

**MEASURING THE IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP SKILL
DEVELOPMENT ON PUBLIC OFFICIALS**

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Measuring the Impact of Leadership Skill Development on Public Officials

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Abstract: The focus for this roundtable discussion is upon the change in knowledge and skill that occurs in a leadership program that is designed to enhance the skills and knowledge of community leaders. The participants in a ten-week course were evaluated on pre and post-test knowledge of specific skills and concepts associated with community leadership.

What impact does leadership skill development programs have upon public officials? The focus for this roundtable discussion is upon the change in knowledge and skill that occurs in a leadership program that is designed to enhance the skills and knowledge of community leaders. The participants in a ten-week course were evaluated on pre and post-test knowledge of specific skills and concepts associated with community leadership. The result of the evaluations and the evaluation methodologies will be discussed in the session. The evaluation occurred in three leadership training programs from The Ohio Local Government Leadership Academy that included elected officials from county, municipal, and township governments, and appointed individuals who serve on local government committees, commissions, boards or task forces. The data for this presentation are drawn from a local Leadership Academy developed in the Toledo area in Ohio.

The Ohio Local Government Leadership Academy

The Ohio Local Government Leadership Academy was developed after a series of eight meetings with a committee consisting of representatives from state associations of local government in Ohio and administrators and faculty from The Ohio State University. The participants included representatives from:

- County Commissioners Association of Ohio
- Ohio Municipal League
- Ohio Township Association
- The John Glenn Institute for Public Service and Public Policy

- Office of the President, Government Relations
- Community Development, Ohio State University Extension

The initial meeting included fourteen individuals. The Community Development Office had requested the initial meeting to explore three questions.

1. In what ways can the university increase and strengthen its relationships with the associations of local government?
2. What kinds of programs can the university provide, or partner with the associations to provide to local government officials?
3. What kinds of research could the university provide to support the work of the associations?

Although several themes emerged from the first meeting, our purpose here is to discuss the development of only one of the joint initiatives that followed—the Ohio Local Government Leadership Academy. The first meeting was used to set the agenda for the subsequent meetings. The term leadership did not emerge at the first meeting. Rather, such terms as effective decision-making, conducting effective meetings, ethical conduct, effective media relations, and working with community residents were topics of discussion. During seven subsequent meetings, the discussions were refined to create a leadership academy to expand the knowledge base, and to build the skills of elected officials in several specific areas—each became a module in the curriculum.

To satisfy the needs of the three associations, the academy was developed so that interested public officials could complete one or more of the required or elective modules during the two annual meetings held by each association each year. Further, members of one association could attend the meetings of either of the other two associations to complete the leadership certificate more quickly than the three years outlined in the program.

Based upon requests from local officials and from county extension offices, a second version was created for presentation at local or regional sites. One local Academy is described in the pages that follow.

Toledo Area Local Government Leadership Academy

The academy was developed through a partnership between The Ohio State University Extension, The Ohio State University Sea Grant College Program and the Toledo Area Chamber of Commerce during a visit to the Chamber. Participants in the Academy completed ten sessions over a ten-week period with each session lasting two hours. A diverse audience made up the composition of the first Local Government Leadership Academy class including the following professional backgrounds: 1 mayor, 2 small business development commission directors, 2 executive directors of professional committees, 7 township trustees, 3 city council persons, 2 community development corporation directors, 1 precinct committee person, 1 attorney, 2 probate court magistrates, 1 university professional, 1 doctor, 1 engineer, 1 librarian, 1 executive vice-

president of a local business, 2 presidents of local businesses, 1 real estate professional, and 1 chamber of commerce executive. The course schedule and a brief description for each session are listed below.

January 8, **Public Officials and Public Service:** This is a workshop about the requirements and challenges for serving in public office in Ohio. The program is designed to provide participants with an overview of the basic issues, expectations and practices associated with serving in any public office in Ohio. The workshop will focus on the principles and practices that can provide a framework for improving your tenure and service in public office. Topics include: Duties and Responsibilities of Public Officials; Codes of Ethics; Standards of Conduct; Conflict of Interest; Using and Abusing the office--"the ice is very thin"; Open Meetings Laws; "Honesty, Ethics, Integrity and Civility go a long way."

