
Academic Leadership in Career Colleges: Styles, Style Adaptability, Preparedness, and Prior Experience

JoeAnn Parker, EdD

Associate Vice Provost
Strayer University

Heidi R. Ventura, PhD

Professor and Associate Dean
Trevecca Nazarene University

Catherine I. Hendon, EdD

Associate Professor and Program Director
Trevecca Nazarene University

Academic leaders must have adequate leadership skills to be effective in their roles and achieve the college's goals; however, there is relative paucity of knowledge regarding preferences and preparation that midlevel academic leaders in career colleges have. A quantitative method with a correlational design was used to examine the relationships among the primary leadership style, leadership style adaptability, leadership preparedness, and prior leadership experience of midlevel academic leaders in career colleges. The research findings revealed no significant relationships among the variables. However, the relevance of leadership experiences gained by career college academic leaders prior to their entrance in academia should be considered in continuing discussions of supporting midlevel academic leaders in career colleges.

Keywords: academic leadership, leadership experience, leadership preparedness, leadership styles, leadership style adaptability

The success of colleges is largely measured by the effectiveness of academic leaders (Boggs & McPhail, 2020; Sirkis, 2011). While it is important to have strong executive-level leadership to set the vision and mission of colleges and universities, it is equally important for midlevel academic leaders to have the necessary skills to perform the regular duties of their roles (Boggs & McPhail, 2020; Bratton, 2012). These midlevel academic leaders hold various titles, including program director, head of department, department head, chair, program chair, academic leader, department chair, division dean, or academic dean (McNair & Perry, 2020; Potgieter & Coetzee, 2010), and may have had little or no management training or leadership development (Boggs & McPhail, 2020; Wolverton et al., 2005). The importance of these roles in higher education continues to rise amidst leadership challenges to maintain accreditation, retain students, recruit and employ quality faculty, and implement new technologies in

the classroom (Boggs & McPhail, 2020; Brown 2001) coupled with management challenges of rising tuition costs and heightened demands from taxpayers and governmental agencies for stronger accountability (Bisbee, 2007). To address the challenges in higher education, academic leaders must be able to lead themselves as well as their departments, programs, and students while embracing change to foster an environment of innovation, trust, and learning (Boggs & McPhail, 2020; Brown, 2001).

Background

Dyer and Miller (1999) reported that approximately 80% of decisions at colleges are made by midlevel managers; however, many academic leaders do not have management or leadership experience in an academic context nor formal training to acclimate to the new role (McPhail & McPhail, 2020). Management and leadership skills are generally acquired through on-the-job trial and error, which may foster frustration for the academic leader and the team being led (Sirkis, 2011). Midlevel academic leadership roles may typically require a discipline-specific degree (Hilley, 2015), related experience, or even teaching longevity (Sirkis, 2011) but not usually any management or leadership experience (Boggs & McPhail, 2020; Sirkis, 2011).

There is little research on midlevel academic leadership within career colleges; most of the existing research on midlevel academic leadership is from the community college sector. While there are similarities between the two, the National Center for Education and Statistics (NCES, n.d.) indicates that Career and Technical Education (CTE) includes academic programs geared toward skills and knowledge required for specific professions and jobs. They may operate as either for-profit or nonprofit (Levesque et al., 2008). Because the focus is on career preparation, having faculty with skills and experience from the profession is paramount. In some career colleges, midlevel academic leaders are required to hold a certificate only with subject matter experience.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the existence of relationships among primary leadership style, leadership style adaptability, leadership preparedness, and prior leadership experience of midlevel academic leaders in career colleges. For this study, leadership style is defined according to Hersey et al. (1996) as the approach that a leader in an organization uses to relate to and influence their team. Hersey et al. continue further to define leadership style adaptability as the degree to which a leader can adjust their behavior in response to a situation in an organization. Leadership preparedness is defined as the readiness of an academic leader in

terms of their knowledge and skills to be able to effectively lead in a college setting (Mohnot & Shaw, 2017). For this study, prior leadership experience is defined as years of leadership experience gained prior to working in an academic leadership role, including nonacademic leadership.

Four research questions guided the study. First, what was the relationship between the academic leader's primary leadership style and leadership style adaptability? Second, what was the relationship between the academic leader's primary leadership style and perceived preparedness for leadership? Third, what was the relationship between the academic leader's style adaptability and perceived preparedness for leadership? Fourth, what was the relationship between the academic leader's primary leadership style and prior leadership experience?

Through these guiding questions, the study sought to extend current knowledge regarding midlevel academic leadership in community colleges into the more specific arena of career colleges. Rajbhandari et al. (2014) concluded that academic leadership readiness was vital for leaders to be able to make decisions in fast-paced higher education environments. Bisbee (2007) underscored that having an understanding of the leadership styles of academic leaders and their specific challenges can be instrumental in developing training programs. Many midlevel academic leaders had not aspired to become academic leaders as part of their career path and may not have leadership skills upon assuming a leadership role (Brown, 2001).

