

Professor uses observation to measure leaders

By Tom Shelton

A UNL professor in the College of Business Administration said traditional "paper and pencil" methods of measuring leadership are not adequate.

Fred Luthans is using direct observation of leadership as the major method of a three-year study which began in June 1980. The study is financed by a \$250,000 grant from the U.S. Office of Naval Research.

Researchers studying leadership have been going about it in the wrong way, Luthans said.

"We all agree leadership makes a difference in successes and failures, that leadership often tips the balance," he said. "But questionnaires and other such methods have proven to be unreliable to measure it."

As part of his direct observation measurement technique, 120 managers from five diverse organizations in Lincoln, in both the public and private sectors, were observed at work by their secretaries or close subordinates and outside observers.

Organizations anonymous

Luthans said he could not mention the names of the five organizations, saying that anonymity was part of the agreement to get them to participate.

Luthans calls his method a leadership observation system. He said its purpose is to directly measure leadership behavior, which includes assessing behavior in planning, coordinating, staffing, training, developing, motivating, reinforcing and

several other areas.

Luthans said too often U.S. businesses emphasize "bigger and better computers" but neglect looking toward more effective human resource management techniques.

He said his direct observation method seems to be working. "The preliminary results indicate it is reliable," he said.

Luthans said the United States is in a perilous state of low productivity.

"Productivity in this country is in trouble," he said. "From World War II to the 1960s, America was in good shape, but the mid-1960s saw a declining productivity rate."

The blame for decreased productivity has been misplaced, Luthans said.

Same problems

"We can blame OPEC oil prices, double-digit inflation, the increasing cost of government," he said, "but the fact is that other countries face the same problems, sometimes in worse doses, but their productivity rate isn't going to pot the way ours is."

Luthans said Western European countries and Japan have higher productivity rates than the United States and better methods of leadership.

Luthans said he is optimistic about his project and his method of measuring leadership.

"It is clear that direct measures can indeed provide a reliable alternative measurement technique to questionnaires," he said. "We have also found there is considerable disagreement between how leaders view themselves and how subordinates, peers

and supervisors view them."

The remaining two years of Luthans' research will be spent testing the validity of his research method and establishing a measurement scheme with "predictive validity."

"In other words, leaders who have certain measured behaviors will be predicted to have certain performance outcomes," he said. "This goal of predictive validity

will not be easy to attain, but if accomplished, there are tremendously important implications for selection, training, development and appraisal."

He said he hopes the result of this measurement system will help business, government, hospitals, schools and the military better select and appraise their managerial personnel and improve the productivity of their people.

Issues become more simple as election day draws near

If you have ever thought that presidential candidates seem to state the issues much more simply before an election than after, a new psychological study says you are right.

Reporting recently in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, University of California (Berkeley) psychologist Dr. Philip E. Tetlock studies the pre- and post-election policy statements of 20th-century American presidents to determine whether they were more clear or complex near election day, and why. The study used a psychological scale to measure the complexity of statements made by new presidents, those seeking re-election and vice presidents who won the presidential seat.

Two theories were tested. The first, called "impression management," says that presidents deliberately present issues as "rigid, black-and-white generalizations" during election campaigns to win popular support. Once in power, however, they quickly learn the constraints and demands of office. Though presidents may not blatantly abandon past commitments, they rapidly adopt more flexible and complex policy positions when faced with the need to make difficult value trade-offs and to justify sometimes unpopular decisions to skeptical audiences.

The second theory, known as "cognitive adjustment," implies that new presidents

need time, sometimes several months or even years, to learn to see issues in more practical ways, and so develop a more genuine and gradual change in policy perspective.

The result found that presidents' statements became sharply more simplified as re-election time approached, were rapidly more complex during a president's first month in office, but did not increase in complexity with the length of time in office. Even the policy statements of re-elected presidents were more simplified between their next-to-last and last years of terms in office.

According to Tetlock, the findings suggest that the increased complexity of new presidents' statements is part of a self-conscious, political strategy.

The study warns, though, that there may be times when a president's more simplified election rhetoric may be caused by reasons that are not so strategic. For example, presidents possibly may think about issues in more complex ways than they choose to reveal to the public. A president's tendency for more complex statements may also be related partly to an increased appreciation of the complexities of government, discovered quickly between election and inauguration days as the president-elect makes cabinet appointments and outlines the new administration's policies.

Workshops in human services set

Omaha will be the site of a new series of workshops for persons employed in human services.

Six workshops are scheduled in the series which is sponsored by the UNL Division of Continuing

Studies and the UNO School of Social Work.

The first workshop will be Nov. 13 at the Peter Kiewit Conference Center in Omaha. This morning workshop will focus on conflict management in the group

setting. Group process theory will be briefly reviewed and conflict management concepts will be emphasized. Experiential exercises will provide examples of practice skills for dealing with conflict.

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