Leadership in Social Work Education: Sustaining Collaboration and Mission

Christine R. Call
Larry W. Owens
Neil J. Vincent

Abstract: Little research is available depicting how faculty members experience the leadership style of their academic leaders. This paper reports results from a qualitative analysis of responses of 233 social work faculty members from CSWE accredited programs to an open-ended question about how they experience the leadership style of their current academic unit heads. The analysis incorporates feminist and professional social work perspectives.

Keywords: Academic leadership, collaborative leadership, social work faculty, social work leadership, social work leadership standards

The mission of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) highlights the importance of preparing "competent social work professionals" through the development of policy and standards and "national leadership" (Council on Social Work Education, 2011). As the sole accrediting body for social work programs in the United States, CSWE is responsible for defining what represents "competent preparation" of social work professionals and for ensuring program compliance with its standards. Competent leadership at all levels of social work education is necessary to accomplish CSWE's mission. Notably, CSWE implemented a Leadership Institute in 2008 to foster education, training, and mentoring of social work leaders and to develop standards for educating competent social work leaders.

Across the social service sector, organizations such as the Leader-to-Leader Institute recognize the importance of enhancing the leadership of social service organizations to better meet the needs of the communities served. Although the importance of competent leadership is widely acknowledged, little research has been conducted to investigate leadership practices in social work education. The CSWE has developed few guidelines to specify training requirements and leadership competencies. Anecdotal information from colleagues both in and outside the academy prompted the authors to investigate how social work faculty judge the effectiveness of the leadership in their departments not only to further our understanding of faculty's experiences but also with the intention of providing information that could help CSWE set more specific standards for social work leadership practices in the academy.

Literature Review

The role of the academic leader is varied and complex (Filan & Seagren, 2003). Yet, academic leaders often lack preparation and training for the role (Cassie, Sowers, & Rowe, 2006; Filan, 1999; Filan & Seagren, 2003; Ginsburg, 2008; Gmelch, 2004; Hecht,

Christine R. Call, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor in the MSW Program at the University of St. Francis in Joliet, IL; Larry W. Owens, Ed.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Social Work at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, KY; and Neil J. Vincent, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor in the MSW Program at DePaul University in Chicago.

2004). As Hecht (2004) observed, "becoming an effective department chair is largely a process of self-education" (p. 28). Faculty members often assume academic leadership roles lacking not only pertinent training but also a recognition that the pedagogical skills of successful faculty members do not necessarily predict success in a leadership capacity. Gmelch (2004) noted that only about 3% of colleges and universities offer formal training and mentorship programs for new academic deans, chairs, and directors, although the leadership role in the academy is exceptionally challenging given the shared governance structure of the academic setting (Cassie et al., 2006).

In a study of academic leadership across departments, Knight and Holen (1985) surveyed faculty to examine the relationship between effective department leadership practices and the leader's strength in *initiating structure* and *consideration* using Halpin and Winer's Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) (Halpin, 1966). *Initiating structure* refers to "the leader's behavior in delineating the relationship between himself [sic] and members of the workgroup, and in endeavoring to establish well-defined patterns of organization, channels of communication, and methods of procedure" (Halpin, 1966, p. 86). *Consideration* is defined as "behavior indicative of friendships, mutual trust, respect, and warmth in the relationship between the leader and the members of his [sic)] staff" (Halpin, 1966, p. 86). The survey revealed faculty judge the most effective academic leaders to be strong in both *initiating structure* and faculty *consideration.*

Filan and Seagren (2003) advocated adopting a transformational leadership approach within postsecondary academic settings. Transformational leaders focus on "changing the organizational culture…engage the full person … [and] become a source of inspiration to faculty, staff, administrators, and students" (p. 26). They outlined six essential facets of effective academic leadership training: understanding self, understanding transformational leadership, building relationships, leading teams, strategic planning, and networking. In a different vein Buller (2007) warned against the common false dichotomy that academic leaders represent the interests of either upper administration or the faculty. Effective deans, chairs, and directors recognize the common feature of the academic leader's role as middle management oriented (Filan, 1999).

Several studies examined the role of social work academic leaders from the leaders' perspective. Rank and Hutchison's (2000) random sample survey of 150 social work leaders, 75 deans and directors from 460 CSWE-accredited social work programs, and a like number of executive directors and presidents from 56 NASW chapters identified five essential leadership skills for the social work profession: proaction, values and ethics, empowerment, vision, and communication. These concepts comprise both task-focused and process-oriented leadership skills.