Review of Literature

Strong management and leadership needs to permeate the college. Academic leaders are vital to the achievement of metrics and academic outcomes (Sirkis, 2011). Ensuring that midlevel academic leaders have the essential skills needed to achieve the duties of their role is tantamount to the importance of establishing the comprehensive goals for a college (Bratton, 2012). Although the majority of administrative decisions in colleges are made by midlevel academic leaders, many of them do not have the necessary training to assist them in being successful in their leadership roles (Dyer & Miller, 1999). To be effective in their roles, academic leaders must have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to lead their team and students within the fast-paced environment of higher education (Brown, 2001).

Academic Leadership in Career Colleges

Career colleges were developed to serve the needs of businesses and individuals who must acquire a particular skillset to enter into a profession. Both nonprofit and for-profit career college curricula are distinctly designed to provide training associated with a specific occupation (Levesque et al., 2008), but they may engage in distinctly different approaches regarding academic activities to include designing the college's curriculum, faculty appointments, admissions requirements, and research activities (Morey, 2004). While there are notable differences between career colleges and community colleges, they are comparable in terms of curriculum, program length, and leadership structure (Clowes et al., 1995).

Career colleges are designed specifically to offer curricula related to a specific occupation (Levesque et al., 2008). Many midlevel academic leadership roles in career colleges require an applicant to hold only a minimal related degree (Hilley, 2015) with work experience in a specific field. While leadership experience is helpful, it is often not a required skill for an academic leadership role (Sirkis, 2011), and research is scarce regarding what leadership skills and competencies midlevel academic leaders need (Sirkis, 2011; Mohnot & Shaw, 2017; McNair & Perry, 2020).

Freeman (2011) found that career college leaders have management experiences from industry; however, they believed they needed help to translate those experiences into an academic environment. In a study of more than 200 academic leaders across 16 institutions, Bisbee (2007) found respondents indicated that potential leaders needed more exposure to leadership opportunities by way of various experiences, and there needed to be more leadership training offered before and after accepting a leadership role. Only half the study participants indicated they felt well prepared for their current role and overall for leadership (Bisbee, 2007).

Leadership Style Related to Style Adaptability

Designed by Hersey in the late 1960s, the framework of the situational leadership model centers on the interaction of leaders and followers in evaluating the level of supervision and emotive attention the leader provides, along with the followers' ability to perform the duties of their role (The Center for Leadership Studies, n.d.). Situational leadership, supported by 50 years of research, enables leaders to become more effective in assessing the situation in which they need to apply action, modify their actions to appropriately fit the situation, connect with followers in ways they comprehend, and elevate their leadership actions which results

in improved organizational outcomes (The Center for Leadership Studies, n.d.).

In situational approaches to leadership, leaders modify their actions based on the performance of followers and the nature of issues they are addressing. The contention is that there is not any leadership style appropriate for all situations, and therefore, leaders must be able to adapt their leadership style to the situation (Hersey et al., 2001). The essence of situational leadership is based on the concepts of task behavior, relationship behavior, and readiness level. *Task behavior* refers to the extent to which the leader is involved in guiding their team to complete tasks. *Relationship behavior* denotes the level of support that the leader provides their followers through communication and other helpful activities. *Readiness level* refers to the manner in which a leader's team is ready and able to achieve organizational goals (Hersey et al., 2001).

The performance of a leader hinges on how well they are capable of adapting their actions to organizational situations. Leading from a situational leadership aspect enables leaders to stay forward-thinking and to act quickly in light of various situations that require their actions (Rajbhandari et al., 2014). Rajbhandari et al. (2014) argue that academic leaders can effectively deal with the dynamic environment by adjusting their leadership actions based on the situation.

Al-Omari (2005) conducted a study to examine the leadership style and style adaptability of 21 deans and 63 department chairs working at three universities in Washington, Idaho, and Oregon. Al-Omari (2005) found that *selling* was the dominant leadership style and *participating* was the secondary leadership style for both the deans and department chairs. The department chairs' degree of adaptability scores were midrange while the deans' scores were in the higher range. Al-Omari (2005) theorized that deans' and department chairs' self-knowledge of their leadership style will enable them to become more efficient in their roles.

Leadership Style Related to Leadership Preparedness

Morris and Laipple (2015) conducted a national study of 1,515 academic leaders from 145 public colleges and universities and found that administrators who had previously taken any courses in business administration, human resources, leadership, or psychology had better comprehensive scores in readiness for a leadership role. Role satisfaction was more pronounced with experienced administrators than with new leaders. Morris and Laipple (2015) found that generating revenue, documentation of benchmark progression, and dealing with complaints were areas that aca-

demetic leaders were the least prepared to handle and suggested that academic leaders need to have training to help them manage in these areas.

