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# Social Work Faculty Perceptions of the Leadership Qualities of Their Academic Leaders

## **Abstract**

Leadership within the social work academic setting is unique and complex. Understanding the way in which faculty members experience the leadership qualities of their academic leaders is a necessary precursor to effective leadership development. This article reports on the quantitative data from a mixed-methods, nationwide survey exploring social work faculty perceptions of the leadership qualities of their academic programs' leaders.

## **Keywords**

social work education, academic leadership, social work faculty, leadership training

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# Social Work Faculty Perceptions of the Leadership Qualities of Their Academic Leaders

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## Abstract

*Leadership within the social work academic setting is unique and complex. Understanding the way in which faculty members experience the leadership qualities of their academic leaders is a necessary precursor to effective leadership development. This article reports on the quantitative data from a mixed-methods, nationwide survey exploring social work faculty perceptions of the leadership qualities of their academic programs' leaders.*

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## Introduction

The role of the academic leader entails managerial and academic responsibilities. Successful academic leaders must manage the administrative demands of the university while simultaneously addressing the needs and concerns of faculty (Cassie, Sowers, & Rowe, 2006; Gmelch & Burns, 1990). Academic leaders often are ill-prepared to meet this challenge (Cassie et al., 2006; Filan, 1999; Filan & Seagren, 2003; Ginsburg, 2008; Gmelch, 2004; Hecht, 2004). Approximately 3% of colleges and universities offer formal training and mentorship programs for new academic deans, chairs, and directors (Gmelch, 2004). New academic leaders may not recognize the significant need for relationship-fostering skills for successful mentoring and collaboration (Call, Owens, & Vincent, 2013).

Addressing a perceived lack of leadership training, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) implemented the Leadership Institute in Social Work Education (LISWE) at its 2009 Annual Program Meeting (Fisher, 2009; Holosko, 2009). CSWE now provides scholarships for emerging leaders in social work education to attend Harvard's Management Development Program or Institute for Management and Leadership in Education summer institutes (CSWE, 2010). Likewise, the Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Directors (BPD) offers a pre-conference leadership workshop for new directors. Further, the National Association of Deans and Directors of Schools of Social Work (NADD) provides leadership development

and mentoring opportunities for new directors and deans of social work programs.

Recognizing social work education's efforts on leadership training and development, this article reports on the quantitative findings of a survey of social work faculty. The survey gathered faculty perceptions of the qualities most and least demonstrated by their academic leaders. This article also reports on the leadership qualities faculty most desire of their academic leaders and implications of these findings are discussed.

## Literature Review

A few studies have examined the role of the social work academic leader from the leader's standpoint. Rank and Hutchison's 2000 random sample survey of social work leaders, deans, and directors identified five essential leadership skills applicable to the social work profession: Proaction, Values and Ethics, Empowerment, Vision, and Communication. These skill groupings reveal both task-focused and process-oriented abilities essential to effective leadership. In a later study, House, Fowler, Thornton, and Francis (2007) surveyed of African-American deans and directors of schools of social work and identified administrative and organizational skills; openness to diverse opinions; and personal characteristics such as listening, respect for others, and strong emotional intelligence as the most relevant factors of successful academic leadership.

In a previously published article on the qualitative portion of a mixed-methods study of academic leadership qualities, Call et al. (2013) found no previous studies that explored the leadership styles of social work academic heads *from a faculty perspective*. The study found a majority of social work faculty cited positive attributes to describe their unit head. The study reported that positive leaders employ a collaborative process and advocate for faculty, thus facilitating their empowerment. Positive academic leaders are strong managers and effective communicators who lead with integrity and who articulate a positive vision for their academic unit.

However, Call et al. (2013) found a significant minority of the participants ascribed negative leadership qualities to their academic leaders. These findings included reports of autocratic decision makers who engaged in unethical behavior, poor managers with inadequate or deficient communication skills, leaders uninvolved with and unsupportive of faculty, and leaders characterized as unable or unwilling to effectively resolve conflict within their academic unit. The study also noted the lack of formal leadership preparation available to many new academic leaders. The leadership characteristics reported by faculty in this study validated and built on findings from previous studies on effective leadership styles (Grant & Crutchfield, 2008; Holosko, 2009; House et al., 2007; Rank & Hutchison, 2000). Most faculty identified collaborative and supportive leadership styles that encouraged partnerships with faculty, university administration, and the community as the most positive and effective qualities needed of academic leaders.

A further review of the literature found no other studies on academic leadership from a social work faculty member's perspective. However, several themes emerged: (1) Unique nature of academic leadership; (2) Emerging approaches to academic leadership; (3) Social work practice and academic leadership; and 4) Social work leadership and the values of the social work profession.

### Unique Nature of Academic Leadership

Bryman (2006) developed a comprehensive list of effective academic leadership qualities from interviews with 24 leadership researchers. These qualities included:

- Providing direction
- Creating a supportive structure
- Encouraging an environment that is supportive and collaborative
- Establishing trustworthiness
- Possessing integrity

- Having credibility and acting as a role model
- Facilitating participatory decision-making
- Consulting
- Communicating new developments
- Representing the department/institution and networking
- Respecting the current culture while also instilling values and vision
- Protecting staff autonomy

According to Bryman (2006), the unique abilities of academic leaders include maintaining autonomy among faculty and staff, consulting with others on important decisions, fostering collegiality, and advocating for the department. Similarly, Cardno (2013) noted the uniqueness of the academic leader role as a "duality of expectations" (p. 127). Results of this small qualitative study revealed academic leaders were primarily "academics managing academics in a close-to-the-job and direct manner because it is about leading teaching and learning" (p. 133).

