	Male	202	7.65		
ehquestion3	Female	80	7.85	-2.091	0.037
	Male	202	8.25		
ehquestion4	Female	74	8.14	-1.900	0.059
	Male	176	8.50		
eoquestion29	Female	80	7.93	2.120	0.035
	Male	202	7.50		
eoquestion9	Female	78	8.31	2.551	0.011
	Male	202	7.83		
eoquestion11	Female	76	8.63	2.713	0.007
	Male	202	8.15		
isvquestion12	Female	80	8.75	1.737	0.083
	Male	202	8.45		
cpquestion19	Female	78	8.13	2.025	0.044
	Male	202	7.74		
cpquestion20	Female	80	8.13	2.953	0.003
	Male	202	7.56		
cpquestion2	Female	80	3.75	-2.581	0.010
	Male	198	4.67		