Kalargyrou et al. (2012) contended that because leadership skills can be learned, colleges should ensure emerging academic leaders are properly trained prior to taking a leadership role. They studied 236 academic leaders and faculty from hospitality management education programs and found that academic leaders and faculty ranked business skills as the most vital skill for a leader to have with cognitive skills, interpersonal skills, personal values, and strategic skills, following respectively.

Leadership Style Adaptability Related to Leadership Preparedness

Mohnot and Shaw (2017) examined leadership preparedness and the leadership styles of 872 academic leaders in higher education in India and found a positive correlation between the leadership style adaptability and the degree to which an academic leader was prepared to assume the duties of their position. Leaders with more than one leadership style demonstrated better preparation for their roles than did participants with only one dominant leadership style. The results of the study further indicated that participants showing indistinguishable leadership styles were far less prepared for their roles as academic leaders than those that had clear leadership styles. The findings of Mohnot and Shaw's study provide a rationale to commence leadership training for current employees who are prospective leaders.

Sypawka et al. (2010) investigated leadership styles of 132 academic leaders from 58 community colleges in North Carolina to determine their dominant leadership style on Bolman and Deal's (1984) four-frame model of leadership in relation to their education, professional experience, and work experience as a dean. They found that the *human resources* category was the most dominant category among the study participants with the *structural* category following second highest, followed by *symbolic* and *political*, respectively. They concluded because participants had non-existent use of several categories, they would benefit from training on how to tap into multiple categories of leadership behavior to increase their effectiveness as academic leaders.

Gmelch (2013) investigated the implementation of a yearlong academic leadership training program designed by academic deans who wanted to help develop leadership skills for department chairs. The 28 participants included academic leaders from business, education, and engineering departments. Following the training program, more than 70% of the

participants indicated that they were “equally a faculty and an administrator” (p. 31), up from 47% at the beginning. Participants reported feeling they were more effective as an academic leader and had found a good work/life balance that they did not have previously. They also reported that opportunities to ponder their previous actions aided them in making more effective decisions going forward.

Leadership Style Related to Leadership Experience

It is inaccurate to assume that effective faculty members will also be effective academic leaders, as there are distinct competencies needed for each role (Wolverton et al., 2005). While some candidates may be capable of performing both sets of competencies, the majority are not. In a multi-level needs assessment about what department chairs need to be effective, Wolverton et al. (2005) studied the provost, eight deans, 56 department chairs, and 20 faculty from the University of Nevada. The results of the study indicated that the deans felt department chairs should have good intercommunication skills and give effective feedback on performance. The provost’s responses were similar with the addition that department chairs should be able to plan decisively to reach departmental and overall organizational goals. The department chairs themselves raised the importance of financial management, employee management, and finding the time to both teach and manage a department. Some chairs indicated that they wish they had a better understanding of what the position fully entailed prior to accepting the role. The majority of the chairs also felt that initially coming into their leadership roles, they did not have the necessary skills to develop faculty or resolve conflicts.

Bratton (2012) contended there must be capable leadership daily within each department of an organization and that effective leadership is developed over time with experience. He proposed eight key traits that an individual must have for success in their role as an academic leader: being “dedicated, confident, knowledgeable, optimistic, approachable, honest, dependable, and having strong communication skills” (Bratton, 2012, p. 44). Effective leaders learn to become confident in their subject matter expertise, knowing that others are depending on them to make decisions in the best interest of the organization.

Potgieter and Coetzee (2010) conducted a quantitative study to determine the requisite leadership skills and training needed for academic leaders to become competent and more effective in their leadership roles. Their participants were 41 academic leaders from 22 departments of a college in South Africa. The leadership competencies within their survey included planning and organizing, leadership, controlling, human

resources, and personal attributes, rated on Likert scales to indicate the perceived importance of the competency as well as the level of training needed to become skilled in the area. The results indicated daily higher-level training is perceived as necessary for planning and organizing, extensive training for leadership, and advanced training for controlling, human resources, and personal attributes. Potgieter and Coetzee (2010) demonstrated the significance of training necessary for leaders to operate effectively within the scope of the competency.

