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Formal vs. Informal Leading: A Comparative Analysis

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I. INTRODUCTION

Informal leadership has been recognized as an important factor in organizational behavior (Bass, 1990a; Doloff, 1999; Hall, 1986; Han, 1983; Robins & Zirinsky, 1996; Senge, 1996; Sink, 1998; Weiss, 1978; Wheelan, 1996; Whitaker, 1995). Nevertheless, a search of the literature reveals very little beyond a few references to informal leadership in small groups. For example, in his exhaustive review of the literature, Bass (1990a) identifies research on informal leadership only in the context of leading group discussions. Confirming this are similar findings from Bass & Steidlmeier (1999) and Wheelan (1996). Two organizational behavior textbooks (Kreitner & Kinicki, 1998; McShane & Von Glinow, 2000) include no mention of informal leadership and only brief discussion of informal groups.

There is very little information available that compares these two processes of leading in leadership research. In fact, most research is done on formal leaders, those in a "position" of leadership. This complicates the analysis of the process of leading due to ways that these leaders may use the various forms of authority and power (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Fairholm, 1998; French & Raven, 1959) available to persons in these positions: legitimate, coercion, and reward (specifically extrinsic reward). In other words, the formal authority of persons in positions of leadership may mask the process of leading.

Informal leaders, those not in positions of leadership but recognized as leaders nevertheless, do not have such authority at their disposal. Accordingly, they must rely on "authentic leading" rather than "power-wielding" tactics available to formal leaders (Pielstick, 2000), although formal leaders may not necessarily use those tactics. Is there a significant difference between actual formal and informal leaders in the workplace regarding the use of authority? What other similarities and differences are there?

As a basis of comparison, the author turned to an earlier meta-ethnographic study emphasizing transformational leadership (Pielstick, 1996, 1998) that detailed a comprehensive "leader profile." This profile, later articulated as "authentic leading" (Pielstick, 2000), described leadership in terms of six major themes: shared vision, communication, relationships, community, guidance, and character.

Shared Vision

Shared vision emerged as the touchstone theme of authentic leadership. Vision is the most common distinguishing characteristic identified with leadership overall, and authentic leadership specifically. "The single defining quality of leaders is the capacity to create and realize a vision" (Bennis, 1993, p. 216). Burns (1978) stated that "such leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (p. 20). Such a higher purpose transcends the individual. It is elevating, enduring and transforming. Both the leader and the led elevate their sense of purpose to one that is more enduring, thus transforming each other.

The leader does not impose, but may initiate, the vision. Shared vision derives from shared needs, values, beliefs and purpose(s) of the leader and the followers. "Moral leadership emerges from, and always returns to, the fundamental wants and needs, aspiration, and values of the followers" (p. 4). Vision, values, beliefs and ethics create meaning and form "one of the most potent shapers of behavior in organizations, and in life" (Wheatley, 1992, p. 134). The shared values and beliefs form the core of organizational culture. Thus, this theme has an important relationship to the community theme.

Communication

The communication theme focuses on sharing the vision, providing meaning and purpose. Communication regarding the vision is used to excite, inspire, motivate and unify both followers and leaders. The communication is a dialog, a two-way sharing that facilitates the process of elevating the moral purpose of the shared vision, building relationships, and shaping the culture of the organization.

Listening is the most important component of communication for authentic leaders. "The ability to listen is key…very key…. I think listening is more important than speaking" (Cronin, 1993; cited by Leinbach, 1993, n.a.) Authentic leaders are also open to influence. "Willingness to be influenced was the single most frequently identified dimension used by constituents to assess their presidents" (Birnbaum, 1992, p. 175-176). This involves asking questions and probing to understand each other. Reflective thinking and feedback may augment listening to enhance understanding. As stated by Covey (1989), "Seek first to understand, then to be understood" (p. 235).

An important role of the authentic leader is to articulate the shared vision, values, and beliefs of the organization repeatedly. "In behavioral terms, managers are more likely to be perceived by their subordinates as leaders when they are clear about their values and beliefs, are able to articulate them in an exciting and enthusiastic way to others" (Kouzes & Posner, 1988, p. 530). The skilled leader inspires followers, provides encouragement and enhances motivation. Authentic leaders clarify and illustrate the vision, values and beliefs by using metaphors, analogies, stories, ceremonies, celebrations, rituals and traditions.