Tahir, Abdullah, Ali, and Daud (2014) also recognized the special importance of leaders in middle management roles. They recommended that universities make greater efforts to identify and to develop potential academic leaders. Kligyte and Barrie (2014) conducted a study to examine "collegiality" in higher education. Recognizing that higher education leadership is unique compared to other settings, they considered multiple definitions and understandings of collegiality from governance to allegiance in disciplinary communities, and even to behavioral norms. Meanwhile, Hoppe (2003) stated the most important quality required of academic leaders is "fortitude: the will to make the right decisions for the right reason" (p. 5). Hoppe cautioned that too often academic leaders lack fortitude and suggested that aspiring administrators be placed in situations in which they must demonstrate their ability to make decisions.

### Emerging Approaches to Academic Leadership

Emerging leadership models are challenging the traditional hierarchical practices of organizational leadership in education. These new models are viewed as transformative (Filan & Segran, 2003) and "revolutionary" (Kezar & Carducci, 2007). Transformational leaders articulate a vision; inspire and motivate; exhibit integrity and ethical behavior; encourage critical and creative thinking; and demonstrate cognitive, social, and emotional competence (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Bass, 2008; Filan & Seagren, 2003; Goleman, 2002; Kouzes & Posner, 2007). These leaders are role models who are not merely collaborative

but who by virtue of facilitating the empowerment of followers actually promote their leadership development. Similarly, “revolutionary” leadership models, in contrast to traditional models, are less hierarchical and more process centered and context focused, thus supporting mutual power and influence between the leader and those supervised. Kezar and Carducci (2007) described “revolutionary” leadership as a “collective process, oriented toward social change and committed to equality and diversity, which can change social inequalities” (p. 14).

Distributed leadership can be considered one type of transformational model that posits all faculty are capable of demonstrating leadership (Goleman, 2002). Similarly, Gronn (2000) argued for a leadership that is not founded on power and control but, rather, on an ability to work with others and to facilitate others’ leadership development. He suggested that leaders and followers are collaborators working together to accomplish a group task in which leadership roles change. Thus, leadership is seen as “fluid and emergent rather than as a fixed phenomenon” (p. 324). In a distributed leadership model, multiple leaders interact together interdependently, sharing leadership responsibilities through their various roles (Harris, 2003; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). The individual in the designated role of unit head or director shares power and works to transform faculty departments or units into “professional learning communities” (Harris, 2003, p. 322) that empower faculty decision-making. Recently, numerous authors have documented an effort in Australia to move academic settings toward the distributed leadership model (Davison et al., 2014; Holt, Palmer, Gosper, Sankey, & Allan, 2014; Jones, Lefoe, Harvey, & Ryland, 2012). As this model decentralizes decision making and focuses on collaboration among multiple stakeholders, advocates of this approach believe the distributed leadership model is best suited for academic settings.

Bolden, Gosling, and O’Brien (2014) also supported the need for different approaches to leadership that could incorporate transformative and revolutionary strategies. Using surveys, interviews, and focus groups in 15 Great Britain academic communities, the authors assessed academics’ sense of “citizenship” and belonging in their institutions. Bolden et al. suggested the focus should shift from developing leaders in higher education to enhancing “people’s sense of belonging, out of which should arise an enhanced sense of citizenship and a corresponding desire to engage in community life” (p. 765).

## **Social Work Practice and Academic Leadership**

Holoko’s (2009) content analysis of professional literature identified five core attributes of social work leaders similar to those found by researchers examining academic leadership qualities: vision, influencing others to act, team work/collaboration, problem-solving capacity, and creating positive change. Grant and Crutchfield (2008) noted the importance of shared leadership. Mary’s (2005) survey found that social workers prefer a transformational leadership style that focuses on the “development of the fullest potential of individuals and their motivation toward the greater good” (p. 108). Transformational leadership is the style most strongly linked to positive leadership outcomes.

Another perspective on leadership is the social work supervisees’ perceptions of their leaders. Elpers and Westhuis (2008) revealed a significant difference between social worker expectations of their supervisors and that which they perceive their supervisors provide. This disconnection between expectations and perception correlates with lower social worker job satisfaction. Popa (2012) found that, in a public child welfare setting, leaders rated themselves higher on all five leadership components in the study than the caseworkers they supervised.

One factor affecting the quality of social work leadership is the level of preparation or readiness of social workers for that role. Regrettably, many social service leadership roles are occupied by individuals with MBAs or MPAs rather than MSWs (Nesoff, 2007). Furthermore, Nesoff (2007) noted that too often social workers assume leadership roles without proper training and further cautioned that, without a concerted effort to better prepare them for leadership roles, they will not have a leading role in the management of human service programs.

Elpers and Westhuis (2008) called for “leadership development as a key component of the social work curriculum and profession” (p. 40), as well as for additional research into the role of leadership in social work settings and how best to distinguish the difference in social work leadership and management. A study by Lazzari (2007) reinforced the need for more leadership content in social work education, insofar as only 35 out of 639 accredited social work educational programs responded to a request for syllabi focused on leadership. Brilliant (1986) characterized the lack of leadership development in social work education as “the missing link” within the profession.