Sirkis (2011) asserted that community college academic leaders at the department level are often chosen from faculty candidates that are already on staff at a college. While these contenders usually have subject matter knowledge, they do not necessarily have leadership experiences. Once hired, departmental academic leaders may find their new role is beyond the scope of their expectations. Sirkis (2011) further discussed that new academic leaders typically do not receive formal training for their new role but rather learn to perform the duties of their new role by on-the-job learning. Sirkis (2011) underscores the importance of departmental leadership roles to the overall efficient operations of the college, as the bulk of daily activities are overseen by the department chair. Although efficient performance of managerial tasks is essential, Sirkis (2011) urges that leadership skills must also be developed in order for department chairs to become competent academic leaders and proposes that colleges design and implement customized internal training programs that offer continuous developmental opportunities with both routine duties and leadership activities. She further suggests that the training opportunities also be offered to faculty that may be slated to take on a leadership role in the future.

Methodology

The quantitative method used for this study was a correlational research design. This design supported the examination of data on the primary leadership style, leadership style adaptability, leadership preparedness, and prior leadership experience of midlevel academic leaders in career colleges. Correlational research design should be used when investigating if relationships exist among variables (Creswell, 2015). The null hypotheses resulting from the guiding research questions were: (a) there is no significant relationship between primary leadership style and leadership style adaptability, (b) there is no significant relationship between primary leadership style and leadership preparedness, (c) there is no significant relationship between leadership style adaptability and leadership prepared-

ness, and (d) there is no significant relationship between primary leadership style and leadership experience.

Participants

Full-time, midlevel academic leaders at career colleges throughout the U.S. comprised the general population for this study. The accessible population included those leaders who had LinkedIn accounts as snowball sampling was used, beginning with the researchers' professional network. Study participants were 63 midlevel, full-time academic leaders, defined as academic department heads, department chairs, program directors, deans, and directors, at career colleges.

Demographic items provided for descriptive analysis of participants as summarized in Table 1. The respondents were 73% female ($n = 46$) and 25% male ($n = 16$), with 1.5% preferring not to answer ($n = 1$). A review of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data (IPEDS) data from a sample of 13 career colleges in the U.S. was conducted to determine if this response sample was representative. The gender of full-time employees reported as full-time management were evenly split. Consequently, this study's sample may be more heavily female than the population. However, it is common for executive-level leaders to be male while midlevel leaders are more heavily female (Amey et al., 2020).

As expected in a population of leaders within higher education, their academic credentials were significant, with 30% holding a doctorate ($n = 19$), 41% a master's ($n = 26$), 22% a bachelor's ($n = 14$), nearly 5% an associate ($n = 3$), with 1.5% holding only a certificate ($n = 1$). In response to the question "how many years of leadership experience did you have prior to working in an academic leadership role, including non-academic leadership?" 27% indicated between 0 and 4 years ($n = 17$), 14% between 5 and 9 years ($n = 9$), 14% between 10 and 14 years ($n = 9$), 17% between 15 and 19 years ($n = 11$), 11% between 20 and 24 years ($n = 7$), and nearly 16% with 25 or more years ($n = 10$).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Female	46	73.0
Male	16	25.4
Prefer not to answer	1	1.6
Highest level of education attained		
Certificate	1	1.6
Associate	3	4.8
Bachelor's	14	22.2
Master's	26	41.3
Doctorate	19	30.2
Prior years of leadership experience		
0–4 years	17	27.0
5–9 years	9	14.3
10–14 years	9	14.3
15–19 years	11	17.5
20–24 years	7	11.1
25–30+ years	10	15.9

Data Collection

Situational leadership theory is the basis for the Leader Effectiveness and Adaptability Description Self (LEAD Self) instrument which measures leadership styles and leadership style adaptability (Hersey et al., 1996). The LEAD Self instrument presents 12 situations, each with four alternative solutions, wherein respondents are asked to choose the alternative they feel would best address the situation. The LEAD Self instrument assesses the respondent's primary leadership style and leadership style adaptability in various situations (Furtunescu & Domnariu, 2014). The LEAD Self evaluates and provides four leadership style scores and one leadership style adaptability score based on the 12 situations. Due to copyright restrictions for the LEAD Self instrument, participants completed it through the Center for Leadership Studies, who then emailed the results to the principal researcher.

The LEAD Self categorizes the leaders' primary style as one of four options: (a) *telling*, which is indicative of a leader that primarily uses high-task/low-relationship behaviors, (b) *selling*, indicating preferred utilization of high-task/high-relationship behaviors, (c) *participating*, which indicates the tendency to utilize low-task/high-relationship behavior, or

(d) *delegating*, which is suggestive of the preference to use low-task/low-relationship behavior.

The LEAD Self measures leadership style adaptability through frequency distribution across the scores. The leadership style adaptability scores for the LEAD Self can range from 0 to 36 and are categorized as *low* with scores ranging from 0 to 23, *mid-range* with scores from 24 to 29, and *high* with scores ranging from 30 to 36 (Hersey et al., 1996). The lower range of a leadership style adaptability score indicates that the leader needs to develop their ability to assess a situation and apply the appropriate actions to address the situation. Scores in the midrange of the scale suggest that the leader can in most cases assess a situation and apply the appropriate actions to effectively address a situation. Scores in the high range indicate that the leader has the ability to consistently assess a situation and apply effective actions to resolve the matter (Hersey et al., 1996).

