

University of Dubuque  
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Integrating Leadership Data into Resident Assistant Selection Practices

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*After nearly two years as a hall director and working with students at the University of Dubuque, I have often found myself questioning the way things are done. This project is a result of this curiosity. Thank you to Rick Merfeld, Jeff Janson, Marqita Jones, and Aaron Surratt, as well as the RA staffs for making this project possible and the MAC cohort and faculty for their continual support during our journey.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Students living on campus during their undergraduate education at numerous institutions often have stories to tell about their interactions with Resident Assistants. Some students will tell of the Resident Assistant who turned a blind eye to the constant noise and underage drinking occurring on the floor while another RA documents a minor loud noise. These same students may also speak of the Resident Assistant who planned the best programs and facilitated the formation of a community on the residence hall floor. In my experience as an RA and Hall Director, RAs may also significantly change throughout the year, becoming more strict or lenient, as well as less involved with the students in the residence hall.

At the University of Dubuque, the Resident Assistant is viewed by students and the administration as a leader carefully selected for a demanding paraprofessional role. Resident Assistants are selected for numerous reasons, including leadership, responsibility, judgment, communication skills, self awareness, and understanding of the RA role. At the University of Dubuque, Resident Assistant candidates currently complete a multi-faceted process that includes individual interviews and group activities. This study explores the effort to add one additional activity, which provides somewhat more objective data concerning leadership potential of candidates added to the decision making process of hiring the RAs to serve for the following year at this University.

### **Statement of Problem**

The selection process by which the following year's RA staff is observed includes five activities: planning a program, choosing the hypothetical best RA staff, answering discussion

questions, prioritizing a list of things to do, and creating a device to keep an egg from breaking when dropped one story. During each part of the day-long process, each candidate is observed by a professional Residence Life staff member and at least one current Resident Assistant.

The process depends on subjective interpretation of behaviors and communication of the RA candidate rather than any measures that make use of specific assessment tools that can provide more objective data specifically tailored to identify a potential RA's leadership style tendencies. In an effort to add a measure of objectivity to the decision making task, the Residence Life professional staff rate each candidate and the corresponding values are plotted in a visual representation. The decision making process occurs in a daylong meeting of the five Residence Life professional staff, where each candidate is evaluated for fit in the Resident Assistant role as well as to work with a particular cohort of students and staff team.

Hiring decisions can be made on subjective information, either data gathered from reviewers or the 'data' of gut feelings. A human resource management truism is that in the hiring interview a decision is usually reached in the first thirty seconds and the rest of the time is spent simply justifying that decision (R. Cunningham, lecture, January 24, 2008). Many organizations have tried to gather self report data from accepted measurement instruments like the Leadership Grid© test in order to provide for a less subjective assessment of the quality of an applicant. In this study, self-report objective data from the Leadership Grid© test was added to the mix of available information to the staff involved in the 2008 hiring process of the 2008-09 RAs at the University of Dubuque in order to provide the addition of objective assessment data to the more subjective observational data currently employed in making the hiring decision.

### **Relevant Research**

The primary focus of this study is the decision making process of the Resident Life Professional Staff at the University of Dubuque. Small group decision making literature from the rational model of decision making proposed by John Dewey (1910) to the more recent survey of group decision making processes canvassed by Johnson and Johnson's (2000) will serve as means to explore the subjective-objective tensions of decision making.

A secondary focus of concern for this study is the use of self-report leadership style instruments. Blake and Mouton (1986) developed a Managerial Grid as a self assessment measurement tool designed to identify an individual's preferred leadership style, juxtaposing task orientation with a relational orientation. The questionnaire has proven extremely effective in helping to identify a participant's leadership propensity in six different measures: initiative, inquiry, advocacy, conflict solving, decision making, and critique. The Leadership Grid© identifies whether an individual's leadership style tends toward authority-compliance, country club, impoverished, middle of the road, team, paternalistic, or opportunistic management. The Leadership Grid© has been adapted since its inception in 1964 as results from its use in multiple industries have been integrated into the refinement of the questionnaire. The data from this self-reflective tool has been validated with over forty years of effort to demonstrate its utility. It holds promise to provide the Residence Life staff with more objective information to be added to the subjective data already being employed in hiring decisions.