House, Fowler, Thornton, and Francis (2007) surveyed African American deans and directors of schools of social work to glean the quality of their experience as social work education leaders. Most of the respondents reported *sufficient* to *very sufficient* levels of job satisfaction. Furthermore, they identified the factors most relevant to successful academic leadership as administrative and organizational skills, openness to diverse opinions, and personal characteristics such as listening skills, respect for others, and

strong emotional intelligence. Finally, the survey participants posited that professional mentoring, a strong educational background, community involvement, a variety of coping mechanisms, and an altruistic orientation as the qualities and resources they desired in future academic leaders. These findings are particularly relevant insofar as the social work profession continues to promote and support diversity among the social work leadership cadre.

In the academic setting overall, the relative paucity of leadership preparation within the social work field significantly contrasts with the corresponding emphasis it enjoys in other disciplines, most notably business, that vigorously promote leadership training. Brilliant (1986) characterized this relative inattention to leadership preparation as "the missing link" within the social work profession while noting that "leadership has no prominence in the social work curriculum" (p. 327) and highlighted the need for more leadership theory and practice in social work curricula. Fisher (2009) reported social work leadership training is most effective when it is theory-based and emphasizes the development of leadership models in social work curricula.

Holosko's (2009) content analysis of the professional literature identified five core attributes of social work leaders: vision, influencing others to act, team work/ collaboration, problem-solving capacity, and creating positive change. Grant and Crutchfield (2008) noted that a common feature of high-impact social sector organizations is shared leadership. They further observed that the leaders of these organizations are particularly adept at building coalitions and partnerships both within the organization and with strategic external partners. Mary (2005) surveyed social workers regarding which style of leadership – transformational, transactional, or laissez-faire – they perceived as most effective. The results indicated that transformational leadership, with its focus on the "development of the fullest potential of individuals and their motivation toward the greater good" (p. 108), was seen by social workers as the style most strongly linked to positive leadership outcomes.

In response to the perceived lack of emphasis on leadership development and training within the academy and profession, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) prioritized leadership development of academic deans, chairs, and directors (Fischer, 2009; Holosko, 2009) and subsequently implemented the Leadership Institute in Social Work Education (LISWE) at its 2009 Annual Program Meeting. In addition, CSWE provides scholarships enabling 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). Moreover, since 1996 the Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Directors (BPD) has stressed the importance of leadership training by offering a pre-conference workshop for new directors at its annual conference.

Concurrent with the above initiatives, emerging leadership theories challenge the traditional hierarchical view and practice of organizational leadership and management. Feminist scholars Rao and Kelleher's (2000) theory of leadership incorporates the need to transform institutions in such a manner as to promulgate cultural diversity and commitment to greater sharing of power and responsibility. Consistent with NASW

values, these concepts mesh with Rao and Kelleher's suggestion that leadership for transformation requires "being willing to take risks by questioning existing ways of working, and considering how tasks might be done differently if the primary motivation is a concern for equality and justice" (p. 76). Transformational leaders are role models who articulate a vision, inspire and motivate, exhibit integrity and ethical behavior, encourage critical and creative thinking, foster collaboration, and attend to the needs and professional development of those they lead while recognizing and appreciating their contributions. Transformational leadership is collaborative and empowerment oriented, hence supportive of the leadership development of followers (Bass, 2008; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

Feminist relational theorists emphasize the importance of relational connections and promote 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). Lazzari, Colarossi, and Collins (2009) highlighted the challenges of introducing a feminist leadership perspective into a predominantly hierarchical leadership setting as they noted social workers often face "double or triple jeopardy when working in hierarchical organizations where patriarchal models of 'power over' dictate structures and processes and 'power with' is devalued and often punished" (p. 349), thus raising ethical concerns. Insofar as equality, social justice, and the importance of relationship are codified concerns of social workers, it is important to understand how faculty members experience the leadership of their academic unit heads and in what ways these directors, deans, and chairs exemplify these values.

Research purporting to understand the specific leadership role of the faculty director in social work departments and colleges is limited. We found no prior studies that explore leadership styles of directors of social work programs *from a faculty perspective.* Furthermore, there is little research exploring how deans, chairs, and department directors balance the task-focused and process-oriented needs of an academic department or identify ethical problems associated with various leadership styles.

Method

This exploratory, mixed method study utilized a cross-sectional online survey of a national sample of social work faculty to explore respondents' assessments of their academic leadership. The researchers asked social work faculty 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? More specifically the study sought to understand which qualities of academic leadership faculty perceive as ideal and which they perceive as less efficacious. This article provides a description of the research sample and reports on the qualitative analysis of survey participants' responses to an open-ended question about how they experienced the leadership practices of their current academic unit head.