The 21st Century Leadership Preparation Survey (21CLPS; Wilson, 2014) was used to gather data on midlevel academic leaders' perception of their own leadership preparedness. The 21CLPS is a self-inventory designed to assess an academic leader's readiness for a leadership role in terms of 12 skills: visioning, strategic planning, collaboration, data-driven decision making, systems thinking, instructional leadership, establishing school culture, special populations, effective communication, facilitating stakeholder involvement, technology literacy, and global awareness and cultural diversity (Wilson, 2014). It is a 24-item instrument rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*). In its development process, 21CLPS showed strong reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.97 (Wilson, 2014).

Characteristics shown to be relevant in the literature review were collected through demographic items. Collected data was current academic leadership position, length of leadership experience (including leadership outside the academy), age, gender, and highest level of education attained. Respondents were asked if their academic leadership role was a full-time responsibility and what their current academic leadership position was, in order to confirm that the study included only full-time, midlevel academic leaders.

Survey participants were invited by the researcher via LinkedIn and provided a link to SurveyMonkey to participate in the study by agreeing to the informed consent and responding to the 21CLPS instrument and the demographic items, denoted as Part I of the survey. Upon completion of Part I, participants were sent an email with a link to complete the LEAD Self instrument on the Center for Leadership Studies website,

which was Part II. Both parts of the survey were available for six weeks in spring 2019 with a total of three reminders sent to participants who had completed only Part I. Although 120 respondents completed Part I of the study, only 63 of those also followed up to complete Part II.

Analysis

The data for the 21CLPS instrument and demographic items were exported from SurveyMonkey into Excel. The LEAD Self response data provided from the Center for Leadership Studies were also entered into the Excel spreadsheet. Participants' responses were matched using their email addresses. After pairing the responses, the data were exported to IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software for analysis.

The data from the measuring instruments were converted to scores representing each construct. Participants' leadership styles were measured based on their responses to the LEAD Self, and one score was created to reflect primary leadership style while another score was created to reflect leadership style adaptability. The participants' responses to the 21CLPS was transformed into one score reflecting leadership preparedness. The 21CLPS for this study reflected a Cronbach's alpha of 0.96, demonstrating a high level of reliability. Data respondents provided on the demographic item regarding years of prior leadership experience, as summarized in Table 1, was used to represent the previous leadership experience score.

The *participating* leadership style was revealed to be the predominant leadership style among study participants ($n = 44$), with *selling* ($n = 10$) and *delegating* ($n = 8$) far behind, and *telling* ($n = 1$) with only one respondent, as shown in Table 2. The frequency distribution for the majority of participants' leadership style adaptability score fell in the midrange ($n = 45$), reflecting some ability to assess situations and apply appropriate actions, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Results for LEAD Self Primary Leadership Style and Leadership Style Adaptability

Category	<i>n</i>	%
Primary Leadership Style		
Participating	44	69.8
Selling	10	15.9
Delegating	8	12.7
Telling	1	1.6
Leadership Style Adaptability		
Low (0–23)	4	6.3
Mid (24–29)	45	71.4
High (30–36)	14	22.2

Note. Primary leadership styles arranged in descending order according to frequency.

The results of the 21CLPS demonstrated participants' self-perception for the 12 skills of leadership preparedness on a 7-point scale, as listed in descending order according to means in Table 3. All but one skill area reflected at least a 5-point mean on the 7-point scale, from 5.06 to 5.9. The top three skills for which leaders believed they were prepared had high means and standard deviations with little variance: establish a *positive school culture* ($M = 5.90, SD = 1.32$), *collaboration* ($M = 5.74, SD = 1.37$), and *data-driven decision making* ($M = 5.71, SD = 1.31$). Following those, there were descending means and/or slightly more variance in standard deviations: *vision* ($M = 5.67, SD = 1.22$), *instructional leadership* ($M = 5.59, SD = 1.51$), *global awareness and cultural diversity* ($M = 5.47, SD = 1.48$), *strategic planning* ($M = 5.44, SD = 1.20$), *effective communication* ($M = 5.28, SD = 1.52$), *technology literacy* ($M = 5.24, SD = 1.51$), *systems thinking* ($M = 5.17, SD = 1.35$), *facilitate stakeholder involvement* ($M = 5.06, SD = 1.71$). The one exception below 5 points was the skill of *special populations* ($M = 4.71, SD = 1.56$). Most skills had responses from the minimum of 1 to the maximum of 7. The two exceptions had a minimum response of 2: *vision* and *strategic planning*.