## **Social Work Leadership and Values of the Social Work Profession**

It is important to consider the leadership models that best reflect the values of the social work profession (National Association of Social Workers, 2008). Transformative and revolutionary leadership requires a “critical consciousness” about the work of academic institutions and academic social work programs (Kezar & Carducci, 2007). To incorporate the work of Freire (2000) requires leadership practices founded on both reflection and action (Burghardt, 2014). Weiner’s (2003) perspective on leadership required a “democratization of power.” and a reduction in top-down management of social work academic programs and the institutions in which they are housed. Based on Freire’s (2000) tenets, leadership in social work academic settings incorporates a political and social analysis of the academic institution itself in relation to the academic community, faculty, staff, and students. Burghardt (2014) built on Freire’s work linking social work leadership development to the importance of relationship building in both community organization and social work administration. Feminist relational theorists have emphasized the importance of relational connections and have promoted the notion of “power with” as opposed to “power over” as the key to transforming relationships and, by extension, human organizations (Fletcher, 1996; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991). As equality, social justice, diversity, and the importance of relationships are codified values of social workers, it is important to understand whether faculty believe their academic unit heads exemplify these values.

## **Method**

This exploratory study utilized a cross-sectional online survey of a national sample of social work faculty to explore respondents’ assessments of their academic leaders. Social work faculty were asked to respond to both closed and open-ended questions to examine the following research question: How do social work faculty experience the leadership style of their academic unit head? The study further sought to understand those qualities of academic leadership that faculty perceive as ideal and less efficacious. This article describes the research sample and reports on the quantitative analysis of the survey responses.

As social work faculty members from three universities, the authors brought not only their unique professional experiences with academic leaders to the study, but also the experience of other colleagues both

past and present. For both the qualitative (Call et al., 2013) and this quantitative portion of a mixed-methods study, the study data were analyzed primarily through a feminist lens focusing on relationships, revealing faculty experiences, and voicing a concern for ethical stances (Jordan et al., 1991; Olsen, 1994; Patton, 2002). The qualitative and quantitative survey responses also were analyzed from a professional social work perspective. From this perspective, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (2008), examined whether the faculty members’ experiences were consistent with the professional ethics and values of the social work profession and were incorporated in the accreditation standards of Council of Social Work Education (2015). Both viewpoints were consistent with a critical worker theory (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994) that seeks to promote awareness of the faculty members’ experiences to not only satisfy research purposes, but also to acknowledge their perceived reality and, thus, support their empowerment. The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 19.

## **Sampling**

Social work faculty participants were selected in two phases. First, 225 social work departments were randomly selected from a list of 537 accredited social work programs nationwide. To arrive at a sample size of 225, an online sample size generator was utilized. Second, from the 225 departments websites, 2,337 faculty email addresses were collected, excluding academic leaders. A total of 372 faculty members volunteered to participate in the study, for a 17% response rate. Ninety-two emails were returned as undeliverable.

A majority of the study participants were white (76.4%), female (71.4%), and approximately 50 years of age. The faculty in the study identified as 76.4% white, 9.5% African-American, 4.5% Latino/Hispanic, 3.5% Asian, 1.2% Native American/Indigenous, and 2.5% as bi-racial or multi-racial (see appendix—Tables 1 and 2). Most participants had earned doctorates and taught at public universities. A slight majority held the rank of either associate or assistant professor. A significant majority of faculty had accumulated nearly 15 years of academic experience and a similar number of years of social work practice experience outside of academia. The participants had occupied their current positions an average of approximately nine years. Their current academic leaders had served in their leadership positions for about six years (see appendix—Tables 2 and 3).

## Survey

The mixed-methods survey presented 13 demographic items, 34 closed-ended items, and three open-ended questions. The survey explored social work faculty experiences with their current academic leaders, their overall experience with former academic heads, and their sense of the qualities fundamental to efficacious social work leadership. The survey instructions defined the academic leader as the individual responsible for completing the faculty member's evaluation and for making recommendations for contract renewal and salary increases. Further, the survey instructions suggested the "head of the academic unit" might have the title of director, chair, or dean. Thirty-two of the 34 closed-ended items were adapted from an unpublished instrument developed by Cooke (2003) for assessing supervisor/work group leaders. The researchers developed two of the survey items. In addition, participants were asked to select the qualities they most desire of academic leadership. The researchers assigned each of the 34 closed-ended items to one of six categories of leadership qualities: Proactive/Problem-Solving, Values and Ethics, Empowerment, Vision, Communication, and Teamwork/Collaboration. These qualities were derived by synthesizing categories identified in two studies on social work leadership: Rank and Hutchison's (2000) five essential leadership skills for the social work profession (Proaction, Values and Ethics, Empowerment, Vision, and Communication) and Holosko's (2009) five leadership categories (Vision, Influencing Others to Act, Teamwork/Collaboration, Problem-Solving Capacity, and Creating Positive Change). This article only reports on the quantitative survey data. A full report of the quantitative data appears in Table 4 (see appendix).

## Data Collection

The national survey of social work faculty was conducted using a web-based survey development and implementation application. The authors developed the survey online and conducted a pilot with three faculty colleagues, then revised the survey based on their feedback. Initially, an introductory email was sent to briefly explain the study and to inform faculty that another email formally requesting their participation would follow in two days. This survey email was sent with a link to the online document. A second email request was sent to potential faculty participants two weeks later. The survey was open for 28 days.

## Results

Averaging scores for all 34 of the academic leadership qualities surveyed revealed that 64.2% of the social work faculty strongly agree or agree that their academic leaders demonstrate these qualities. Conversely, 20.1% strongly disagree or disagree that their academic leaders demonstrate the leadership qualities specified in the survey. Following is an overview of the specific qualities most and less often demonstrated by social work academic leaders. Next, the leadership qualities faculty most desire of their academic unit head are compared with whether leaders actually demonstrate these qualities. Finally, the survey results are examined based on the type of leadership skill represented, e.g., Proactive/Problem-Solving, Values and Ethics, Empowerment, Vision, Communication, and Teamwork/Collaboration.