Clichés such as "action speaks louder than words" illustrate the power of nonverbal communication. Authentic leaders "consistently demonstrate by their own behavior what they expect of others" (Kouzes & Posner, 1988, p. 530). They walk-the-talk, lead by example, and do what they say they will do. These leaders are very aware that their actions are closely watched and interpreted for consistency with the spoken word. Consistency helps build trust.

Relationships

The relationships theme reflects the interactive, mutual and shared nature of authentic leadership. "Transformational leaders may foster the formation of high-quality relationships and a sense of a common fate with individual subordinates while, in a social-exchange process, these subordinates strengthen and encourage the leader" (Deluga, 1992, pp. 244-245).

Descriptors of these interactive relationships include: shared, two-way, mutual, collaborative, and collegial. "There is probably no substitute for creating a culture…that favors easy two-way communication, in and out of channels, among all layers of the organization" (Gardner, 1990, p. 86). Authentic leaders "tended to be friendly, informal, and close and treated subordinates as equals although they (the leaders) had more expertise. They gave advice, help and support and encouraged their subordinates' self-development" (Bass, 1985, p. 82). Authentic leadership clearly involves a relationship in which the leaders and followers are fully engaged with each other in achieving the shared vision of the organization.

Decision making with authentic leaders is most likely to involve participatory processes to arrive at a consensus. "These leaders motivate by 'pulling' us along with them" (Sashkin, 1989, p. 52). They "promote intelligence, rationality, and careful problem solving" (Bass, 1990b, p. 22).

Community

The community theme represents the shared values and beliefs of the organization. "Edgar H. Schein has said that the only important thing leaders do may well be constructing culture" (Sashkin & Rosenbach, 1993, p. 99). Shaping community contributes to building relationships and internalizing commitment to the shared vision. "Leaders who are clear about their values—and whose behavior consistently reflects their values—make a significant difference in an organization" (Wilcox & Ebbs, 1993, March, p. 39). Supporting values and beliefs become socialized into the group. Some key values identified with authentic leaders are: treating people with dignity and respect, dealing with social injustice, altruism, fairness, justice, liberty, human rights, honesty, integrity and equality.

The primary means of shaping culture is through communication, including symbolic action, described above. "The ideals, beliefs, shared meanings, and expectations and their embodiment in symbolic devices, such as myths, rituals, ceremonies, stories, legends, jargon, customs, habits, and traditions" (Duignan and Macpherson, 1993, p. 21) are used to shape organizational culture. "Leaders inculcate values and beliefs through their own individual behaviors, their personal practices. . . . [to] demonstrate and illustrate the values and beliefs on which their visions are founded" (Sashkin & Rosenbach, 1993, p. 101). As followers participate in these processes, the

values and beliefs are reinforced and institutionalized. Just as all actions of a leader are subject to symbolic interpretation by followers, all actions potentially affect the shape of the organizational community.
Guidance

Leaders conduct themselves and even communicate through their actions to build relationships and shape culture. Combined with communication, this is the act of leading.

Authentic leaders build trust through their actions, "knowing what is right and necessary" and being "tirelessly persistent" (Bennis & Nanus, 1985, p. 45). Walking-the-talk, role modeling and setting an example describe the consistency of actions critical to building trust among followers. "Demonstrate to others what is important by how you spend your time, by the priorities on your agenda, by the questions you ask and the people you see" (Kouzes & Posner, 1993, p. 60).

Authentic leaders teach. "A great leader is usually a great teacher" (Parnell, 1988, p. 2). These leaders provide opportunities to learn and grow. Their symbolic actions also provide guidance for others, an indirect but powerful means of teaching. Authentic leaders emphasize recognition, intrinsic rewards, and professional development opportunities. Extrinsic rewards are de-emphasized in favor of recognition and celebrations (Kirby, et al., 1992). Authentic leaders also engage in moral reasoning and principled judgment, teaching these ideas to their followers. These leaders use and promote the use of critical, creative and reflective thinking which supports the development of cognitive complexity. This provides a basis for multiple frames of reference, situational alternatives, or other forms of requisite variety.