Table 3. Results for 21CLPS Leadership Preparation

Skill	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Establish a positive school culture	5.90	1.32	1	7
Collaboration	5.74	1.37	1	7
Data-driven decision making	5.71	1.31	1	7
Vision	5.67	1.22	2	7
Instructional leadership	5.59	1.51	1	7
Global awareness and cultural diversity	5.47	1.48	1	7
Strategic planning	5.44	1.20	2	7
Effective communication	5.28	1.52	1	7
Technology literacy	5.24	1.51	1	7
Systems thinking	5.17	1.35	1	7
Facilitate stakeholder involvement	5.06	1.71	1	7
Special populations	4.71	1.56	1	7

Note. Skills arranged in descending order according to means.

The Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for each of the first three research questions by entering the score for each relevant variable into the SPSS software. In analyzing the first research question, *What was the relationship between the academic leader's primary leadership style and the leader's perceived preparedness for their leadership role?*, the LEAD Self instrument's primary leadership style score and the 21CLPS instrument score were used. The Pearson r correlation revealed no relationship between the variables, $r(61) = 0.21$, $p = 0.10$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. The result indicated no substantial relationship between primary leadership style and perceived leadership preparedness.

To analyze the second research question, *What was the relationship between the academic leader's primary leadership style and the leader's leadership style adaptability?*, the LEAD Self instrument's primary leadership style score and leadership style adaptability score were used. The Pearson r correlation revealed no relationship between the variables, $r(61) = 0.21$, $p = 0.11$. Consequently, the null hypothesis was not rejected. The result indicated no substantial relationship between primary leadership style and leadership style adaptability.

To analyze responses for the third research question, *What was the relationship between the academic leader's style adaptability and perceived preparedness for leadership?*, the LEAD Self instrument's leadership style adaptability score and the 21CLPS instrument score were used. The Pearson

r correlation revealed no relationship between the variables, $r(61) = 0.09$, $p = 0.47$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. The result indicated no substantial relationship between primary leadership style adaptability and perceived leadership preparedness.

The fourth research question, *What was the relationship between an academic leader's primary leadership style and prior experience in leadership roles?*, was analyzed using the LEAD Self instrument's primary leadership style score and demographic item responses regarding years in leadership roles. There were six response categories: 0 to 4 years, 5 to 9 years, 10 to 14 years, 15 to 19 years, 20 to 24 years, and 25 to 30+ years. A Spearman rank correlation was computed to assess the relationship between the academic leaders' primary leadership style and the category of their years of prior leadership experience. There was no relationship between the variables, $r(61) = 0.05$, $p = 0.70$. Consequently, the null hypothesis was not rejected. The result indicated no substantial relationship between primary leadership style and prior experience in leadership roles.

Conclusions

Organizational leadership style encompasses leaders' systematic behavioral actions used to inspire others to achieve organizational goals. A leader's choice of leadership style is influenced by many factors to include organizational culture and the sector in which the leader works (Bergen, 2002). Academic leaders in career colleges are often promoted from the ranks of high-performing faculty that previously worked as leaders in a non-academic industry. The on-the-job leadership experience may often have been specific to the previous industry and could vary from the strategies needed for effective academic leadership (Bergen, 2002).

The development of one's leadership style is influenced by the industry in which the leader works (Bergen, 2002). The majority of participants had prior leadership experience which would have been integral to the formation of their leadership style based on the prior industry where they worked. In the same way that leaders are able to modify their leadership behaviors to fit the situation, leaders have the ability to change their primary leadership style to fit the industry in which they currently work. Similarly, a leader's current primary leadership style may not correlate to their prior leadership experience based on a nonacademic setting.

The *participating* leadership style was the predominant style among the study participants. Given that 73% of respondents indicated they were female, this aligns with Al-Omari's (2005) findings that females tend to prefer the *participating* leadership style. Hunter (2000) found that

executive-level leaders at community colleges, defined as presidents, vice-presidents, and deans, scored in the categories of 90% *selling* and 10% *participating*, so perhaps *participating* leadership style is more common or useful in midlevel leadership. Hilley (2015) found that collaboration was a necessary competence for leaders in community colleges, and Conrad and LeMay (2020) describe the necessity of building consensus among groups that encompass both higher and lower parts of the organizational structure.

The results of the study indicate that the academic leaders' leadership style adaptability scores were predominately in the middle range ($M = 27.08$, $SD = 3.30$). The results indicate participants are able to regularly assess a situation and apply effective actions. Rajbhandari (2013) concludes that leaders' comprehension of their leadership style provides a framework for them to be able to adapt their leadership style in various situations. In a study with academic leader participants, Al-Omari (2005) similarly found that the participants' adaptability scores were midrange. Having prior leadership experience should enable a leader to draw from that skill set and adapt their actions accordingly to address the situation.