### Leadership Qualities Most Demonstrated by Academic Leaders

The 10 leadership qualities on which faculty strongly agreed/agreed are demonstrated by their current academic leaders and ranged from 80.0% to 67.5% (see appendix—Figure 1). Faculty reporting a strongly disagree or disagree rating for these qualities ranged from 18.3% to 9.5%; the neutral responses ranged from 15.5% to 10.5%. The 10 qualities listed in order of most reported as demonstrated were: (1) Acknowledges faculty accomplishments; (2) Allows sufficient time for completion of assignments; (3) Promotes conditions that encourage respect for cultural and social diversity within the academic unit; (4) Schedules group meetings with faculty to exchange information about common interests and fosters partnerships and collegiality; (5) Makes changes in policies and curriculum of the academic unit with input from faculty; (6) Finds time to listen to faculty; (7) Is easy to approach and communicate with when problems arise; (8) Seeks out and values the opinions, suggestions, and ideas of faculty; (9) Encourages faculty members to play an integral role in guiding the vision of the academic unit; and (10) Exhibits professional competency through actively engaging in teaching, research, and service.

### Leadership Qualities Least Demonstrated by Academic Leaders

The ten leadership qualities faculty reported as least demonstrated by their current academic leaders ranged

from 32.9% to 20.8% (see appendix—Figure 2). Faculty reporting a strongly agree or agree rating for these qualities ranged from a high of 58.8% to a low of 43.8%. The neutral responses ranged from 25.3% to 15.4%. These qualities listed in order of least demonstrated were: (1) Is an effective mentor for faculty; (2) Usually places interests and concerns of faculty members and staff before his or her own; (3) Constructively manages conflict; (4) Open to constructive feedback about how they manage the department; (5) Expects faculty to perform at a high level of competence by regularly tracking progress toward meeting expectations; (6) Conducts periodic and constructive faculty performance reviews; (7) Evaluates faculty's performance solely on agreed upon standards; (8) Recognizes mistakes as an opportunity for learning and growth; (9) Provides faculty with accurate and complete information; and (10) Considers and seeks out multiple perspectives when problem solving.

### **Leadership Qualities Faculty Desire of Academic Leaders**

The 14 leadership qualities faculty most desire of their academic leaders are listed in order of frequency (see appendix—Table 5). “Creates a culture supportive of faculty” was identified by 100 faculty (30.4%); “Communicates openly, honestly, respectfully, and expects others to communicate in the same way” was identified by 78 faculty members (23.7%); and “considers and seeks out multiple perspectives when problem-solving” was identified by 69 faculty members (21.0%). The next three most desired qualities of academic leaders were: “fosters a climate of shared decision-making within the academic unit” identified by 67 faculty members or 20.4%; “willing to advocate for faculty with higher-level administration” identified by 51 faculty members or 15.2%; and “constructively manages conflict within the academic unit” was chosen by 50 faculty members or 15.2%.

### **Desired Leadership Qualities Compared to Qualities Leaders Demonstrated**

Only three of the qualities faculty most desire in their academic leaders were among the 10 most demonstrated of their leaders (Figure 3): “Makes changes in policies and curriculum of the academic unit with input from faculty” (Teamwork/Collaboration); “Seeks out and values the opinions, suggestions, and ideas of faculty” (Values and Ethics); and “Encourages faculty members to play an

integral role in guiding the vision of the academic unit” (Vision). Two of the qualities *most* desired of their leaders were among those *least* demonstrated by their academic leaders: “Constructively manages conflict” and “Considers and seeks out multiple perspectives when problem solving” (both under Proactive/Problem Solving).

Approximately 30% of faculty surveyed reported they desired their academic leaders to “Create a culture supportive of faculty,” while 62.6% strongly agreed/agreed this quality actually was demonstrated. Similarly, 23.7% identified “Communicate openly, honestly, respectfully, and expect others to communicate in the same way” as a desired quality of their leaders, and 62.8% of faculty surveyed strongly agreed/agreed their academic leaders demonstrated this quality. “Considers and seeks out multiple perspectives when problem solving” was desired by 21.0% of faculty, with 58.8% reporting they strongly agreed/agreed this quality was demonstrated by their academic leaders. Likewise, 20.4% of faculty identified “Fosters a climate of shared decision making within the academic unit” as a desired quality with 62.3% of faculty strongly agreeing/agreeing this occurred. Just over 15% of faculty reported “willing to advocate for faculty with high-level administration” as a desired quality, and 65.9% indicated their academic leaders demonstrated this quality. Meanwhile, 15.2% desired their academic leaders to “constructively manage(s) conflict,” with just over half (51.6%) indicating their leaders demonstrated this quality.

### **Examination of Survey Results by Categories**

Of the 14 leadership qualities faculty most desired of their academic leaders, four fell under the category of Teamwork/Collaboration, three under Values and Ethics, three under Proactive/Problem Solving, two under Empowerment, and one each were listed under Communication and Vision. Additional examination by leadership categories of the ten qualities faculty identified as most demonstrated by their academic leaders included three of the five Teamwork/Collaboration qualities, two of the eight Values and Ethics qualities, two of the five Communication qualities, one of the five Proactive/Problem Solving qualities, one of the seven Empowerment qualities, and one of the two Vision qualities. Similarly examining the 10 least demonstrated qualities of academic leaders revealed four fell under the Empowerment category, three under Proactive/Problem-Solving, two under Values and Ethics, and one under Communication. None of the least demonstrated qualities were from Vision and Teamwork/Collaboration.