"Leadership always has one face turned towards change, and change involves the critical assessment of current situations and an awareness of future possibilities" (Foster, 1989, p. 43). Transformational leaders "identify themselves as change agents…. Their professional and personal image was to make a difference" (Tichy & Devanna, 1986, p. 271). Change involves taking reasonable or calculated risks, experimenting, reducing the risk of others failing, and providing the necessary resources to facilitate success.

Character

In addition to the themes that describe the functions and actions of authentic leaders, the meta-ethnography identified a variety of personal characteristics found among these leaders. Although not predictive of one becoming a leader, these characteristics have been identified with authentic leadership and facilitate our understanding of the phenomenon. It is not likely that any one individual will display all these characteristics.

The single most often referenced characteristic of authentic leaders is self-confidence. "The [transformational] leader must be a person of strong conviction, determined, self-confident, and emotionally expressive" (Bass, 1990a, p. 220). These leaders are centered, intuitive and motivated by a higher purpose. "True leaders lead fully integrated lives, in which their careers and their personal lives fit seamlessly and harmoniously together" (Bennis, 1990, p. 108). They have an internal locus of control (Bandura, 1977; Howell and Avolio, 1993). They use power for empowering others, rather than for their own purposes. When it is used personally, power becomes a source of energy rather than a source of control over others.

Intelligence is commonly attributed to authentic leaders. Authentic leaders demonstrate cognitive complexity, the ability of the leader to understand and attend to complex and competing needs simultaneously and approach challenges with a variety of perspectives and tactics, leveraging the law of requisite variety. "Exemplary presidents saw patterns, analyzed problems at a deep level, understood nuances, and were concerned about receiving feedback" (Birnbaum, 1992, p. 181).

Authentic leaders are personable, exhibiting "compassion, people orientation, friendliness, and sensitivity to the needs of different constituencies" (Duncan & Harlacher, 1990, p. 40). They are friendly, cheerful and warm; have a sense of humor; and like to have fun. Yet, they may also be humble, i.e., they do not call attention to themselves and do give credit to individuals or groups for their accomplishments.

Hypotheses

"The Leader Profile," an instrument designed by the author based on the detailed meta-ethnographic findings summarized above (Pielstick, 1996), was prepared for this study. One hundred and sixty-one descriptors were arranged into five categories, using a 5-point Likert scale: shared vision, communication, relationships, guidance, and character. The sixth category, community, was formulated from descriptors that were already included in other categories. In addition, basic demographic information was collected regarding the leaders and survey completers.

The instrument was pre-tested with a group of volunteers from a university doctoral leadership program. There were no significant problems encountered and only minor modifications were made to the final instrument. In

addition, the pre-test included the recording of beginning and ending times to determine the average length of time to complete the survey so that this could be included with the instructions in the cover letter to potential respondents.

Null hypotheses were proposed regarding overall, theme, and individual variable differences, i.e., the hypotheses were that there would be no significant differences at any of these three levels.

Hypothesis 1: There is no difference between the scores for formal and informal leaders using a comparison on all variables.

Hypotheses 2-7: There is no difference between the scores for formal and informal leaders using a comparison on those variables identified with each theme, e.g., shared vision, communication.

Hypotheses 8-168: There is no difference between the scores for formal and informal leaders using a comparison by individual variable.

II. METHODOLOGY

A mailing list was purchased from the Center for the Advanced Study of Leadership of the James MacGregor Burns Academy of Leadership at the University of Maryland for one-time use for this study. Neither the Center nor the Academy have endorsed this study nor provided any support beyond making the mailing list available. The list contained approximately 2000 names. Five hundred were selected at random for a mailing of the survey in the late summer of 1999. Each recipient was asked to complete two questionnaires, one on a formal leader and one on an informal leader within the same organization. Ninety-five surveys were returned. It was determined that the cost and expected return on follow-up would not significantly improve the response rate sufficient to attain the desired 385 responses ($\forall$ 5% margin of error at 95% confidence, Rea & Parker, 1992), so no follow-up was conducted for this study.