January 15, **Conducting Effective Meetings:** This is a workshop about the principles and best practices that provide a framework for conducting effective meetings. The topics for the workshop include: Types of meetings; Legal Requirements; Pre-meeting Activities such as Agenda preparation/Distribution/"Five day rule"; The Meeting Environment; Process, Rules and Procedures; Conducting the Meeting--process and dynamics; After the Final Gavel--bringing closure and finishing the requirements.

January 22, **Communicating and Working with the Media:** This is a workshop about developing effective working relationships with media representatives and organizations that cover your meetings. The workshop will focus upon the basic principles and practices that will provide a framework for improving your media relations and skills.

January 29, **Communicating and Working with Citizens:** This is a workshop about establishing more positive and effective relationships with all residents of the community. The workshop is built around the principles that should define the relationships between government and residents. The content of the workshop will be based upon best practices that are used in many localities around the state and nation to provide a framework for building effective relationships and engaging community residents with their government in positive ways.

February 5, **Building Sustainable Communities:** This is a workshop about developing a better understanding of a new paradigm for governing our communities. The workshop provides an overview of the principles and practices involved in developing sustainable communities. The workshop is designed to explore the relationships between growth, development, environment, ecology, social structures and the civic culture.

February 12, **Team Building:** This is a workshop about the principles and practices that can provide a framework for building effective working relationships between and among members of the governing body and building effective working relationships with the administrative/managerial staff and with other employees of the local government.

February 19, **Leadership Skills and Styles and Effective Decision Making:** Do you know your leadership style? Do you know the leadership styles/ types of others on your board/ council? Do you know that understanding leadership styles and types can help improve our interpersonal relationships and the effectiveness of the board/council? The goal for every public official is to "make good decisions." What is a good decision? How do we make them? This is a workshop about the concepts, principles, and practices that can provide a framework to improve the operations and effectiveness of your governing body and your personal decision-making.

February 26, **Conflict Management and Dispute Resolution:** This is a workshop about the well-established principles and practices that are used to manage conflict and resolve disputes. The workshop is divided into four parts with each focusing on different dimensions of conflict management and dispute resolution. The workshop will focus on practical applications and examples of real situations that will help to build a framework for each participant to use the skills developed in the workshop.

March 5, **Intergovernmental Relations: Opportunities and Challenges for Cooperation:** This is a workshop about the principles and practices that can provide a framework for structuring working relationships between and among local governments. The workshop will explore Ohio law pertaining to opportunities and limitations for intergovernmental agreements and cooperative arrangements. The workshop will draw heavily from the positive and negative experiences of others who have engaged in cooperative agreements with other governments.

March 12, **Technology in Local Government:** This is a workshop about the uses, applications and limitations of electronic technology, especially computers, in local government. The workshop will focus upon five themes relating to computers and technology in local government—selecting hardware and software, common applications and practices currently in use among many local governments, new applications of government-on-line, emerging uses, and policies relating to the use of government computers.

Evaluating Knowledge Gain

An instrument was developed for the program that was designed to measure prior knowledge and evaluate knowledge gained and perspectives changed as a result of the program. The evaluations were conducted at the end of each of the ten sessions. A final evaluation was conducted at the end of the program to help assess the overall impact of the program. The paper and data provide a useful framework for further dialogue about the impact of such programs on community leaders. The instrument used to measure change was developed specifically for this leadership program. An example of the instrument for one session follows. The content of the evaluations were developed around the particular sub-topics for each of the ten sessions. An example of one of the evaluation instruments for the session on Conducting Effective Meetings is reproduced on the page that follows.

Ohio Local Government Leadership Academy Program Survey

Please rank your level of understanding by circling one of the following using a scale of 1-4, with **1 being poor** and **4 being good**.