As social work faculty members from three universities, the researchers brought not only their own unique professional experiences with academic leaders to the study but also the like experience of other colleagues both past and present. The researchers viewed

and analyzed this exploratory study data primarily through a feminist lens focusing on relationship, revealing faculty experiences, and voicing a concern for ethical stances (Jordan et al., 1991; Olesen, 1996; Patton, 2002). The researchers also analyzed the faculty responses from a professional social work perspective, incorporating the values and mission of the profession. From this perspective they examined whether the faculty members' experiences were consistent with the professional ethics and values of the social work profession as espoused by the National Association of Social Workers (2008) and incorporated in the accreditation standards of CSWE (2012). Both viewpoints are consistent with a critical worker theory (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1996) that seeks to promote awareness of the faculty members' experiences to not only satisfy research purposes but also acknowledge their perceived reality and thus support their empowerment. The researchers further sought to begin to understand the organizational context or "institutional location" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1996) in which faculty members operate in relationship to their academic leader.

Sampling

Social work faculty participants were selected in two phases. First, the researchers randomly selected 225 social work departments from a list of 537 accredited social work programs nation-wide. Second, of the departments chosen, the researchers collected 2,337 faculty email addresses, excluding academic leaders, from departmental websites. A total of 372 faculty members volunteered to participate in the study for a 17% response rate. Ninety-two emails were returned as undeliverable.

Survey

The mixed-method survey presented 13 demographic items, 34 closed-ended items, and 3 open-ended questions exploring social work faculty's 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. Thirty-two of the 34 closed-ended items were adapted from an unpublished instrument developed by Philip W. Cooke, DSW (2003) for assessing supervisor/work group leaders and two items were developed by the researchers. The results of the quantitative portion of the study and preliminary qualitative data were reported at several national social work conferences during the last several years. This article only reports on the qualitative analysis of survey participants' responses to the open-ended question: "Please describe the leadership style of the current head of your social work academic unit."

Data Collection

The national survey of social work faculty was conducted using a web-based survey development and implementation application. The researchers 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 inform faculty that an 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.

Description of the Sample

A majority of the study participants were white (76.4%) and female (71.4) with a mean age of 52 years. The other faculty members in the sample identified as 10% African-American, 5% Latino/Hispanic, 3% Asian, 1.4% Native American/Indigenous and 2.2% identified as bi-racial or multi-racial (See Tables 1 and 2). Most participants had earned doctorates and taught at public universities. A slight majority of participants held the rank of either associate or assistant professor. A significant majority of faculty had accumulated nearly 15 years of academic experience and a like number of years of social work practice experience outside of academia. The participants had occupied their current positions on average approximately nine years. Their current academic leaders had served in their leadership positions for about six years (See Tables 2 and 3). A little over 14% of the faculty had previously served as a director or chair of their department.

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	n	Mean	SD	%
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	*n*	Mean	SD	%
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 Institute	368			
Public				72.6
Private				27.4

Data Analysis

The responses to the open-ended question were analyzed using content analysis whereby the authors sought to delineate "core consistencies and meanings" (Patton, 2002, p. 463) or themes. After each researcher independently completed a "close reading" (Thomas, 2003) of faculty responses, the researchers met and discussed their initial reaction. All three researchers noted that faculty responses fell into three categories: primarily positive, primarily negative, or a mixed response. The authors next coded faculty members' responses into one of these three categories. After completing this part of the content analysis, the researchers calculated the percentage of each response category. The authors then agreed to independently identify the leadership themes emerging from the faculty's responses concerning their experiences of their unit head's leadership, coding each unique and distinct unit of meaning. Responses considered irrelevant to the research question were not coded. The researchers reviewed the themes and coding of the responses until they came to consensus on the key themes imbedded in the faculty's responses. These responses were then categorized as either positive or negative leadership themes. The researchers then independently recoded the faculty responses using these agreed upon themes. After recoding the responses, the researchers met and shared their independent coding of each faculty's unique comments. During this process they continued to revise and refine the categories until they came to consensus. The process included identifying relevant sub-themes subsumed under major categories (Thomas, 2003).