### **Approach of the Study**

I co-ordinated the administration of the Grid International Leadership-Managerial test (Blake and Mouton 1964, Blake and McCause 1991) to all prospective applicants for UD

Residence Life RA positions, because I wanted to assess (through the use of a set of before and after Likert scales) its usefulness for the UD Residence Life professional staff decision meeting in which the following year's RAs are chosen, in order to find out whether the addition of more objective leadership data to an otherwise largely subjective assessment process would significantly effect the decisions made, so that the UD Residence Life professional staff could determine whether this type of objective self reflection data would be useful in selecting RA candidates in the future.

### **Overview of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to assess whether the addition of more objective leadership style information concerning applicants for the Resident Assistant positions at the University of Dubuque will significantly affect the decision-making process of the Residence Life team members charged with selecting the candidates for next year's appointments. All prospective candidates for the appointment to an RA position were requested to take the Leadership Grid© test found at [www.gridinternational.com/values2.html](http://www.gridinternational.com/values2.html). The results of these tests were gathered and made available to the Residence Life Professional staff to be included in their deliberations concerning appointments.

A further review of the relevant literature on leadership and decision making in small groups as well as justification for the specific methodology for this inquiry follows. The decision making literature focuses on the processes in making decisions with a concern for objective and subjective data. A thorough analysis of the findings of the before and after Lickert scale questions is provided as are final conclusions for the study.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In order to understand the impact of leadership in the RA role and how decisions are made in a group, one must have some familiarity of leadership theory and decision theory, including methods of making decisions. The following literature review identifies the pertinent literature for this study.

### **Leadership**

Leadership has been conceptualized through many different approaches and theories. Bass (1990) names several categories of theories that have existed and been popular throughout time. Northouse (2007) provides a current definition of leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” in his canvas of seven approaches to leadership theory (p. 3). The style approach to leadership focuses specifically on what leaders do rather who leaders are. This approach identifies the manner in which a leader balances the concern for task and relationship in their interaction with followers. The origins of the style approach come from the Ohio State University studies that analyzed task behaviors and consideration of employees and the University of Michigan studies that measured production orientation and employee orientation on a continuum (Northouse, 2007, p. 87). Based on the historic work of these two research studies Blake and Mouton (1964) developed a conception of leadership based on a tensional realization of these two concerns. Their Managerial Grid identifies a manager’s style of leadership by measuring the person’s concern for production and concern for people. Subsequent incarnations of this Managerial Grid are available from Grid International©.

Concern for production envelops tasks and things, particularly “whatever it is that organizations engage people to accomplish” (Blake & Mouton, 1964, p. 9). Concern for people,

sometimes contrarily, can also be expressed in several different ways, including trust, social relations or friendships, and equitable pay and benefit structures. These two concerns are

expressed differently by each leader and therefore are plotted on the Grid at varying degrees for the seven categories of leader behavior. On the grid, the concern for production is plotted on the horizontal axis and the concern for people is on the vertical axis based on a nine point scale. The variation of attitudes and practices is plotted

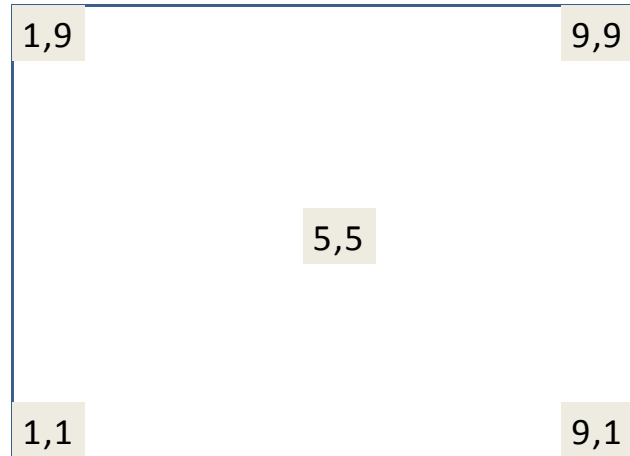


Fig. 1

on the grid in a scale of 1 through 9 based on how the person answers each of sixty-three questions. It is important to note that each manager's type is dynamic, as it is impacted by the organization in which the person works, a particular situation, the values of the individual, personality, as well as assumptions about unknown managerial situations (p. 13-14). Figure 1 represents the current Leadership Grid© which is less concerned with identifying numbers between 1-5 or 5-9 and more concerned with locating the leader's dominant and secondary style of leadership.