In completing the 21CLPS, participants were asked to assess how their leadership experiences had prepared them for skill-related activities in their current academic leadership roles. It is common for industry leadership roles to be essential in the attainment of leadership skills in general (Bergen, 2002). However, the participants' prior leadership experience was not necessarily from within the academic sector, so it is possible that influenced the lack of significance.

Participants had significant years of prior leadership experience. Of the 63, 73% had five or more years. The results of this study suggest that leadership experience in the industry from which the leader came may be relevant in their preparedness for an academic leadership role. In her study on leadership preparation of leaders in career colleges, Freeman (2011) described that 76% of the participants received their leadership/management preparation from their industry-specific previous employer and desired to understand how to apply their experiences in an academic context.

Recommendations

This study examined the relationships among self-perceived primary leadership style, leadership style adaptability, leadership preparedness, and the prior leadership experience of full-time, midlevel academic leaders in career colleges. Although the researchers did not find significant re-

relationships among any of the variables, further research is needed on the specific leadership development needs of career college midlevel academic leaders. This aligns with McNair and Perry's (2020) recommendations that competencies for hiring decisions, professional development, and feedback and coaching should be considered together in developing midlevel leaders.

Academic leaders today must have the management and leadership skills necessary to effectively perform the duties of their role and efficiently motivate academic team members to achieve the college's goals. While there is adequate research evidencing the need for leadership training in higher education in general, there is a scarcity of research directly related to the needs of midlevel academic leaders in career colleges (Bisbee, 2007). Research suggests that academic leaders in traditional institutions of higher learning are often promoted without having leadership experience (Wolverton et al., 2005). In contrast, this study provides evidence that career college midlevel academic leaders do possess prior leadership experience from industry leadership roles, but in agreement with Ayers and Gonzales (2020), they need help in transitioning to an academic setting. Executive leaders can make use of these findings by acknowledging the value of these prior experiences and capitalizing on them to help midlevel leaders successfully transition to the academic context. Paape (2021) indicates that training should be customized to institutional distinctives and specific leader needs.

Two limitations of this study are the confines of quantitative methods and the narrow scope of self-perception. Participants were not asked specifics about their prior leadership experience; a qualitative follow-up to gather more information would have strengthened the design. Further research should incorporate perceptions of others and leadership effectiveness.

Career college academic leaders bring a wealth of industry knowledge that can be shared with students to enhance their educational experience in preparation for various careers. Knowing the leadership styles of academic leaders with their backgrounds should provide a framework for professional development programs for new academic leaders (Sypawka et al., 2010; Paape et al., 2021). Because many midlevel academic leaders have prior leadership experience, consideration should be given to how their prior leadership experiences could impact the leadership support necessary to help them navigate the new academic context. Capitalizing on their lived experiences may further enhance the success of midlevel academic leaders in career colleges.

References

- Al-Omari, A. (2005). *Leadership styles and style adaptability of deans and department chairs at three public research universities* (Doctoral dissertation, Washington State University). <https://hdl.handle.net/2376/340>
- Amey, M. J., Garza Mitchell, R. L., Rosales, J., & Giardello, K. J. (2020). Reconceptualizing midlevel leadership. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2020(191), 127–132. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20416>
- Ayers, D. F., & Gonzales, L. D. (2020). Emotional labor and midlevel leadership. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2020(191), 43–55. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20405>
- Bergen, C. W. V., & Soper, B. (2002). Entrepreneurial leadership styles: What works and what doesn't. *The Entrepreneurial Executive*, 7, 63–77.
- Bisbee, D. (2007). Looking for leaders: Current practices in leadership identification in higher education. *Planning and Changing*, 38(1–2), 77–88.
- Boggs, G. R., & McPhail, C. J. (2020). Strategies for issues management for mid-level leaders. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2020(191), 11–20. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20402>
- Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (1984). *Modern approaches to understanding and managing organizations*. Jossey-Bass.
- Bratton, R. L. (2012). Keys to success for department chairs and section heads. *Physician Executive*, 38(2), 44–6.
- Brown, L. (2001). Leading leadership development in universities: A personal story. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 10(4), 312–323. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492601104005>
- The Center for Leadership Studies. (n.d.). <https://situational.com/situational-leadership>
- Clowes, D. A., Darrel, A., & Hawthorne, M. (1995). Community colleges and proprietary schools: Conflict or convergence? *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 1995(91), 5–15.
- Conrad, K. L., & LeMay, L. E. (2020). Lessons from the field: Leading institutional change from the middle. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2020(191), 107–116. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20415>
- Creswell, J. W. (2015). *Educational research* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Dyer, B. G., & Miller, M. (1999). *A critical review of literature related to the department chair position*. University of Alabama. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED432193.pdf>
- Freeman, A. L. (2011). *Being prepared to lead: The management preparation of academic leaders from a private career college* (Doctoral dissertation, Capella University). ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (UMI No. 3449701).
- Furtunescu, F. L., & Domnariu, C. D. (2014). Assessing the leadership style in health organizations from Romania. *Balkan Region Conference on Engineering and Business Education*, 1(1), 547–550.