In 44% of the surveyed items, 20% or more of faculty completing the survey either strongly disagreed/disagreed their academic leader demonstrated the leadership quality. Faculty gave the lowest rating in the Empowerment Category (six of the seven qualities), followed by Proactive/Problem Solving (four out of five qualities) and Communication (three out of the five qualities). Faculty responses were the most positive in the areas of Teamwork/Collaboration, Vision, and Values and Ethics, respectively.

## Discussion

The findings in this article, in combination with the previously published qualitative findings (Call et al., 2013), provide an overview of social work faculty perspectives of their academic leaders and address a significant gap in the social work literature. A majority of faculty reported positive experiences with their academic leadership. Some of the strongest areas acknowledged by faculty included: recognizes faculty accomplishments, allows sufficient time to accomplish work tasks, and promotes a culture of respect for diversity. However, a significant subset reported negative experiences. Weak social work academic leadership was reported in the areas of: leaders ineffectively mentoring faculty, leaders not placing faculty interest/concerns over those of the leader, leaders uninvolved with and unsupportive of faculty, and, notably, leaders characterized as unable or unwilling to effectively resolve conflict within the academic unit. The negative experiences of some faculty highlighted an inconsistency with the way in which some academic social work leaders apply the values and ethics of the social work profession and their lack of strong relationship-building skills.

The results of this study suggest a considerable number of social work faculty do not experience the type of academic leadership they desire or need. When examining the congruence between the leadership qualities desired and the qualities demonstrated by academic leaders, a sizeable discrepancy appears to exist. Although Elpers and Westhuis (2008) examined expectations of social workers in the field, this study validates their findings as they apply to the academic setting.

The results of this study appear to confirm a faculty desire for the same leadership qualities presented in Holoko's (2009) study: vision, influencing others to act, team work/collaboration, problem-solving capacity, and creating positive change. The authors recognize leadership in academia is complex and unit heads may utilize different approaches given the context. In this study, faculty reported a desire for academic leaders who possess

qualities of a transformational leadership style. The qualities most desired of academic leaders – supportive of faculty, communicates openly, considers multiple perspectives when problem-solving, fosters a climate of shared decision-making, constructively manages conflict, and assists faculty in building on their strengths – are consistent with Mary's (2005) findings that social workers prefer transformational leadership qualities that support the development of a faculty member's fullest potential. These qualities are consistent with the values of the social work profession.

The survey did not require a reliability analysis. Tavakol and Dennick (2011) stated a reliability analysis, such as the Cronbach alpha analysis, "provides a measure of the internal consistency of a test or scale...[and] the extent to which all the items in a test measure the same concept or construct" (p. 53). This study was an exploratory survey that examined the leadership style of social work academic heads *from a faculty perspective*. The survey did not measure a specific construct. Rather, it explored the experiences of faculty and represents a snapshot or first look at an important area that rarely has been studied.

Limitations to this study require cautious application of its findings. First, the low response rate (17%) limited the generalizability of the findings to only the faculty in this study. However, while the response rate was low, the study captured the perceptions of 372 faculty members. As previously noted, no previous studies were found that explored the leadership styles of social work academic heads *from a faculty perspective*. A second limitation points to the validity of the survey to measure faculty experiences. The authors adapted an existing survey from Cooke (2003) and, while five of the questions may be considered double-barreled, the researchers expected the participants to respond based on the totality of the question, e.g., that both circumstances were occurring. Finally, a large number of participants reported being from universities with PhD and/or MSW programs (see appendix—Table 2). This demographic suggests larger universities and academic programs may be overrepresented in the survey.

## Implications for Academic Leadership

This study has several implications for social work academic leadership development. These findings, along with previously reported findings (Call et al., 2013), suggest a considerable number of social work faculty may be disillusioned and feel disempowered by their academic leaders. Although the core values of the profession focus on relationships, some leaders may not be connected to

their faculty in mutual and empathic relationships. This conclusion is similar to other academic settings (Bolden et al., 2014). Further, Miller and Stiver (1997) identified empathy, honesty, and respect as the bedrock of mutual and collaborative relationships, values rooted in more transformative and empowering leadership models. Thus, social work academic leaders and faculty should consider the extent to which the relationship values of the profession are inculcated in the leadership practices of the academic unit.

While this study and that of Bolden et al. (2014) support increasing faculty's positive connections, conflict, which is an area of concern raised by study participants, can foster disconnection and a sense of not belonging. Academic leaders and faculty with strong relational skills are able to facilitate conversations within the academic unit that allow for more positive conflict resolution. Social work academic leaders should possess these relational skills to navigate the multiculturalist complex and globally connected world in which we live and work.

Leadership development in social work academic settings could benefit from greater emphasis on team-based leadership. Transformational leadership changes have occurred in other professional settings. Yet, a hierarchical, top-down approach to leadership appears to continue in many social work academic settings. Stronger accreditation requirements for unit heads' relational leadership skill development may well foster the empowerment of faculty, increase faculty leadership skills, and advance the mission of social work education.

This study is a snapshot or a first look at academic leadership from a faculty perspective. Future studies should examine the relationship between faculty and their leaders, and the way in which their relationships impact their relationships with students, one another, and their academic institutions. Other specific areas for study include increasing our understanding, from both the academic leader and faculty perspective, of the manner by which academic leaders share power and handle conflict. Finally, future studies should consider how to train and evaluate leaders with more process-oriented, relational skills in social work academic settings.