Each of the seven managerial styles is unique and is summarized in Figure 2. Perhaps the most desirable, the 9,9 style is described as sound with contribute and commit as the key terms (Grid International). The 9,9 manager has a high concern for people and results and the basic aim is to "promote the conditions that integrate creativity, high productivity, and high morale through concerted team action" (Blake & Mouton, 1964, p.142). Directly to the left of the 9,9 style on the grid is the 1,9 leader who has a high concern for people and a low concern for production.

Relationships with the followers are of primary concern for the “Accommodating, (Yield and Comply)” manager. This style is contrasted with the 9,1 manager, who has a high concern for production, but little to no concern for relationships. The 9,1 style is described as controlling, direct and dominate. This leader will do

whatever is necessary to accomplish results while the 1,9 will throw out results to keep the people in the group satisfied. The 1,1 manager is indifferent to results and relationships and is therefore ineffective in most situations.

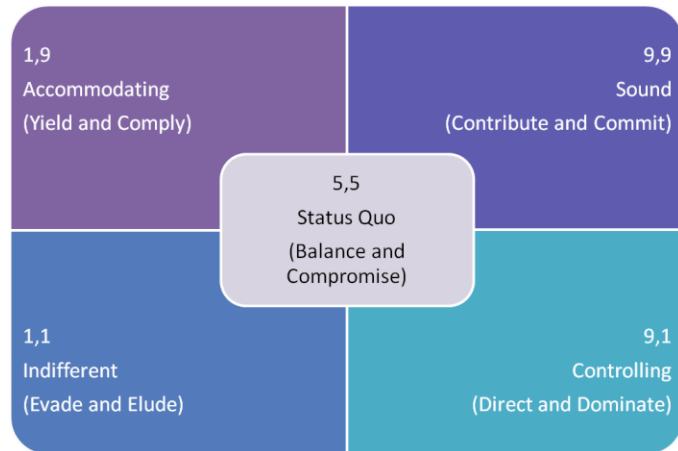


Fig. 2

However, the 5,5 leader can also be ineffective as he or she works to maintain the status quo, compromising and balancing both task and relationship. The newest styles, paternalistic (1,9 and 9,1) and opportunistic (all five), combine the different leadership styles to approach different situations. The paternalistic manager “commands action and results by providing guidance, praise, and reward and subtle punishment” (Grid International). The opportunistic manager uses all five styles to reach his or her personal goals. The key terms for this style are manipulate and exploit.

The work of Blake and Mouton and later, Blake and McCause, approaches leadership theory by identifying the style the leader uses to balance concern for production and concern for relationships or people. The balance of production and relationship is not only important for the leader to navigate but also can play a role in group decision making.

### **Group Decision Making**

Decision theory is complex and like leadership theory, has multiple approaches to describe what occurs when a decision is made by a group. The classical view of decision making by organizational behaviorists is that of a logical and rational process. This process consists of recognizing a problem that requires a decision. Once the group has defined the problem, further research is done to identify the multiple facets of the problem. A set of solutions are generated and then evaluated based on criteria for effectiveness set forth by the group. The group then selects the best solution to the problem and lastly implements the decision. Nutt (1984) discusses this sequential model in his discussion of the normative model of decision making, consisting of five stages: formulation, concept development, detailing, evaluation, and implementation. The rational and logical models of decision making are extremely linear and scholars have since identified that organizations do not usually make decisions in this way.

March and Simon (1958) and Simon (1960) suggest the rational and logical models of decision making are optimizing; that is they have decision makers attempt to find the one best solution to the problem. March and Simon argue that organizations actually look for solutions that will work well for the problem situation, rather than the best solution. The search for adequate solution rather than the optimal one is termed “satisficing.” This distinction is central to the bounded rationality model of decision making. Simon’s “bounded rationality model” differs from the tradition rational model in four ways; it:

1. Characterizes individual decision making based on limited perspectives
2. Assumes a satisficing orientation
3. Assumes a sequential evaluation of ideas

4. Assumes the use of judgemental heuristics which are summaries of past experiences used as rule-of-thumb rubrics and decision arbiters by a group.

Humans are not always logical in thinking and organizations often limit time and provide scarce resources, all of which complicate the decision making process. This model has been further refined as different aspects of decision making are observed and studied (Eisenhardt, 1989; Dean and Sharfman, 1996; Das and Teng, 1999; Langley et al., 1995; Werder, 1999; Nutt, 1998).