Leadership Topic: Conducting Effective Meetings

<u>before</u> today's presentation	My level of understanding of the following	<u>after</u> today's presentation
1 2 3 4	1. Meeting types: regular meetings, work sessions, public forums and public hearings.	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	2. Legal requirements, notices, Sunshine Law, open meeting requirements, executive sessions.	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	3. Pre-meeting activities, agenda preparation/distribution/"Five Day Rule", supporting documents, press briefings, etc.	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	4. The meeting environment, accessibility, physical details, etc.	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	5. Process, rules and procedures, code of ethics, etc.	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	6. Conducting the meeting, roles, public address, agendas, etc.	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	7. Meeting Closure, the press, follow-up, minutes and records.	1 2 3 4

If necessary, what could have been done better or included to enhance your understanding of this session? (Use back if necessary).

Please turn in at end of session. Thank you for your cooperation.

The Evaluation Results

The table that follows provides a summary of the evaluation data collected for each session. The data for each module from within each session are not reported in this paper. However, the overall statistics incorporates the information from each module to produce a session statistic. The numbers (N) for each session varies since participants were required to attend only seven sessions to earn their Certificate.

<u>Prior Knowledge</u>	<u>Session Topic</u>	<u>Knowledge Gained</u>
35%	Public Officials and Public Service	65%
39%	Conducting Effective Public Meetings	60%
7%	Communicating and Working With the Media	93%
30%	Working and Communicating With Citizens	71%
6%	Building Sustainable Communities	94%
20%	Team Building	80%
25%	Leadership Skills and Styles	97%
7%	Conflict Management and Dispute Resolution	92%
13%	Intergovernmental Relations	88%
24%	Technology in Local Government	76%

One of the interesting observations that emerges from an examination of the data is that there is a reverse relationship between prior knowledge and knowledge gained. The logic is obvious, but too often we fail to assess the impact between starting point and ending point when we report results. Where knowledge is already high or assumed to be high, there is less chance that gains will be high. As an example, the four sessions where prior knowledge is low the gains were in excess of 90%. The reverse is true, where prior knowledge is the highest, knowledge gains were the lowest. For example, in the area where prior knowledge is rated the highest, Conducting Effective Meetings, knowledge gain was the lowest. The data do not, however, support an argument that we should focus on those areas where knowledge gained can be the greatest. Important learning occurs for “experts” at the margin where new insights or skills can improve an already effective leader.

Future Directions and Unanswered Questions

From our initial experience with the issues surrounding knowledge gained during the course of the ten week program, we concluded that we need to assess prior knowledge and knowledge gained differently. There are two levels of measurement for each category. One is the self reported estimate of prior knowledge and knowledge gained. Another way to assess prior knowledge and knowledge gained is through an assessment of specific sets of information that will be provided during the sessions of the Academy. One of the very difficult problems to overcome with adult learners, and especially elected officials, is to collect the information in a discrete manner. Most public officials are very aware of their own image and would be reluctant to provide information if there were any chance the assessment information could be attributed to them in any manner that could be embarrassing. The important questions needing attention include:

1. What are the best surrogate measures of knowledge that we can use? Is self reporting an adequate measure of prior knowledge and knowledge gained?
2. Is there a way to collect accurate information about the level of prior knowledge and knowledge gained that elicits accurate responses from adult learners, especially elected officials? Can information be collected in an environment where there is a sufficient comfort level to allow public officials to provide very accurate information that is not tainted by posturing or spin?
3. Are measures of knowledge gained the only true measures of the value of a program? Or, does valuable learning occur outside the parameters of specific topics and sub-topics within the sessions? Do we need to focus equally as much on value of an experience as we do on knowledge gained?

In teaching and learning situations involving public officials, interactions that occur within a program may provide the beginnings for a change in behavior. There is likely an important “time lag” between program content and the application of ideas within the operating environment of a public official. This time lag and impact issue will continue to plague educators and trainers as public sector leadership programs are developed and presented.