Results

Two hundred and forty-five faculty members answered an open-ended question prompting them to describe the leadership style of their academic unit head. Of that number, 12 of the answers were not responsive to the question and thus were not included in the analysis, so the final number of respondents for analysis was 233. When the authors analyzed the social work faculty's narrative responses regarding their experiences with their respective academic leaders, three primary categories emerged; namely, Positive Leadership Qualities, Negative Leadership Qualities, and a combination of positive and negative leadership qualities they termed Mixed Leadership Qualities. Of the

233 responses to the question, 114 (48.9%) were primarily positive, 94 (40.3%) primarily negative, and 25 (10.7%) evenly distributed between the two poles. Subsequent to this initial categorization, all positive and negative comments from each response were coded according to themes, positive themes first, then the negative. Elements of the major themes were also identified to elucidate their meanings. Six categories of positive leadership qualities and eight categories of negative leadership qualities emerged. The six categories of positive leadership qualities were: Collaborative/Democratic, Advocate/ Supporter, Administrative/Management Skills, Communication Skills, Integrity, and Innovative/Visionary. The eight categories of negative leadership qualities were characterized as: Autocratic/Authoritarian, Unethical Behavior, Poor Administrative Skills, Poor Communication Skills, Non-Supportive, Poor Relationship Skills, Not a Strategic Planner/Lacks Vision, and Lacks Knowledge of Social Work Education. Interestingly, though unsurprisingly, the Positive and Negative Leadership Themes often mirror each other. Table 4 references the number of responses for positive and negative leadership qualities.

Table 4. Positive and Negative Leadership Themes: Number of Responses

Leadership Theme	Total
Positive	
Collaborative/Democratic	144
Advocate/Supporter	138
Administrative or Management Skills	72
Positive Communication Skills	46
Integrity	44
Innovative/Visionary	9
Negative	
Autocratic/Authoritarian	99
Unethical Behavior	83
Poor Administrative Skills	51
Poor Communication Skills	49
Non-Supportive	48
Poor Relationship Skills	15
Not a Strategic Planner/Lacks Vision	12
Lacks Knowledge of Social Work Education	7

Positive Leadership Themes

Collaborative/Democratic. Of the six positive leadership themes that emerged from an analysis of the faculty responses, the quality most frequently attributed by faculty to their respective academic leader was a collaborative and/or democratic leadership style. While 144 comments were made that supported this theme, 58 specifically used the words collaborative or democratic to characterize their respective leaders' styles. See Figure 1 for a listing of Positive Leadership Themes and Descriptors.

Figure 1. Positive Leadership Themes and Descriptors

Collaborative /Democratic	144	Advocate/Supporter	138
Collaborative/Democratic	58	Supporter	25
Being open to faculty members	31	Available/Accessible	20
Seeking faculty input	20	Connected with university/Advocate on behalf of the department	18
Demonstrating shared governance	12		
Seeking consensus	7	Individual support/advocate	18
Being collegial	7	Attentive to needs	13
Demonstrating inclusiveness	6	Leads by example/role model/inspires	13
Being transparent	3	Acknowledges or promotes faculty accomplishments	10
		Involved in the community	8
		Supports students	7
		Advocate	3
		Strengths-oriented perspective	3
Administrative/Management Skills	**72**	**Communication Skills**	**46**
Competent/responsible/hardworking	19	Positive, friendly, easygoing, calm	16
Decisive	18	Listens	8
No micro-management	8	Keeps faculty informed	7
Grant funding skills	6	Conflict management skills	6
Deals with issues	4	Communication skills	5
Organized	4	Calm and reflective	3
Meets deadlines	4	Shares information	1
Efficient	3		
Detailed oriented	3		
Administrator/Manager	1		
Evaluator	1		
Problem-solver	1		
Integrity	**44**	**Innovative/Visionary**	**9**
Respectful	13	Innovative/supports innovation	4
Diversity	7	Visionary/ future perspective	3
Fair	7	Creative/ Encourages creativity	2
Honest	6		
Professional	5		
Integrity	3		
Social work values/ethics	3		

Leadership traits most frequently cited by faculty as conducive to establishing collaborative and democratic relationships with staff include being open to faculty members, seeking their input, and encouraging shared governance. Less frequently noted indicators of a collaborative and democratic spirit of leadership were seeking consensus, promoting collegiality, and exhibiting transparency. One faculty member's comment succinctly articulated this theme: "Open to ideas from multiple sources, supportive of faculty, listens to divergent view points, collaborative leadership style." Another person cogently encapsulated this leadership style in emphasizing how her leader "...has fostered a very cohesive and collaborative faculty environment which didn't exist prior to her

taking the position." Another response focused on consensus-building activities and transparency: "I would describe the leadership style as leading by consensus. She asks questions, gathers information and opinions, suggests solutions gets consensus on them, communicates the decision then moves forward."