Simon's later work (1987) focuses on the intuitive decision making of managers, especially the use of judgmental heuristics. Simon posits that managers will look at their past similar experiences and make a decision using a solution that should work. Burke and Miller (1999) have challenged Simon's findings with a study demonstrating that only 10% of managers who responded believed they used intuition. Most of the managers responded that they used intuition "seldom" or "rarely" when making decisions.

Cohen, March, & Olson (1972) have argued for what they term "The Garbage Can Model" of decision-making as yet another alternative to the rational model of decision making. They argue that many of the factors affecting decisions are random and therefore decisions actually come about when "a suitable collection of problems, solutions, participants, and choices coincide" (Pugh & Hickson, 1989, p. 145). These models of decision making highlight how decisions may or should come about but do not necessarily consider the ways in which a team comes to a decision.

Johnson and Johnson (2000) identify seven methods that a team may use to make a decision. Each method with strengths and weaknesses is outlined below.

1. **Decision made by authority without discussion:** The leader makes all decisions for the organization without input from the group. This often occurs when the decision is simple, routine, and administrative, there is little time available to make the decision, and there is low commitment

from the team to carry out the implementation. This method is commonly used, requires little time, and allows the authority to assert his or her power. However, this method does not allow any group interaction, the team may not agree with, cannot understand or may not be able to implement the decision, resulting in sabotage or ineffectiveness.

- 2. Decision by expert:** An expert is selected from the group and the expert considers the problem and makes the decision. This method is employed when the results require a specific expertise, the expert may have a clear choice, and there is low requirement for team commitment to the implementation of a decision. The decision by an expert is useful with there is a clear expert on the issue at hand. Unfortunately, it can be difficult to determine who the expert is in the group, this method does not require group interaction, and the expert could be chosen because of popularity or power in the group, not expertise.
- 3. Decision by averaging individual's opinions:** This method requires one person to separately ask each team member for his or her opinion and then average the results to make a decision. Utilization of averaging is appropriate when team participation is required but time is limited and long discussions are not desired. Like the first two methods, the team commitment to implement the decision is low for this method. This method is beneficial because extreme opinions and error are cancelled and all group members have a say in the decision. Averaging also can result in quick decisions, especially when it may be difficult to gather the team. Despite the strengths, averaging does not allow for true group interaction, group conflict may not be resolved, expertise is not weighed, and commitment to the decision by the entire group may not be strong.
- 4. Decision made by authority after group discussion:** The leader of the group makes the final decision after the group creates ideas and discusses solutions. This method allows for team input but allows the leader to assert his or her authority in making the decision. The strength of this method lies in the discussion by the group increasing the accuracy of the decision. Despite improved accuracy, the team is not part of the decision, information given to the leader may not be completely accurate, and competition for the leader's attention may occur. The team also may not commit to the leader's decision.

5. **Decision made by minority:** Less than one half of the team makes the team decision in this method due to time constraints that prevent the entire team from meeting or there is a clear choice by the minority. This may come about in cases of an executive or temporary committee or “railroading” by the minority. The minority decision method can result in many decisions in a limited time frame and some team input but can create competition and a lack of commitment by the group for the decision that is made.
6. **Decision made by majority vote:** More than half of the team makes the decision in this significantly common method of decision making. Majority vote is used when there are time constraints hurry the process, the structure of the group supports voting, and commitment to implementing the decision is high. Despite the strengths and commonality, winners and losers are identified, quality of the decision may not be high, and the entire group is represented fully and does not interact.
7. **Decision by collaborative consensus:** Consensus decisions occur when all team members have contributed and listened and are valued. This method requires developed communication skills and is the most effective. Team members are often satisfied because all members express their feelings and thoughts, feel understood, and actively listen to the other members of the group. However, consensus building takes more time than all of the other methods for decision making and requires psychological energy and team-member skill and commitment.

Generally, the goal of the group in this process is to make the most effective decision.

Johnson and Johnson conclude that the characteristics of an effective group decision are:

1. The resources of the group members are fully utilized
2. Time is well used.
3. The decision is correct, or of high quality.
4. The decision is implemented fully by all the required group members.
5. The problem solving ability of the group is enhanced, or at least not lessened (p. 274).

The methods proposed by Johnson and Johnson are utilized by groups in differing situations as no one method can be used all the time.