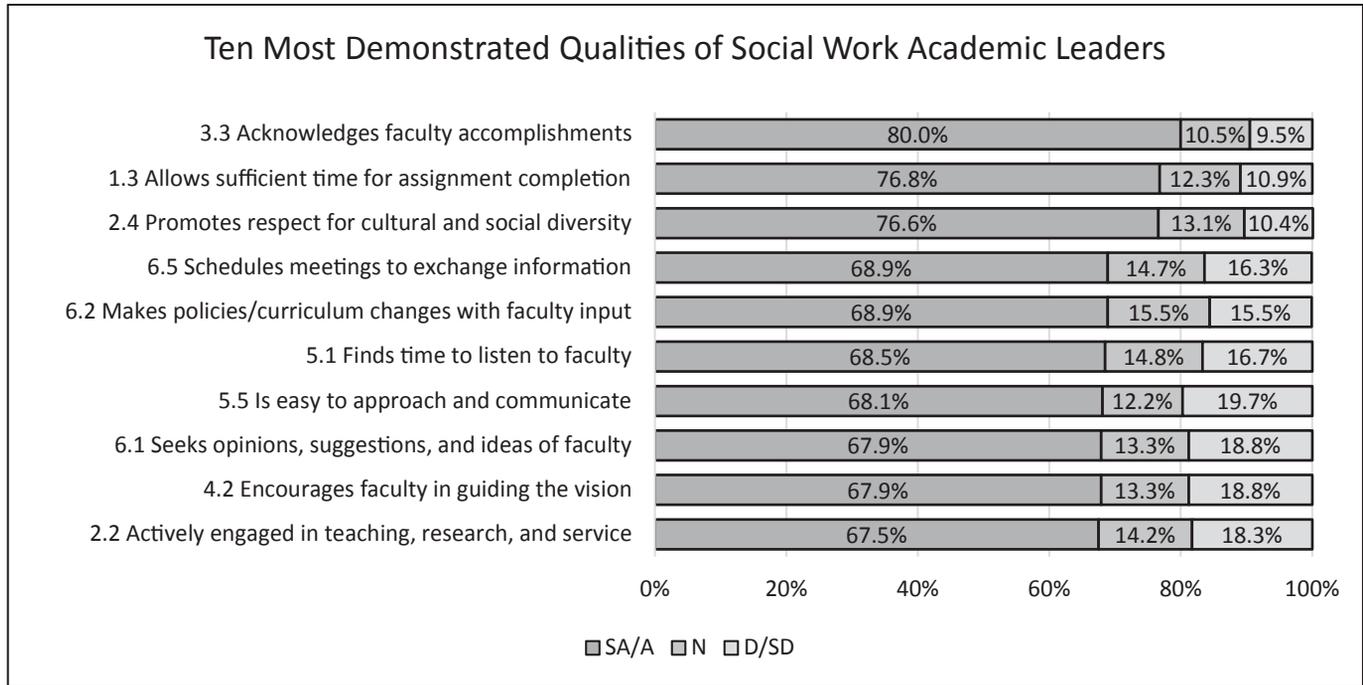
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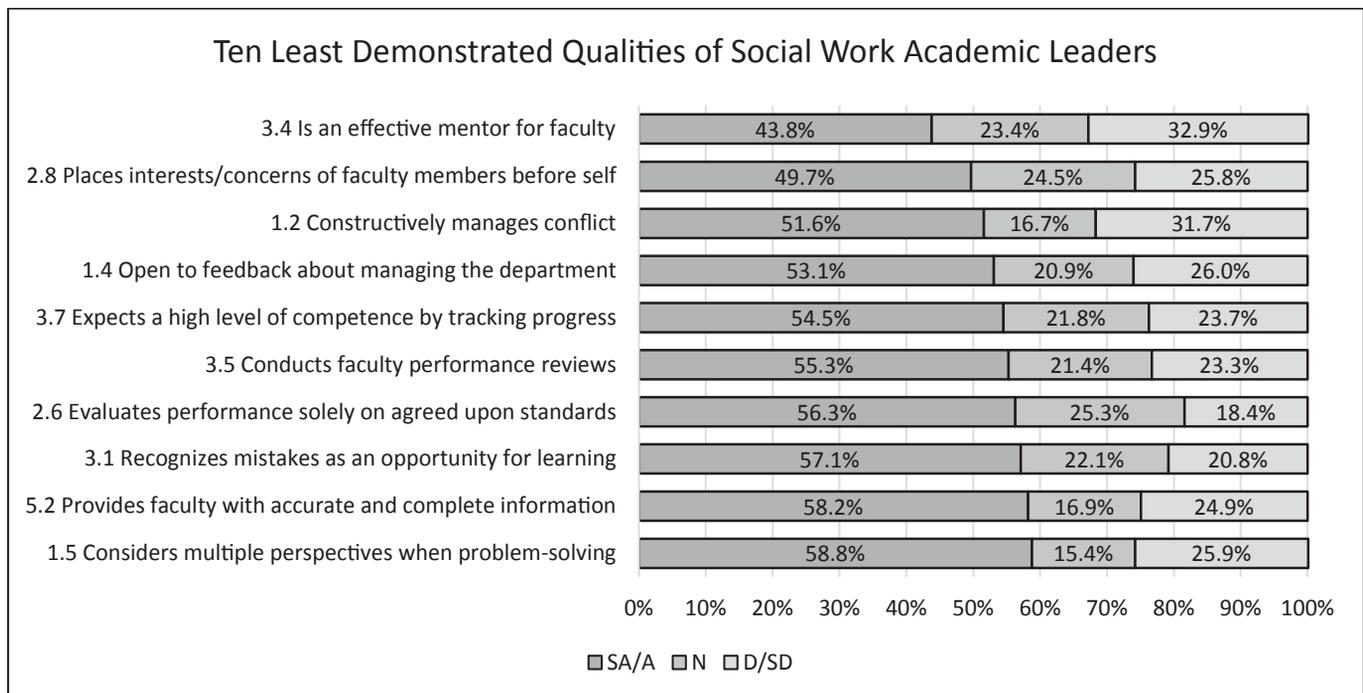
**APPENDIX**

