Case study critical analysis:

Leadership style in the Deaf community: An exploratory case study

of a university president

Elizabeth Harris

Georgia Southern University

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Dr. Don S. Stumpf
In reviewing the case studies for this assignment, seeing the phrase “deaf community” in one of the titles was a surprise. Seeing further that the study dealt with a university president, one could guess that the first deaf president of Gallaudet, I. King Jordan, would be the subject. The study did not disappoint in these beliefs. Having a chance to work with materials that present a research project that dealt with such a unique situation was not something to overlook, due to my own interest in the community due to the experience and involvement during the completion of a sign language interpreting program a number of years ago. Looking forward to a discussion of the strengths brought to a leadership role by someone with this singular position, the article presented the possibility of an interesting review.

**Issues of the case**

As a case study carried out on a single individual, the article relied on the qualitative review of an interview with the subject, relying on his recollections and reflections after the fact as the study was completed during a time of transition as Dr. Jordan had announced his intention to step down from his post. The authors included this (then current) situation into their discussion, although none of the events surrounding the transition were included in the study data since research by others had not been made available in print at the time of writing. In fact, the authors made it clear that no information regarding the events of that time would be included, except to state that there was a possibility that the demonstrations taking place (at the time) showed a difference between how Dr. Jordan was perceived in his leadership style and how his management style was received. (Kamm-Larew, Stanford, Greene, Heacox, & Hodge, 2008)

Two frameworks of leadership style were presented by the authors and applied to the interview results, the primary being that of transformational leadership and the secondary being the application of the path-goal theory of leadership. In the discussions of leadership theory in
the article, the authors present no other styles included to compare/contrast their findings, therefore the data is linked to components of these two only, with any other outcomes not a part of the discussion of this case. It should be noted that a source (Northouse, 2013) cited during the discussion of the chosen style and theory, there were three theories and four styles of leadership are outlined. To add another dimension, Hoyle (2006) presents four types of leaders in his work. The authors noted the lack of a 360 degree view of the subject’s style of leadership, thereby limiting the research to the subject's internal recollections without the defining and/or clarifying viewpoint of those being led. The authors suggest that future studies of other leaders within the Deaf community would provide a broader view toward the leadership styles prevalent within the community and the effects those styles have on the community itself. (Kamm-Larew, Stanford, Greene, Heacox, & Hodge, 2008)

Alternative suggestions

Northouse (2013) wrote "some people are leaders because of their formal position in an organization, whereas others are leaders because of the way other group members respond to them." (p.8) In the presented case, Dr. I. King Jordan was in a role of academic leader and applied for another job - which he ended up getting partially due to the demonstrations of others who saw a difference in people and their capability due to the level of functioning in their sense of hearing and who wished this difference to be present in their leader (Deaf President Now). In Dr. Jordan's own words (published during the time when the case study was being completed and written about the demonstrations that the authors excluded from their study):

The board members' choice of a permanent president will have long-lasting implications for the university. Many people outside Gallaudet believe the board will be voting to elect a "mayor" of the deaf community. The conversation "out there" has been more about popularity or role models than about academic leadership.
I understand this because of the way I became president and the way I did my job. When the Deaf President Now revolution led to my selection in 1988, I was thrust into two roles -- university president and spokesman for the deaf community. I trust I have been successful in both roles. Any success I had as a spokesman for people who are deaf came only because I was first and foremost a strong academic leader. Had I not been a successful president, I could not have been a positive spokesman. (Jordan, 2007) 

Also, the authors present the fact that the subject "reported that he was a participatory leader" (p.366) which is another type of leadership style (Hoyle, 2006) although it is also included as a subdivision of the path-goal leadership theory the authors included in their assessment. (Kamm-Larew, Stanford, Greene, Heacox, & Hodge, 2008) Given this viewpoint from the subject himself, a process that takes the input of the subject's recollections and places them against a full screen of various leadership styles - with no emphasis on the membership in a certain community - would appear to be in order. The inclusion of a true 360 view would allow for a true picture of the leadership style of this particular university president to be determined. This process would also, by the nature of the constituency involved, add another layer of validity and reliability to the data, due to the inclusion of additional members of the Deaf community in the data sets and not just in the subject of the study and one member of the research team - as noted by the authors.

Once an over-arching picture of leadership is gathered, a comparison within the chosen community would be the next step to add specificity to the study. Within other organizations that have a strong presence in the Deaf community - the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID, a unit of the Rochester Institute for Technology) - there are other "single instance" leaders available for comparison, including another with higher education administration as a defining factor. In actuality, a historical study completed at this point in time would include two persons with service to two or three of the
organizations since both presidents of Gallaudet since Dr. Jordan have also served in leadership roles at NTID (NTID History) or in the NAD - or both (profiles posted via Presidents of Gallaudet University). This would present an opportunity to gather data of a cross-sectional nature and compare and contrast among several people - all of whom are members of the Deaf community and who have (or are) serving as the "mayor" (as stated by Dr. Jordan above).

Having three subjects who have served (or are serving) in the same position could align the study and provide a source for sources of validity and reliability that might bridge the gaps the authors admit exist in their original study. Drawing on the acceptance that "college and university presidents are the public faces of their institutions" (Carpenter-Hubin & Snover, 2013, p. 32) the data should be considered with the position holders in a dual role, especially as it concerns the Deaf community. Including other leaders at NTID and/or NAD, would lend additional depth to the comparison and greater applicability to a picture of the leadership style prevalent within the Deaf community.

Factors affecting the alternative suggestions

While a set of comparison institutions of a similar makeup to Gallaudet would be possible to gather due to the classification systems available in higher education, the uniqueness of the institution and its student / faculty population would be a factor in the collection and analysis of the perception data. Processing the cross-sectional data for comparison of leadership style could be confounding by the cultural norms for the various institutions and would need to be controlled for through the collection and analysis processes. Also, the historical study would be affected by the availability of constituencies from the time periods for the earlier presidents. Gathering the same type of 360 view input for comparison schools could also prove problematic.
The depth of the study would need to be adjusted based on the amount of reliable data that could be obtained.

A confounding factor would also be present in the section of the proposed study wherein Deaf culture is included in the analysis. With the many differences in not only the avenue of membership in the culture (several of which are represented by the most recent Gallaudet presidents - one who was deafened in adulthood, another in childhood and a third who was not only born Deaf but also to Deaf parents) as well as the various attitudes and acceptances within the community, there are a number of factors that would need to be controlled for rather than excluded due to their effect on the individual at a base level. Also the acceptance of others can rest in those factors as well, so controls for the inputs would need to be in place as well due to the community itself having many difference among the members, even with a common goal - self-governance - present, as reported when the current president of Gallaudet, Dr. T. Alan Hurwitz, was appointed -

Sparked in part by the selection of previous presidents, a 2006 protest and a 1988 protest—both of which nearly shut down the campus—revolved around questions of deaf identity, culture, and communication, issues that have divided the deaf community for more than two decades.

The intensity of the controversy was due in part to the university’s bellwether status: Decisions about Gallaudet’s direction carry heightened import because they are sometimes seen as an indication of the entire community’s future. (McCally, 2010)(p. 7)

All in all, a full depth study of leadership styles of the latest leaders of the only liberal arts university that is intended for persons who are Deaf or hard-of-hearing would be an interesting and thought provoking look into the way that membership within a certain sub-culture determines leadership styles which are put into practice while participating in a global society of higher education administration would be an interesting addition to the available literature.

Especially if completed as a full and true historical 360 perspective of those studied.
I think you will not be surprised to note that you are the only student who elected to analyze this study! Well-written and researched – another homerun. 150 points

References


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