Effectiveness of decisions is also considered in the descriptive models of decision making: multiple sequence model (Poole, 1983), groupthink (Janis, 1972, 1982), functional theory (Gouran, Hirokawa, Julian, & Leatham, 1993; Gouran & Hirokawa, 1996; Hirokawa & Salazar, 1999), symbolic convergence theory (Bormann, 1996), and other models.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Leadership Data Collection**

The Leadership Grid© was administered to the Resident Assistant applicants during the formal interview process. Each Resident Assistant applicant was asked to complete the values test as directed by Grid International. Every applicant was a current undergraduate student at the University of Dubuque who had completed a Resident Assistant application packet. The test was administered during a session of the RA Selection Day on February 23, 2008 and February 24, 2008 in a computer lab at the University of Dubuque. The applicants were escorted to a computer lab, logged on to the network and proceeded to the Grid International website. Each participant completed the required data and read the provided directions before beginning the questionnaire. Upon completion of the test, the author recorded the participant's preferred style and back-up style as identified by Grid International.

A short presentation detailing the scope of the research project was provided so participants were properly informed of the purpose of the research in which they were participating. Each participant was informed that this self assessment of their own preferred and back-up styles of leadership would be shared with the Residence Life professional staff during the decision making process in which the following year's RA staff were to be chosen from the pool of applicants. They were also informed that this same data would be employed in this study, but that no one individual's score would be used in a manner that could reveal his or her identity.

All RA candidates were then assigned random numbers to maintain confidentiality in reporting of this study. Each student surveyed was asked to provide informed consent and had the option of declining to participate.

The Leadership Grid© was created by Blake and Mouton and published in 1964 and further refined and developed with additional input by McCauley (1991). The test presents 63 managerial situations and requests the participant to choose one of two alternatives for how he or she would react to that particular situation. On a four point scale, the participant must choose whether he or she strongly agrees with one alternative over another or slightly agrees with one alternative over another. By selecting one option over another and the strength of that decision, a value is assigned for the alternative option. The program tabulates the values and assigns the user a preferred style and a back-up style. The result is the leadership style that the user values most.

### **Decision Making Data Collection**

All members of the Residence Life team members who are charged with selecting the candidates for next year's appointments were provided with each individual's leadership style preference for the decision making meeting. Prior to the meeting, the author presented the group with information about the Leadership Grid© and each of the leadership styles. A description of each style was also provided for each group member to use during the meeting. These descriptions were provided by Grid International. Additionally, each staff member had a list of each candidate's leadership style. After this presentation concluded, the author distributed a set of written questions to the group to be completed and collected before the meeting began. The questions asked the participant to rate how important they believed application essay questions, group activities, individual interviews, leadership styles, and the general take of the candidate would be in the decision making process on a scale of 1 to 5, dignified as very unimportant to

very important. The scale was designed to identify how each member anticipated each item would influence their decision on each RA candidate. The scale is represented in Figure 3.

	<b>Very Unimportant</b>	<b>Slightly Unimportant</b>	<b>Neither Important nor Unimportant</b>	<b>Slightly Important</b>	<b>Very Important</b>
Application Essay Questions	1	2	3	4	5
Group Activities	1	2	3	4	5
Individual Interview	1	2	3	4	5
Leadership Assessment	1	2	3	4	5
General Take of Candidate	1	2	3	4	5

Fig. 3

The researcher then observed the decision making meeting to identify if and how the leadership data was employed in the process as well as the decision that was made about each candidate. After the decision making meeting was complete, the second set of questions was distributed. This set included two Likert scales and a prioritizing list for the group members to complete. These questions required each group member to identify the usefulness of Leadership Grid© data in the decision making process. In addition to asking about the usefulness of the leadership data, questions were asked about the usefulness of the other aspects of the hiring process. The set of scales is represented in Figure 4. For coding purposes members of the Residence Life decision-making team were assigned alphabetical letters to provide anonymity in reporting the results.

	<b>Very Unimportant</b>	<b>Slightly Unimportant</b>	<b>Neither Important nor Unimportant</b>	<b>Slightly Important</b>	<b>Very Important</b>
To what degree did the Application Essay Questions influence your final judgment?	1	2	3	4	5
To what degree did the Group Activities influence your final judgment?	1	2	3	4	5

To what degree did the Individual Interview influence your final judgment?	1	2	3	4	5
To what degree did the Leadership Assessment influence your final judgment?	1	2	3	4	5
To what degree did your General Take of the Candidate influence your final judgment?	1	2	3	4	5

Please prioritize which of these influenced your decision on hiring the most.