Statistics were calculated for reliability, mean and standard deviation by variable, ranking by variable mean, Chi-Square for overall, the six clusters, and each variable to test the hypotheses. In addition, a t-test by variable was added due to the high incidence of cells below the minimum expected count (especially due to the high scores given to informal leaders). Descriptive statistics for the leaders and survey completers were also tabulated.

III. RESULTS

The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) for the overall survey was very strong at 0.9896. Content validity of the survey is based on the meta-ethnographic findings (Pielstick, 1996, 1998), including extensive triangulation of sources and review by an expert panel.

Table 1 gives the descriptive statistics for the leaders on whom the survey was completed.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Leaders

Formal	N = 62	65.3%
Informal	N = 33	34.7%
Total	**N = 95**	**100.0%**
Female	N = 32	39.0%
Male	N = 50	61.0%
Total	**N = 82**	**100.0%**
Employees/owners of private business	N = 6	6.3%
Employees in government	N = 7	7.4%
Employees in education	N = 61	64.2%
Employees in not-for-profit organization	N = 14	14.7%
Elected officials	N = 0	0.0%
Appointed officials	N = 2	2.1%
Volunteers	N = 5	5.3%
Total	**N = 95**	**100.0%**

Although the intent was to achieve a match of formal and informal leaders within the same organizations, some respondents completed surveys for only one leader, generally a formal leader. Consequently, the responses include approximately two formal leaders for each informal leader. Thirty-nine percent of the leaders were female. Sixty-four percent of the leaders were employees in education, an unanticipated result of the mailing list used for the survey that may have had some impact on the results of this study, limiting their generalizability, as noted later.

Table 2 gives descriptive statistics for those individuals completing the survey.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Survey Completers

The leader being surveyed	N = 16	17.2%
A peer of the leader being surveyed	N = 39	41.9%
A subordinate of the leader being surveyed	N = 38	40.9%
Total	**N = 93**	**100.0%**
Female survey completers	N = 34	59.6%
Male survey completers	N = 23	40.4%
Total	**N = 57**	**100.0%**
Survey completer age (mean)	N = 57	47.4
White survey completers	N = 52	91.2%
Black survey completers	N = 0	0.0%
Hispanic survey completers	N = 1	1.8%
Asian survey completers	N = 1	1.8%
Native American survey completers	N = 1	1.8%
Other survey completers	N = 2	3.5%
Total	**N = 57**	**100.1%***

  * Due to rounding

Although asked to complete the surveys on leaders other than themselves, 16 responses indicated that they were the leader being surveyed. There was a nearly equal distribution of peers and subordinates/followers on the majority of responses. Close to sixty percent of the responses were from females. The average age of respondents was 47.4 with a standard deviation of 9.95. Ninety-two percent of the respondents were white.

Due to sample size limitations cross-tabulations were not completed for these characteristics other than the formal/informal leaders.

Table 3 gives summary statistics for all variables and for variables by formal and informal leaders.

Table 3

**Mean, Range, and Standard Deviation for All Variables
and for Variables by Formal and Informal Leaders**

Category	Mean	Low	High	SD
Overall	3.90	2.44	4.51	0.33
Formal	3.76	2.08	4.48	0.34
Informal	4.14	2.76	4.70	0.37

The total sample mean (both formal and informal leaders) for all variables was 3.90. The mean for all variables for formal leaders was 3.76 compared to 4.14 for informal leaders. The informal leaders were scored significantly higher than the formal leaders.

To test hypotheses 1-7, Chi-Square statistics were computed for overall comparisons of formal and informal leaders, as well as for each of the six themes—shared vision, communication, relationships, community, guidance, and character. The statistics are shown in Table 4 (df = 4), along with the mean for each. A Chi-Square value smaller than 0.05 is significant. The null hypotheses 1-7 are rejected, i.e., there is a significant difference between formal and informal leaders overall and for each of the six clusters, with informal leaders scoring higher in each category. Shared vision, community, and character have the highest mean scores for the sample.