**Figure 1.**



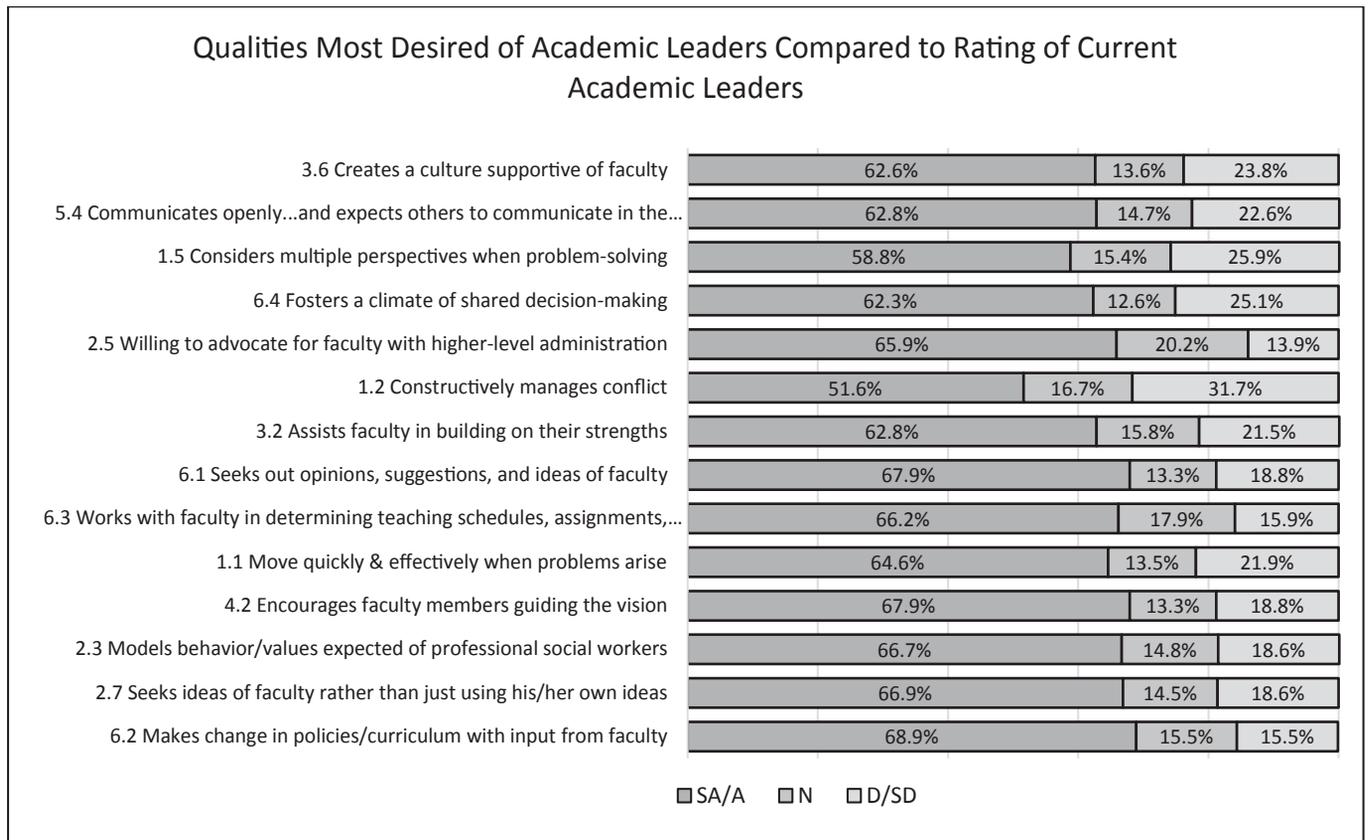
**\*See Table 4 for complete wording on survey questions**

**Figure 2.**



**\*See Table 4 for complete wording on survey questions**

**Figure 3.**



**\*See Table 4 for complete wording on survey questions**

**Table 1.**  
**Sample Demographics: Gender and Race/Ethnicity**

Variable	%
Gender	
Female	71.4
Male	28.6
Race/Ethnicity	
African-American	9.5
Asian	3.5
Bi or Multi-racial	2.5
Latino/Hispanic	4.5
Native American/Indigenous	1.2
White	76.4
Other	2.3

**Table 2.**  
**Sample Demographics: Age and Academic Background**

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	%
Age	353	52.24	9.88	
Current Position (Years)	368	9.35	7.88	
Academic Experience (Years)	367	14.72	9.65	
Non-academic Social Work Experience (Years)	365	14.32	10.44	
Past Director/Chair?				
Yes				14.3
No				83.9
Chair in Current Position (Years)	353	5.97	4.78	

**Table 3. Sample Demographics: Academic Unit**

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	%
Total Faculty per Academic Unit	342	18.98	13.20	
Chair in Current Position (Years)	353	5.97	4.78	
Degrees Offered	372			
Ph.D.				47.8
MSW				81.7
BSW				71.8
Type of Institution	368			
Public				72.6
Private				27.4