\_\_\_\_\_ Application Essay Questions

\_\_\_\_\_ Group Activities

\_\_\_\_\_ Individual Interview

\_\_\_\_\_ Leadership Assessment

	<b>Very Unimportant</b>	<b>Slightly Unimportant</b>	<b>Neither Important nor Unimportant</b>	<b>Slightly Important</b>	<b>Very Important</b>
To what degree should the Application Essay Questions be used in selection next year?	1	2	3	4	5
To what degree should the Group Activities be used in selection next year?	1	2	3	4	5
To what degree should the Individual Interview be used in selection next year?	1	2	3	4	5
To what degree should the Leadership Assessment be used in selection next year?	1	2	3	4	5
To what degree should your General Take of the Candidate be used in selection next year??	1	2	3	4	5

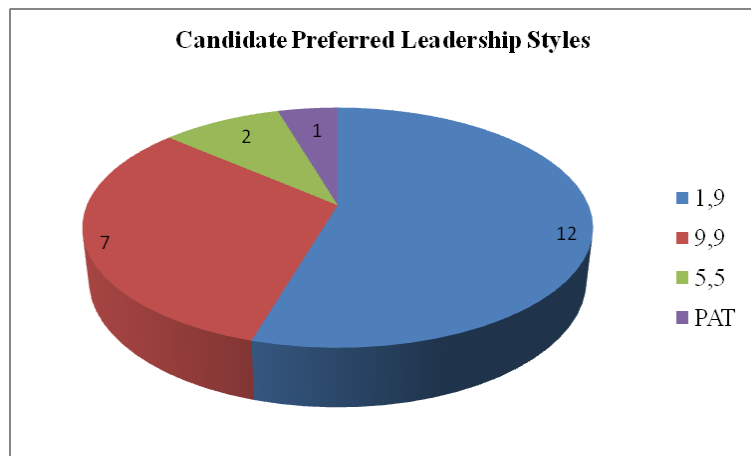
\_\_\_\_\_ General Take

Fig. 4

## FINDINGS

The Leadership Grid© test was distributed and completed by 22 of the Resident Assistant candidates for the 2008-09 school year. The results are represented in figure 5. Twelve of the

candidates have 1, 9, or Accommodating leadership styles. These leaders have a primary focus on relationships, with a secondary focus on task. Seven of the candidates are 9, 9 or Sound leaders who have an equal focus on relationship and task. Two of the candidates are 5, 5 or Status Quo leaders while one has the Paternalistic style of leadership. None of the candidates for the



Resident Assistant position were 9, 1, or Task leaders.

Fig. 5

High

Each of these styles could function in the Resident Assistant role; however there would be varying levels of effectiveness. The 9,9 style of leadership is the most desirable and effective leader according to Blake and Mouton and would be the best fit for the Resident Assistant position as the job requires relationship building with students, faculty, and staff as well as paperwork, confrontation, and other task-centered responsibilities as well.

The back-up style of the candidates varies slightly more than the preferred styles. It is important to note that the back-up style of leadership is the fall back method in situations where the preferred style is not appropriate or does not function. In the RA role, this back-up style could be the style used in situations of confrontation

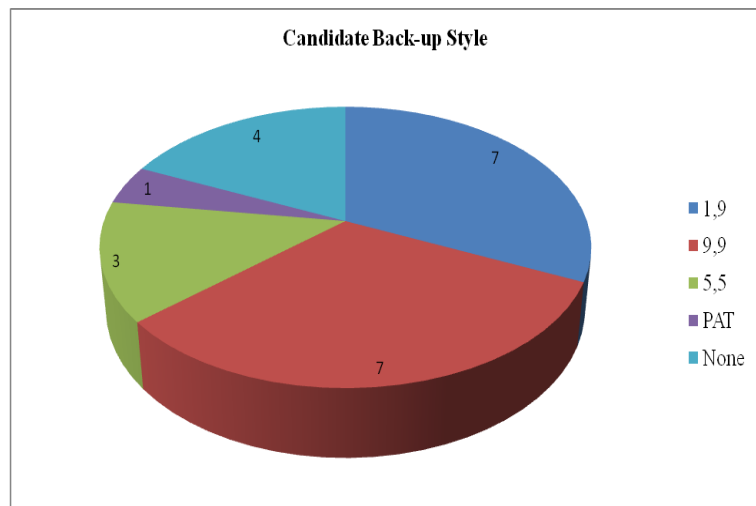


Fig. 6

where the RA is unfamiliar with how to proceed or is interacting with unknown people. Figure 6 represents the back-up styles as identified.