Table 4

**Chi-Square and Mean Statistics for Overall
and the Six Clusters Associated with Authentic Leading**

Cluster	Chi-Square	Mean
Overall	9.452E-101	3.90
Shared Vision	1.3034E-10	3.94
Communication	3.5501E-23	3.83
Relationships	9.4094E-10	3.90
Community	2.1779E-12	3.94
Guidance	8.3398E-20	3.89
Character	2.0391E-42	3.92

At the variable level, means were calculated to determine the relative importance of variables for formal and informal leaders in the sample. The "top 10" for each in this sample were as follows in Table 5.

Table 5

**The "Top 10" Variables for Formal
and Informal Leaders by Variable Mean**

Formal Leaders		Informal Leaders	
Variable	Mean	Variable	Mean
Intelligent	4.48	Honesty and integrity	4.70
Self-confident	4.42	Credible	4.67
Committed	4.40	Fair	4.64
Professional expertise	4.35	Sense of humor	4.64
Perseveres	4.31	Treats everyone with dignity/respect	4.61
Strives for excellence or quality	4.24	Likes to have fun	4.61
Understands complexities	4.23	Promotes gender equity	4.58
Personable	4.19	Ethical	4.58
Positive spirit	4.19	Caring	4.58
Uses critical thinking	4.16	Principle-centered	4.58

Note that not one of the "top 10" variables is the same for both groups, though a few of the variables are similar, and that the scores for informal leaders are higher.

Chi-Square statistics (linear-by-linear association) were computed for each of the variables to test hypotheses 8-169. In addition, due to the number of cells with less than the number of expected count (particularly due to the high scores given to the informal leaders), which can distort the results, a t-test (2-tailed) at $p = 0.05$ was computed to provide additional statistical support for significant differences (including Levene's test for equality of variances). Both statistics are listed for those showing one or both at a significant level in Table 6.

Table 6

Means, Chi-Square, and t-test scores for variables with a significant difference ($p = 0.05$) between formal and informal leaders.

Variable	Mean	Chi-Square	T-test	Notes
SHARED VISION				
Has a moral purpose	3.69	.008	.003	
Has an inspiring purpose	3.69	.027	.026	
Provides for the common good	3.69	.057	.025	
Provides meaning	4.08	.050	.027	
Provides focus	4.15	.074	.039	
Is based on shared needs, values, beliefs	3.54	.067	.038	
COMMUNICATION				
Communicates common values	3.85	.090	.043	
Listens to others	4.38	.035	.034	
Seeks to understand before being understood	3.77	.011	.003	
Inspires	3.85	.028	.018	
Encourages	4.08	.040	.039	
Motivates	3.54	.026	.013	
Uses stories	3.77	.043	.042	
Engages in interactive dialogue	4.15	.000	.000	
Weaves in a higher purpose	3.46	.016	.016	
Shares ideas and issues	3.69	.026	.025	
Provides information	3.54	.016	.004	
Receives information	4.31	.033	.012	
Gives feedback	3.85	.034	.011	
Receives feedback	3.77	.033	.012	
Accepts criticism	3.38	.009	.003	
Shows appreciation	3.85	.033	.032	
Walks-the-talk	3.38	.014	.003	
Leads by example	3.85	.003	.000	
Shows consistency	3.46	.065	.036	
RELATIONSHIPS				
Fully engages when relating to others	3.85	.001	.000	
Collaborates with others	3.92	.049	.049	
Recognizes needs of others	3.62	.005	.001	
Empathizes with others	3.85	.133	.003	
Demonstrates equity	3.46	.011	.003	
Treats everyone with dignity and respect	3.62	.022	.021	
COMMUNITY				
Vision bases on shared needs, values, beliefs	3.54	.067	.038	
Treats everyone with dignity and respect	3.62	.022	.021	
Is humble	3.15	.031	.020	
Is fair	3.92	.001	.000	