-
- Gmelch, W. H. (2013). The development of campus academic leaders. *International Journal of Leadership and Change*, 1(1). <https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/ijlc/vol1/iss1/7>
- Hersey, P., Blanchard, K., & Johnson, D. (1996). *Management of organizational behavior: Utilizing human resources* (7th ed.). Prentice Hall.
- Hersey, P., Blanchard, K., & Johnson, D. (2001). *Management of organizational behavior: Leading human resources* (8th ed.). Prentice Hall.
- Hilley, M. (2015). *Competencies needed for community college leaders: The transition to a state college* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Phoenix). ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (UMI No. 3734436).
- Hunter, N., Jr. (2000). *An investigation of leadership style, style range, and style adaptability of the president, vice-presidents and deans and the readiness level of staff members of a community college* (Doctoral dissertation, Spalding University). ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (UMI No. 9993219).
- Kalargyrou, V., Pescosolido, A. T., & Kalargiros, E. A. (2012). Leadership skills in management education. *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal*, 16(4), 39–63.
- Levesque, K., Laird, J., Hensley, E., Choy, S. P., Cataldi, E. F., & Hudson, L. (2008). *Career and technical education in the United States: 1990 to 2005* (NCES 2008-035). National Center for Education Statistics. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2008/2008035.pdf>
- McNair, D. E., & Perry, K. (2020). Strategies for issues management for midlevel leaders. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2020(191), 35–42. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20402>
- McPhail, I. P., & McPhail, C. J. (2020). Strategic planning as a leadership development tool for midlevel leaders. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2020(191), 21–33. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20403>
- Mohnot, H., & Shaw, T. (2017). The study of academic leadership preparedness and leadership style in higher education. *International Journal of Education and Management Studies*, 7(3), 408–416.
- Morey, A. I. (2004). Globalization and the emergence of for-profit higher education. *Higher Education*, 48(1), 131–150. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:HIGH.0000033768.76084.a0>
- Morris, T. L., & Laipple, J. S. (2015). How prepared are academic administrators? Leadership and job satisfaction within US research universities. *Journal of Higher Education Policy & Management*, 37(2), 241–251. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2015.1019125>
- National Center for Education and Statistics (NCES). (n.d.). *What is CTE?* <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ctes/about.asp#a>
- Paape, J. E., Miller, M. T., Grover, K. S., & Morris, A. A. Department chair training: Priorities, needs, and preferences. *Community College Enterprise*, 27(1). <https://home.schoolcraft.edu/cce/27.1.38-53.pdf>
-

-
- Potgieter, I., & Coetzee, M. (2010). Management competencies in higher education: Perceived job importance in relation to level of training required. *Journal of Human Resource Management*, 8(1), 1–10.
- Rajbhandari, M. (2013). *School leadership en-route to grand leap: Case studies from Nepal & Finland*. Tampere University Press.
- Rajbhandari, M. M. S., Looock, C., Du Plessis, P., & Rajbhandari, S. (2014). *Leadership readiness for flexibility and mobility: The 4th dimensions on situational leadership styles in educational settings*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED552915.pdf>
- Roberson, M., & Sundstrom, E. (1990). Questionnaire design, return rates, and response favorableness in an employee attitude questionnaire. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 75(3), 354–357.
- Sirkis, J. E. (2011). Development of leadership skills in community college department chairs. *The Community College Enterprise*, 17(2), 46–61. <https://www.schoolcraft.edu/pdfs/cce/17.2.46-61.pdf>
- Sypawka, W., Mallett, W., & McFadden, C. (2010). Leadership styles of community college academic deans. *The Community College Enterprise*, 16(1), 63–73. <https://home.schoolcraft.edu/cce/16.1.63-73.pdf>
- Wilson, S. H. (2014). *An investigation of school principals' perceptions of aspects of their university leadership preparation programs for twenty first-century school leadership* (Doctoral dissertation, Regent University). ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (UMI No. 3630470).
- Wolverton, M., Ackerman, R., & Holt, S. (2005). Preparing for leadership: What academic department chairs need to know. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 27(2), 227–238. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600800500120126>

Copyright of *The Community College Enterprise* is the property of Schoolcraft College, and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted on a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.