Interestingly, four candidates were sufficiently strong in their leadership style that no back-up style was identified. A table representing the specific styles of each candidate for the RA position can be found in the appendix.

### **Group Decision Making Questions**

Each of the professional staff members completed Likert scale questions before and after the decision making meeting. The questions required the staff to identify the importance of each category of input used in the decision making process. Application essay questions, individual interviews, group activities, leadership style assessment, and the general take on the candidate were used to inform the decision making of the staff. The set of questions administered before the decision making meeting asked each staff member to rate to what degree each piece would have in making the decision for each candidate. The set of questions answered by the group after the decision making meeting required the group to identify the degree of importance each piece had in the decision making and to order the five inputs in order of importance in the individual decision making. Lastly, the second set of questions required the group members to identify to what degree each of the five components should be used in the future for the selection process.

#### *Application Essay Questions*

Essay questions are completed as part of the initial application for the RA position. The questions asked of the candidate are:

1. What do you think is the most fun aspect of being an RA?
2. What are some qualities or experiences that set you apart from the other candidates?

3. Describe a program that you would plan and implement for your residents if you were an RA.
4. Why do you think that we have policies and procedures for the Residence Halls?
5. How do you think being an RA will assist you later as you pursue your career goals?

During the decision meeting, each application is available for review; however there is only one copy to be shared. When asked what part the application essay questions would have in the decision making process, the group split in their responses. Two staff members felt that the questions would be slightly unimportant to their decision (2) while two staff members thought the questions would be slightly important (4). Table 1 represents the response of each staff member to the importance of the application essay questions before the decision making meeting.

After the decision making meeting, the second set of questions was distributed. Every staff member identified a differing importance of the essay question in the decisions made. Professional staff member A had come to believe that the essay questions were neither unimportant nor important (3) rather than slightly unimportant (2), while staff member B determined the questions to be very unimportant (5), rather than an earlier assumption that the essay questions were slightly unimportant (2). Staff members C and D shifted from interpreting the questions to be slightly important (4) to slightly unimportant (2). The overall evaluation of the role of the essay questions was to find them less valuable than anticipated with only one participant finding them more valuable, but not substantially more valuable. The responses for both the *before* and the *after* questions about the application essay questions are represented in table 1.

	<b>Pro Staff A</b>	<b>Pro Staff B</b>	<b>Pro Staff C</b>	<b>Pro Staff D</b>
<b>Before - App. Essay</b>	2	2	4	4
<b>Before - Grp Activities</b>	5	5	4	5
<b>Before - Indiv. Inter.</b>	5	5	5	5
<b>Before - Ldrshp Style</b>	4	4	4	4
<b>Before - General Take</b>	5	4	5	5
<b>After - App. Essay</b>	3	1	2	2
<b>After - Grp Activities</b>	4	5	5	5
<b>After - Indiv. Inter.</b>	5	4	5	5
<b>After - Ldrshp Style</b>	4	1	3	4
<b>After - General Take</b>	5	4	5	5

Table 1 *Staff Approaches and Uses of Data for Decision Making*

### *Group Activities*

Table 1 represents the staff members pre- and post- evaluative identification of the importance of the group activities to the final decision making process. The group activities are part of the selection process and took place before individual interviews during the selection day. The group activities consist of planning a program, a facilitated discussion, an answering machine messages prioritizing activity, egg drop device building, and staffing activity. All applicants take part in every activity with an assigned group and are observed by current RA staff members and professional staff.

Before the decision meeting, the professional staff members were asked to identify the importance they believed the group activity information would have to the decision made. As reported in Table 1, at the outset of the decision-making meeting three staff members identified that the performance of the RA candidates in the group activities would be considered to be very important (5) in the decision making. Professional staff member C believed the impact of the group activities to the decision making would only be slightly important (4).

The group member's opinions on the importance of the performance of the candidates in group activities shifted only slightly after the decision making meeting. Professional staff member A identified a decreased of valuing this data in the decision making process while staff member C decided the group activities had played a more important role (5) in arriving at a final decision. Staff members B and D remained stable in their belief that the group activities were very important (5) in the final decision.