Variable	Mean	Chi-Square	T-test	Notes
Is a servant-leader	2.77	.009	.008	
Exhibits honesty and integrity	4.00	.000	.000	
Emphasizes service above self	3.31	.007	.002	
GUIDANCE				
Builds trust	3.38	.004	.001	
Sets the example	3.69	.008	.002	
Mentors others	3.69	.006	.002	
Coaches others	3.85	.003	.000	
Teaches others	3.62	.001	.000	
Provides opportunities to learn and grow	4.08	.049	.048	
Engages in his or her own learning	4.08	.058	.030	
Engages in personal renewal	3.77	.030	.030	
Engages in moral reasoning and principled judgment	3.85	.003	.003	
Teaches moral reasoning and principled judgment	3.23	.000	.000	
Uses creative thinking	4.23	.022	.022	
Uses reflective thinking	4.00	.011	.003	
Gives recognition to others	3.92	.028	.012	
Builds teams	3.31	.008	.001	
Builds coalitions	3.08	.030	.015	
Engages in politicking	3.77	.028	.027	Formal has higher score
Promotes gender equity	3.85	.005	.001	
Supports cultural diversity *and* unity	3.54	.002	.000	
CHARACTER				
Is ethical	4.15	.020	.008	
Is humble	3.15	.031	.020	
Is fair	3.92	.001	.000	
Is centered	3.85	.001	.000	
Is intuitive	4.15	.001	.000	
Is motivated by higher purpose	3.69	.020	.019	
Is credible	4.00	.001	.000	
Is disenchanted with the status quo	3.00	.029	.029	
Is a servant-leader	2.77	.009	.008	
Is a moral leader	3.15	.003	.001	
Is a transforming leader	3.38	.021	.010	
Is well rounded	3.77	.002	.000	
Is open	3.77	.002	.000	
Is flexible	3.69	.014	.005	
Is altruistic	3.54	.002	.002	
Is personable	4.54	.020	.019	
Is caring	4.00	.008	.007	
Is responsive	3.92	.002	.000	
Is principle-centered	3.54	.001	.000	

Variable	Mean	Chi-Square	T-test	Notes
Treats everyone with dignity and respect	3.92	.003	.001	
Exhibits honesty and integrity	4.00	.000	.000	
Emphasizes service above self	3.31	.007	.002	
Has a need for power	3.15	.007	.006	Reversed scoring, formal lower
Uses authority of position	4.08	.000	.000	Ibid
Uses fear or coercion	2.85	.017	.007	Ibid.
Pulls rather than pushes people along	3.38	.014	.014	
Uses good judgment	4.00	.003	.000	
Distinguishes unique situations	4.08	.060	.039	
Has a sense of humor	4.54	.000	.000	
Likes to have fun	4.15	.000	.000	
Encourages imagination and creativity	4.00	.004	.001	

Of the 161 variables in the survey, 87 (54%) showed a significant difference between formal and informal leaders at *p* = 0.05 with one or both statistics. All but one of these showed *higher scores for informal leaders*. Three others, scored in reverse based on expectations from previous research independent of formal/informal designations, scored higher for formal leaders in the raw data. The four significant variables that were stronger for formal leaders were: "Engages in politicking," "Has a need for power," "Uses authority of position," and "Uses fear or coercion."

Significant differences (informal leaders scoring higher) within the *Shared Vision* theme included "Has a moral purpose," "Has an inspiring purpose," "Provides for the common good," "Provides meaning," "Provides focus," and "Is based on *shared* needs, values, beliefs." Six of the sixteen variables (37.5%) showed significant differences on the t-test. However, only the first two variables, moral and inspiring purposes, were significant on the Chi-Square test.

As a group, these variables had the highest mean of the six themes at over 3.94. Only "Is long range (10-20 years or more)" had a low mean score (3.26) and was outside of the expected range on a 2-tailed t-test at the 99% confidence level.

Nineteen (63.3%) of the *Communication* theme variables showed a significant difference between the two leader groups. Interestingly, "Communicates the vision" was not significant and the mean (3.84) was slightly below the overall average for all variables. Scores reported on listening, inspiring, encouraging, motivating, stories, interactive dialogue, sharing, giving and receiving information and feedback, accepting criticism, showing appreciation, walking-the-talk, leading by example and showing consistency hadsignificant differences. Only three of the significant variables were not significant on both tests.

The lowest means were for "Sense of drama" (3.17), "Emotional appeals" (3.28), "Uses symbolic actions" (3.43), and "Writes personal notes" (3.48). The sense of drama (lack of using) was also significant on a 2-tailed t-test at the 99% confidence level.