Advocate/Supporter. The theme of Advocate/Supporter was the next most commonly identified positive attribute faculty ascribed to their leaders with 138 comments representing this category. Fifty of those surveyed specifically described their leader as a supporter, advocating in favor of either faculty or students, or both. Others noted their leaders assumed the role of advocate on behalf of their department or college at their university. Others recounted the ways they felt supported by their leaders in the sense that they presented as accessible, led by example, served as role models to inspire their colleagues or others, and attended to department members' needs by acknowledging and promoting faculty accomplishments, supporting the faculty and department through their involvement in both the academic and general community, or by incorporating a strengths-oriented perspective.

The following comment, in particular, celebrates one leader's collegial activity that was seen to foster the development of community by focusing on faculty achievements: "An example of collegiality and development of community is starting each faculty meeting with publishing announcements of recent faculty accomplishments." Another survey participant commented in a similar vein: "He is supportive if you have a problem or issue, be it with students, colleagues, or the administration." while another noted the director "…set an example of how he would like the rest of the faculty to be in terms of academic scholarship" and "...has been a positive advocate for issues regarding racial and sexual orientation diversity...." Touching on several of the leadership virtues reported in this section, a faculty member writes:

> [The] Director models the behavior she expects from faculty members. She is respectful, courteous, accessible, open to ideas, suggestions, and constructive criticism, and is very faculty- and student-oriented in terms of being supportive to them in their respective roles (e.g., shares opportunities for professional development, including working together on manuscripts, projects, and job announcements with graduating students, etc.). She is always approachable, never seems unable to sit and listen to faculty during impromptu meetings. She maintains a calm demeanor at all times….

Administrative/Management Skills. Seventy-two respondents specified attributes of their leaders that straightforwardly categorized as strong administrative and managerial skills. Others deemed their leaders competent, responsible, hardworking, or decisive; still others observed that their directors choose not to micro manage faculty. Other descriptors of administrative competence faculty employed to describe their leaders included demonstrated grant funding skills, an ability to deal with issues, organized, ability to meet deadlines, detail oriented, efficient, a problem-solver, and an evaluator. One faculty member reported: "Our Chair thinks ahead and tries to prepare for situations and requirements (such as re-accreditation) well in advance, rather than waiting until we have to be in panic mode." Another focused on how the leader "deals with issues (students and

department) directly and promptly." The following quote identifies several attributes of a leader with strong administrative and managerial skills:

> 'Manager.' Excellent at scheduling, good at meeting contract requirements for evaluating faculty etc…great at meeting deadlines and efficient at budgeting and securing temp faculty positions. I have no doubt all deadlines will be met, meetings will be established, and standards followed.

Positive Communication Skills. Attributes subsumed under the category of positive communication skills were cited by 46 faculty, 5 of whom used the descriptor. The attribute most commonly specified was a positive, friendly, easygoing or calm demeanor while additional descriptors referred to important communication skills including: listens, keeps faculty informed, has good conflict management skills, is calm and reflective, and shares information. One faculty member noted: "She communicates clearly and frequently about department concerns..." and "...never seems unable to sit and listen to faculty...." With regard to conflict others described their leader as a "Conflict Manager" and "Is willing to put department conflict 'on the table' and discuss it with faculty."

Integrity. Forty-four participants praised the integrity of their leaders with the majority citing respectful behavior toward others as an important attribute. Others reported being fair, honest, and professional, or valuing diversity and upholding social work values and ethics as behaviors their leader exhibited. "She is respectful of different views and I always feel that I am treated as a professional and a valued member of the department." Another specifically discussed values: "Is honest.... Is ethical and understands boundaries." One participant stated: "he has been a positive advocate for issues regarding racial and sexual orientation diversity."

Innovative/Visionary. Nine comments characterized the academic head as a visionary or someone who has a future-looking perspective demonstrated through setting goals, developing resources, or holding meetings to discuss the vision of the program. Other descriptors echoing this theme were "innovative", "inspirational", and "creative thinker." One person observed that while their leader struggled with details "his overall vision of the program and support he provided to faculty, students and staff" was most important to him. Another noted: "Group meetings are held by their Dean to discuss the vision of the school."

Negative Leadership Themes

Autocratic/Authoritarian. Ninety-nine comments depicted academic leaders as autocratic and authoritarian. Fifty-five of those surveyed used the words autocratic or authoritarian or informal terms such as "top-down." Other faculty language embodying this theme included "coercive", "solicits no input" or "disregards faculty input or academic freedom", is "secretive", is "punitive", "doesn't communicate important information", and "instills fear" and "silences faculty." See Figure 2 for a full listing of Negative Leadership Themes and Descriptors.