**Table 4. Leadership Survey Questions**

Question	<i>n</i>	Percentage				
		<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>Proactive/Problem Solving</b>						
1.1 Moves quickly and effectively when problems arise	370	25.9	38.6	13.5	15.9	5.9
1.2 Constructively manages conflict	372	16.9	34.7	16.7	19.4	12.1
1.3 Allows for sufficient time for completion of assignments	366	31.7	45.1	12.3	7.7	3.3
1.4 Open to constructive feedback about how to manage the department	369	24.7	28.5	20.9	14.9	11.1
1.5 Considers and seeks out multiple perspectives when problem solving	371	30.2	28.6	15.4	16.2	9.4
		25.9	35.1	15.7	14.8	8.4
<b>Values and Ethics</b>						
2.1 Represents self and situations honestly	365	31.8	32.6	16.4	12.9	6.3
2.2 Exhibits professional competency though actively engaging in teaching, research, and service	366	33.1	34.4	14.2	12.0	6.3
2.3 Models the behavior and values expected of professional social workers	366	35.8	30.3	14.8	7.1	11.5
2.4 Promotes conditions that encourage respect for cultural and social diversity within the academic unit	367	42.2	34.3	13.1	5.7	4.6
2.5 Willing to advocate for faculty with higher- level administration	367	36.0	30.0	20.2	6.8	7.1
2.6 Evaluates faculty's performance solely on agreed upon standards	364	26.6	29.7	25.3	12.6	5.8
2.7 Seeks out and incorporates the ideas of faculty rather than only using his/her own ideas	366	28.4	38.5	14.5	10.4	8.2
2.8 Usually places interests and concerns of faculty members and staff before his or her own	364	23.1	26.6	24.5	12.1	13.7
		32.1	32.1	17.8	9.9	7.9
<b>Empowerment</b>						
3.1 Recognizes mistakes as an opportunity for learning and growth	371	25.1	32.1	22.1	12.9	7.8
3.2 Assists faculty in building on their strengths and helps them use their skills and abilities	368	29.3	33.4	15.8	14.1	7.3
3.3 Acknowledges faculty accomplishments	370	43.2	36.8	10.5	7.0	2.4
3.4 Is an effective mentor for faculty	368	21.5	22.3	23.4	20.1	12.2
3.5 Conducts periodic and constructive faculty performance reviews	369	20.9	34.4	21.4	16.0	7.3
3.6 Creates a culture supportive of faculty	369	34.1	28.5	13.6	14.4	9.5
3.7 Expects faculty to perform at a high level of competence by regularly tracking progress toward meeting expectations	367	24.3	60.5	21.8	16.1	7.6

		28.4	35.4	18.4	14.4	7.7
<b>Vision</b>						
4.1 Encourages innovation and collaborative solutions	370	30.5	35.4	15.7	12.2	6.2
4.2 Encourages faculty members to play an integral role in guiding the vision of the academic unit	368	33.4	34.5	13.3	9.2	9.5
		32.0	35.0	14.5	10.7	7.9
<b>Communication</b>						
5.1 Finds time to listen to faculty	371	35.3	33.2	14.8	10.0	6.7
5.2 Provides faculty with accurate and complete information	366	24.3	33.9	16.9	16.1	8.7
5.3 Distributes new information as quickly, accurately, and professionally as possible	367	30.8	32.2	19.9	12.5	4.6
5.4 Communicates openly, honestly, respectfully, and expects others to communicate in the same way	368	33.7	29.1	14.7	12.5	10.1
5.5 Is easy to approach and communicate with when problems arise	370	35.9	32.2	12.2	12.4	7.3
		32.0	32.1	15.7	12.7	7.5
<b>Teamwork/Collaboration</b>						
6.1 Seeks out and values the opinions, suggestions, and ideas of faculty	368	29.9	38.0	13.3	9.5	9.2
6.2 Makes changes in policies and curriculum of the academic unit with input from faculty	367	28.1	40.9	15.5	7.9	7.6
6.3 Works collaboratively with faculty in determining teaching schedules, assignments, and assignment deadlines	364	30.2	36.0	17.9	9.3	6.6
6.4 Fosters a climate of shared decision making within the academic unit	366	27.0	35.2	12.6	13.9	11.2
6.5 Schedules group meetings with faculty to exchange information about common interests and fosters partnerships and collegiality	367	32.2	36.8	14.7	9.5	6.8
		29.5	37.4	14.8	10.0	8.3
<b>Total Percentage</b>		29.9	34.3	16.6	12.2	7.9

Note: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neutral; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree

**Table 5. Responses to Most Desired Qualities of Academic Leaders**

Which items from those listed above (pick up to five) are the most important for you to see in an academic leader?	Frequency	%
3.6 Creates a culture supportive of faculty	100	30.4
5.4 Communicates openly, honestly, respectfully, and expects others to communicate in the same way	78	23.7
1.5. Considers and seeks out multiple perspectives when problem solving	69	21.0
6.4 Fosters a climate of shared decision-making within the academic unit	67	20.4
2.5 Willing to advocate for faculty with higher-level administration	51	15.5
1.2. Constructively manages conflict within the academic unit	50	15.2
3.2 Assists faculty in building on their strengths and helps them use their skills and abilities	43	13.1
6.1 Seeks out and values the opinions, suggestions, and ideas of faculty	38	11.6
6.3 Works collaboratively with faculty in determining teaching schedules, teaching assignments, and assignment deadlines	32	9.7
1.1 Moves quickly and effectively when problems arise	31	9.4
4.2 Encourages faculty members to play an integral role in guiding the vision of the academic unit	24	7.3
2.7 Seeks out and incorporates the ideas of faculty rather than just using only his/her ideas	19	5.8
2.3 Models the behavior and values expected of professional social workers	19	5.8
6.2 Makes change in policies and curriculum of the academic unit with input from faculty members	19	5.8