The *Relationship* theme includes sixteen variables, of which six (37.5%) were significant, all on both tests. These variables reflect engaging others, collaboration, recognizing the needs of others, empathizing, demonstrating equity, and treating everyone with dignity and respect. As a group, the mean was 3.90, the same as the overall average of all variables. There were no low mean scores among these variables and none fell outside the 2-tailed t-test at the 99% confidence level.

Only nine variables, formulated from descriptors in other groups, made up the *Community* theme, though others could arguably have been included. Only one of the nine, "Strives for quality or excellence," was not significant, i.e., 89% were significant. These variables included a shared vision based on shared needs, values, and beliefs, relationships in which the leader treats everyone with dignity and respect, guidance to strive for quality or excellence, being humble, fair, a servant-leader, and altruistic, exhibiting honesty and integrity, and emphasizing service above self.

Guidance includes 45 variables, yet only 18 (40.0%) were significantly different for formal and informal leaders. The mean for the guidance group (3.89) was just below the overall average for all variables. Building trust, setting an example, mentoring, coaching, teaching, learning and renewal, moral reasoning and principled judgment (both engaging in and teaching others), creative and reflective thinking, recognition, building teams and coalitions, engaging in politicking, promoting gender equity, and cultural diversity *and* unity were among the significant

variables. "Engages in politicking" was one of the four variables scored stronger for formal leaders. Three variables were significant on only one of the two tests: Engaging in his or her own learning, promoting gender equity, and supporting cultural diversity and unity. The first was significant on the t-test and the latter two on the Chi-Square test. The only low means of note were "Gives extra pay for performance" (2.67) and "Gives extra pay for performance" (2.86). The latter was also significant on the 2-tailed t-test at the 99% confidence level.

Finally, the *Character* group of variables included 54 descriptors, the largest group on the instrument, with a group mean of 3.92, very close to the 3.94 of shared vision and community. Of these, 31 (57%) showed significant differences. All but one of these variables was significant on both tests, the exception being "Distinguishes unique situations," which was significant only on the t-test. Among the significant variables with the highest means were being personable, ethical, caring, motivated by a higher purpose, credible, treating everyone with dignity and respect, fair, responsive, having a sense of humor, and honesty and integrity.

However, the top five means for this cluster of variables—"Intelligence" (4.51), "Self confidence" (4.46), "Committed" (4.45), "Has professional expertise" (4.38), and "Perseveres" (4.33)—were not significantly different for the two groups of leaders. That is, these, as well as a number of other character variables, were high for both groups of leaders.

Recall that four of the variables in this cluster were scored in reverse based on previous research. The raw score means (prior to reversal) were among the lowest in this group: having a need for power (3.16), using authority (3.53), using fear or coercion (2.26), and using extrinsic rewards (3.11), with the need for power and using fear or coercion being outside the parameters in the 2-tailed t-test of significance at the 99% confidence level. Of these four variables, only "Uses extrinsic rewards" was not a significant difference. Formal leaders scored higher than informal leaders (raw score means) on each of the others. Two other variables had low means worthy of mention, "Uses admiration of followers" (3.30) and "Pulls rather than pushes people along" (3.45), even though the latter showed a significant difference in favor of informal leaders.

IV. DISCUSSION

It is very clear that there are important and significant differences between formal and informal leaders. Informal leaders are perceived by others as showing higher levels of leading than formal leaders overall, as well as in each of the six themes of shared vision, communication, relationships, community, guidance, and character shown to be important to authentic leading independent of formal or informal leading (Pielstick 1996, 1998, 2000). While some variables are strong for both groups, over half of the variables showed a significant difference between the two groups, with informal leaders scoring higher on "The Leader Profile" than formal leaders, with four notable exceptions: engaging in politicking, having a need for power, using authority, and using fear or coercion. Fortunately perhaps, having a need for power and using fear or coercion may not be of significance among leaders overall.

While both formal and informal leaders develop shared visions, informal leaders are more likely to include a moral and inspiring purpose, provide for the common good, and create meaning. The shared vision of informal leaders is more likely to be based on shared needs, values and beliefs than the vision of formal leaders.