Figure 2. Negative Leadership Themes and Descriptors

Autocratic/Authoritarian	99	Unethical Behavior	83
Autocratic/Authoritarian	55	Favoritism	37
Coercive	11	Sexism	10
No input or disregards faculty input/academic freedom	10	Unethical	9
		Dishonest	8
Doesn't communicate important information	7	Disrespectful	6
		Abusive	4
Punitive	7	Not fair in distribution of work	3
Secretive	6	Takes credit for faculty work	3
Instills fear and silences faculty	3	Anti-religion	1
		Ageist	1
		Homophobic	1
Poor Administrative Skills	**51**	**Poor Communication Skills**	**49**
Poor administrative skills	29	Avoids conflict	9
Micro-manager	7	Fosters dissension/divisive	8
Fear of change	3	Poor skills in handling conflict	6
Poor decision-making skills	3	Reactionary	6
Poor judgment	3	Poor communication skills	5
Disorganized	2	Defensive	3
Trouble making decisions	2	Emotionally volatile	3
Fear of disapproval	1	Inflexible	3
Lacks critical thinking skills	1	Dislikes conflict/fear of conflict	3
		Takes sides in conflict	2
		Poor conflict resolution skills	1
Non-Supportive	**48**	**Poor Relationship Skills**	**15**
Uninvolved/not accessible/invisible	22	Lacks accountability	5
With higher administration	9	Passive aggressive	3
Non-supportive	7	Poor relationship skills	2
With faculty and staff – poor mentor	4	Judgmental	1
Not a role model	2	Rude	1
Laissez-faire	2	Shaming	1
Distant	1	Not empathic	1
No recognition staff accomplishments	1	Shallow	1
Not a Strategic Planner/Lacks Vision	**12**	**Lacks Knowledge of Social Work Education**	**7**
Not a visionary/no vision/lacks vision	7	Not a social worker	3
Reactionary versus proactive	1	Not an academic social worker	1
Can't see bigger picture/	2	Does not understand social work	1
Little or no goals or planning	2	Untenured academic	1

Specific comments representing an autocratic or authoritarian style include: "Pushes her agenda despite the objections of faculty – can be a bully...", "Unilateral - transparency does not exist about many things..." and was "forced to resign at the end of the academic year due to autocratic leadership style." and "Very top down" and "We seem to have a theme, however, of important decisions being announced as if we all had

a hand in them, yet we're all taken by surprise." and "her way, her ideas, no input" and "He imposes his interests on the faculty." The most disconcerting comment was: "Staff are treated like servants."

Unethical Behavior. Eighty-three faculty discussed behaviors of their leaders that would be considered unethical with nine specifically using the word "unethical." Behaviors that were specifically named to denote this quality include: "Favoritism", "sexism", "disrespectful", "dishonest", "abusive", "unfair in the distribution of work", "takes credit for faculty's work", "ageist", "anti-religious", and "homophobic". Specific responses that exemplify this theme included: "male senior faculty favored;" "She is dishonest;" "He is also very sexist and is abusive toward women faculty and staff;" "People are afraid of him and if an individual disagrees with him, particularly in a public forum – including faculty meetings – he will later verbally berate the individual." "Cannot show vulnerability to her...otherwise, she capitalizes on it through verbally assaulting the particular faculty member." "My unit head has made many disrespectful remarks over the past (e.g., ageist, sexist, anti-religious, anti-military"). "While repeatedly stating that we are a "family," the Director utilizes a highly authoritarian style that effectively and consistently undermines…tenure-level, non-tenured faculty and enables him to repeatedly take credit for much of our administrative work...."

Poor Administrative Skills. Fifty-one comments embodied the theme of poor administrative skills including 29 with a specific reference to poor administrative skills. Other descriptors were: "micro-manager", "fear of change", "fear of disapproval", "trouble making decisions", "disorganized", "poor decision-making skills", "lacks critical thinking skills", and "poor judgment". Comments that characterize this category include: "He has trouble making decisions because of the fear that people will disapprove of him personally." "Disorganized and erratic--does not remember important details, plans at the last minute, plans are often confusing and ineffective."

Poor Communication Skills. Of the 49 comments exemplifying this theme, five specifically cited their academic unit heads' "poor communication skills." Other comments denoting this theme included: "Fosters dissension/divisive", "reactionary", "defensive," "inflexible", or "emotionally volatile". For example, one faculty member reported: "Dislikes disagreements. Plays faculty off of one another. Creates a climate of tension and recrimination." Another reported their leader "Fosters dissension and conflict to maintain control." Another identified how the director: "...becomes extremely defensive and angry when his decisions are challenged." An important sub-theme that emerged as a recurring example of poor communication was 21 faculty's portrayal of their leader's poor conflict resolution skills including: avoids conflict, poor skills in handling conflict, dislikes conflict, takes sides, and fear of conflict. Examples included: "Conflicts within the school are ignored by the leadership." "Instead of dealing with faculty conflicts that have been ongoing for years, he instead makes the decision to not hold departmental meetings on a regular basis."