This sense of inclusiveness also shows in the differences between formal and informal leaders regarding communication. Informal leaders are more likely to listen and seek to understand. They engage in *interactive* dialogue. They are more open to sharing, giving and receiving, accepting criticism and showing appreciation. They communicate by example and walk-the-talk. Informal leaders are more likely to use stories, to inspire, encourage, and motivate, and to weave a higher purpose into the dialogue.

Leaders and followers are engaged in interpersonal relationships. As with communication, informal leaders are more likely to be inclusive by fully engaging others, collaborating with them, and recognizing their needs. Informal leaders are more likely to empathize with others and demonstrate equity in their relationships. Informal leaders treat everyone with dignity and respect.

Authentic leaders push organizational culture to the level of community. The collection of variables used to assess this category showed nearly complete significant differences for the two groups of leaders. As above, informal leaders treat everyone with dignity and respect. They are humble and fair. They are recognized as servant-leaders. They are altruistic, exhibit honesty and integrity, and emphasize service above self.

To help realize the dream, authentic leaders also provide guidance. In this regard, informal leaders are more likely to build trust. They set the example. They guide by mentoring, coaching and teaching, as well as by providing other opportunities for others to learn and grow. At the same time informal leaders are more likely to be learners

themselves. They both engage in and teach others to engage in moral reasoning and principled judgment. While both groups of leaders engage in critical thinking, informal leaders are more likely to also engage in creative and reflective thinking. They are also more likely to give recognition. Given the heavy emphasis on teams over the past decade or so, it was somewhat surprising to find that informal leaders are more likely to build teams. They also build coalitions, whereas, formal leaders are more likely to engage in politicking. And finally, informal leaders are more likely to promote gender equity and to support cultural diversity *and* unity.

Character is a quality that is often recognized or criticized when it comes to leaders. There were a number of qualities that were strong among both groups, including intelligence, self confidence, commitment, professional expertise, and perseverance. Nevertheless, there were also significant differences. Among the differences is that informal leaders are more likely to be humble, fair, and altruistic. They are recognized as servant-leaders and emphasize service above self. Informal leaders are moral, principle-centered, leaders who exhibit honesty and integrity. They are motivated by a higher purpose. They are transforming leaders who are disenchanted with the status quo. Yet, they are well rounded, open, and flexible. Informal leaders are also personable, caring, and responsive, treating everyone with dignity and respect. They are more likely to have a sense of humor and to like to have fun, including encouraging imagination and creativity.

On the other hand informal leaders have less need for power and are less likely to use fear or coercion. They also are less likely to use the authority of their position, although by definition of being an informal leader, they would have little or no formal authority available.

The formal authority associated with the positions of formal leaders stands out as an area requiring further research. This study shows that informal leaders generally demonstrate more of the qualities often associated with the process of authentic leading. Additional research is needed to better identify and define those differences, as well as to determine the significance of them to the process of leading. Furthermore, since the descriptors used in this study were derived from sources describing formal leadership, we need to determine if there are other descriptors that need to be considered that are unique to informal leading that may not have been considered.

The sample used in this study, both in terms of size and high proportion of educators, may have introduced some biases that would not be found in a broader sample. In addition, the large number of variables may have contributed to the low response rate. Factor analysis may help reduce the number of variables to a more manageable number for further studies.

In addition, there are research opportunities that derive from the relationship of informal leading and informal groups. McShane and Von Glinow (2000) describe informal groups as being formed to meet affiliation needs, provide influence, or to accomplish tasks. Informal groups may support or conflict with goals of formal leaders in the organization. What are the similarities and differences between formal and informal leaders in these informal groups?

Wheelan (1996) examined differences in verbal patterns between formal and informal leaders where both are active within small groups. What other differences are there between these leaders?

Another area of investigation, related to the moral aspect of leading that is evident among informal leaders, is spirituality. This is beginning to be investigated by other researchers but not specifically related to formal/informal leading (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Fairholm, 1998; Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996; Pielstick, 2000).

Although the sample size and high frequency of educators in this study present limitations for broader generalization of the findings, it is clear that this initial investigation opens the way to additional study of these differences and has potential implications for leadership theory. In particular, the difference between the process of leading and power-wielding needs additional investigation and differentiation. Informal leaders demonstrate a higher level of authentic leading, providing lessons from which formal leaders can enhance their own leadership practice.

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