Non-Supportive. Forty-eight faculty members identified behaviors of their unit head they experienced as unsupportive. Among these were an unwillingness to support or advocate on behalf of faculty in matters involving the higher administration of the

Academy, serve as a good mentor or role model, and recognize staff accomplishments. The following comments succinctly represent this set of faulty concerns: "The leader demonstrates the ability to toe the line of the university administration and not represent the best interests of the faculty" and "Is not supportive of faculty in terms of their development, learning or accomplishments, especially the non tenure track faculty." A sub-theme – namely, inaccessibility – emerged from the perception of 25 respondents who experienced their leaders as either inaccessible or uninvolved with them and, therefore, not available to be supportive. Other comments included "invisible" and "laissez-faire." "Does not personally respond to e-mail or communication." "…the door of the office is always kept closed." "He is frequently out of town/country and has no real sense of what is happening in his own program."

Poor Relationship Skills. While this category of "poor relationship skills" certainly overlaps with the three categories of non-supportive, poor communication skills, and unethical behavior, it seemed nonetheless important to highlight it as a separate category insofar as two faculty members explicitly cited "poor relationship skills." Additional descriptors relating to relationship shortcomings reported by 13 others include: "lack of accountability", "little display of empathy", or indulging in "passive-aggressive", "shaming", "rude", "judgmental", or "shallow" behaviors. One comment in particular pertaining to this theme was "...angry and shaming when his expectations are not met." This category has a somewhat distinct feature as it designates behaviors that specifically undermine relationships, fostering disconnection and as such are the antithesis of the skills taught in social work practice.

Not a Strategic Planner/Lack of Vision. Twelve faculty members described their directors as non-strategic planners, lacking in vision, or reactionary as opposed to proactive. One comment that incisively portrays this category is: "Little ability to see big picture…very small thinker."

Lacks Knowledge of Social Work Education. Seven faculty expressed concern that their academic leaders were not social workers, did not understand social work, were not academic social workers, or were untenured and had little knowledge of social work education. One stated: "Not being a social worker she doesn't understand or value the profession."

Limitations of the Study

Although the results illumine to some degree how a substantial number of faculty members regard their academic leaders, the "typicality" (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002, p. 725) of their experiences can only be evaluated by other faculty as they consider the applicability of the results to their own situation and setting. Additionally, as is the case with all qualitative research, the results may have been influenced by the researchers' personal biases as social work faculty despite efforts to mitigate bias by the participation of three researchers in the analysis of the data. Another limitation is that the researchers did not seek feedback from the participating faculty in reviewing or interpreting the analysis. Future studies might seek to obtain participant input in designing the questions and interpreting the results. The researchers did not

categorize differences in experiences among adjunct faculty, junior faculty, and tenured faculty. In addition, the researchers did not categorize differences between female and male faculty, an important consideration since over 75% of the participants were female. Future studies should seek to understand the differences and similarities in the experiences of these sub-groups of faculty.

Discussion

This study explored social work faculty's experience with leadership within their academic unit. While nearly 49% of faculty study participants reported primarily positive experiences with their social work unit leaders, 51% reported either mixed or negative experiences. As indicated by faculty, positive leaders facilitate a collaborative process and advocate for faculty. They are strong managers and effective communicators who lead with integrity and articulate a positive vision for their academic unit. The leadership characteristics reported by faculty in this study validate previous findings that identify effective leadership styles (Grant & Crutchfield, 2008; Holosko, 2009, House et al., 2007; Rank & Hutchison, 2000). Notably, nearly half of the faculty reported their satisfaction with their academic unit heads' collaborative and supportive leadership style whereby leaders develop partnerships with faculty, university administration and the community, clearly confirming the positive impact of shared leadership described by Grant and Crutchfield (2008).

This exploratory study is consistent with the findings of Knight and Holen (1985) who determined faculty consider the most effective academic leaders to be strong in both *initiating structure* and *consideration*, or more explicitly administrative and relationship skills. This study supports the role of inspiration in the process of engaging the whole person consistent with a transformational leadership style as faculty frequently reported their admiration for the positive leadership qualities of collaboration, mentoring, and integrity.

Slightly fewer than half of faculty members reported primarily positive attributes to portray their academic director or other academic unit head while 40% reported primarily negative leadership qualities. Some portrayed their unit heads as autocratic decision makers who sometimes engage in unethical behaviors. Others described their leaders as poor managers with inadequate or even deficient communication skills. Still, others saw their leaders as uninvolved with and unsupportive of faculty. Some noted their leaders were unable or unwilling to effectively resolve conflict within the unit while essentially modeling poor interpersonal relationship skills. These findings are important and suggest that a significant proportion of social work unit heads may be not only ineffective but also unethical in their leadership roles. Of particular concern are faculty reports of specific unethical and oppressive behaviors by academic leaders, including disrespectful comments and behaviors, dishonesty, favoritism, sexism, and verbal abuse. Lastly, a smaller proportion of study participants characterized their leaders as exhibiting leadership competencies in many domains while encumbered by deficiencies in others.

Implications for Academic Leadership

The study has numerous implications for the development of effective social work academic leadership. The need for more training in general and more effective training in particular is evident and consistent with Hecht's (2004) assertions that many academic leaders assume their positions without any formal training. Few universities offer training to unit leaders (Gmelch, 2004). The highly negative perceptions of some social work academic leaders by faculty participants in this study clearly validate the CSWE's commitment to training competent academic deans, chairs, and directors. The results of this study also mirror the need for more effective training as outlined by Filan and Seagren (2003). While a strong ethical foundation is certainly embedded in the six essential facets they outlined, the addition of ethics as a seventh facet could perhaps elevate expectations for not only our leaders but also social work faculty and students. A greater focus on ethical considerations surrounding team building, strategic planning, and networking could enhance academic leadership training. Teaching leaders to practice mindful self-reflection to obviate ethical lapses and display respectful and culturally sound relationship-building skills is imperative in this age of globally connected learning environments.

Clearly, some faculty members in the study experienced their academic leaders as lacking positive relationship skills, with some reporting oppressive and even abusive behaviors. Such reports are an anathema to social work's mission, reminding us that for social work faculty the academy is also a site "within larger economies of power and privilege" (Kinchelo & McLaren, 1994, p. 147), requiring further study. Considering the results in this light may require social work academic leaders to initiate an on-going dialogue concerning the power relations in the academy and how faculty are socially and historically situated, as a first step in fostering a more empowered faculty. Such a discussion would require the academy to more fully consider under what circumstances and in what manner faculty experience their subordinate social status, including a discussion of the intersectionality of age, ethnicity, gender, race, sexual orientation, socio-economic class, religious affiliation, among other discrete factors.

The study validates CSWE's decision to create the Leadership Institute in Social Work Education (LISWE) at its 2009 Annual Program Meeting and to support leadership development by funding scholarships for emerging leaders in social work education (CSWE, 2010). This study suggests a need for significantly more emphasis on leadership, ethics, and empowerment – especially in doctoral and masters level programs. Incorporating a substantive discussion of the NASW Code of Ethics (NASW, 2008) in all leadership curricula designed to train social work leaders is essential if we wish to remain true to our value base. While leaders who exhibit a mixture of leadership assets and liabilities, where the former outnumber the latter, would most likely benefit from leadership training, others judged to be more challenged by the rigorous ethical, professional, and relationship demands may need to be assessed for their capacity to continue in a leadership role. Perhaps CSWE should consider developing specific leadership standards for academic heads, including training requirements consistent with social work values and required for program accreditation. These could then suffice as criteria for evaluating academic leaders, addressing strengths and shortcomings. Future

studies could concern how best to train, support, and evaluate academic unit heads and remediate, reassign, or otherwise resolve instances of non-adherence to these social work value-based standards of leadership competence. Other studies could explore the consequences of incompetent and oppressive leadership compared to the benefits of more democratic and egalitarian leadership styles, specifically as it impacts workplace morale, faculty performance, and student learning.

In this study faculty reporting positive experiences with their academic leaders generally attributed to their leaders transformational leadership qualities – collaborative style, ethical practices, inspirational presence, mentoring activities, relationship-enhancing communication skills, and visionary perspectives, qualities consistent with professional social work values. Yet, as Hecht (2004) and Brilliant (1986) noted, leadership preparation has not been a priority in the social work profession. Insofar as equality, social justice, and the importance of relationship are codified values of the social work profession, leadership training ought to be prioritized to ensure leaders are collaborative, empowerment-focused, and ethical, thus supporting the leadership development of those they lead while also attending to the administrative and managerial responsibilities of the academic unit.

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Author note:
Address correspondence to: Christine R. Call, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Master of Social Work Program, University of St. Francis, 500 Wilcox Street, Joliet, IL 60435. Email: ccall@stfrancis.edu