### *Individual Interviews*

Table 1 represents the staff members' pre- and post- evaluative identification of the importance of the individual interview data to the final decision. During the selection process, individual interviews are conducted by a professional staff member and a team of two to four current RAs. Candidates are asked several identical questions and are rated in categories that do not necessarily correlate with the questions being asked. The ratings are on a four point scale, with four representing "excellent" and one representing "needs improvement." If a certain behavior cannot be identified, the interview may mark "Did not observe" for the category. The categories in which candidates are rated are: self confidence/self awareness, judgment/responsibility, sensitivity to others, communication skills, teamwork, programming, leadership skills, understanding the RA role.

Each interviewer rates the candidate based on their interpretation of how the candidate displays his or her knowledge of the subject matter. Additionally, each candidate is given a rating on overall rating: 1) Recommend not hiring this candidate, 2) Recommend this candidate for an alternate position, 3) Recommend this candidate for a position, or 4) Strongly recommend this candidate for a position. Each evaluation for every candidate was compiled and available for the professional staff members' meeting where staffing decisions were made. Before the decision

making meeting, all of the staff concluded that the data gathered from the individual interviews would be very important (5) to the decision making process. This is the only factor that was uniformly rated as very important by all staff. It suggests that this is the material in which staff had the greatest confidence as relevant to their decision-making. Only staff member B reduced the significance of this data from very important (5) to slightly important (4) after the final decisions were made.

#### *Leadership Style Assessment*

The data from the Leadership Grid©, for each candidate who participated, was provided to the professional staff team for the decision making meeting. All of the staff members identified that the leadership data would be slightly important information (4) for the decision making process and this is presented in table 1. The assessment after the meeting provided the most substantive change in attitude in this study. The assumption concerning the value of this data by professional staff members A and D remained the same: slightly important (4). Staff member C reported a decreased valuation of this data from slightly important (4) to neither important nor unimportant (3). Staff member B came to believe that this data moved from slightly important to very unimportant (1).

#### *General Overall Assessment of Candidate*

The general assessment of candidates is multifaceted and affected by the subjective impression each candidate has made on the evaluator during and prior to the individual's candidacy, input from others who know the individual, and the information supplied to the evaluators as data (essay, group activity, interviews, and Leadership Grid© evaluation). Staff generally refer to this as their "take." This information, whether accurate or flawed/deeply biased, is a permissible and significant factor in the overall assessment. In terms of importance to the decision making process, the results of the

questions, before and after the decision meeting, did not change. Staff members A, C, and D believed their general “take” of the candidate would be and was very important (5) to the final decision, while staff member B continued to believe it to be slightly important (4); see Table 1.

### *Overall Importance*

The second portion of the set of questions administered after the decision making meeting asked the professional staff to rank each component in comparison to the others for the overall impact in the decision made. A score of one indicates the highest influence, while five represents the lowest impact. The top three factors differed for each staff member while all indicated the leadership style data was second to least important and the application questions had the least impact on the decision made. Table 2 represents the impact each piece had in the

<b>Influence on Hiring Decision</b>	<b>Pro Staff A</b>	<b>Pro Staff B</b>	<b>Pro Staff C</b>	<b>Pro Staff D</b>
Application Questions	5	5	5	5
Group Activities	3	1	2	2
Individual Interview	1	2	1	3
Leadership Assessment	4	4	4	4
General Take	2	3	3	1

decision making process for each staff member.

Table 2 *Influence of Information on Staff Hiring Decision*

### **Future Selection**

The third component of the questions administered after the decision making meeting asked the professional staff members to identify to what degree each piece of the current selection process should be used in the selection of the staff for the 2009-2010 school year.

“General take”, group activities, and the individual interview were all considered to be very

important to the future selection process by all of the staff members. Differing opinions occurred in consideration of the application essay questions and leadership assessment. Professional staff members A and B believed the application essay questions to be slightly unimportant (2) while staff member C identified the questions to be very unimportant (1) and D concluded the questions were slightly important (2) to the process. The leadership assessment's inclusion in the selection process was slightly important to staff members A and D (4), slightly unimportant to B (2), and neither unimportant nor important to C (3). This data is represented in table 3 and indicates a strong preference for the traditional information that relies primarily on interpretation.

	<b>Pro Staff A</b>	<b>Pro Staff B</b>	<b>Pro Staff C</b>	<b>Pro Staff D</b>
<b>After - App. Essay</b>	3	1	2	2
<b>After - Grp Activities</b>	4	5	5	5
<b>After - Indiv. Inter.</b>	5	4	5	5
<b>After - Ldrshp Style</b>	4	1	3	4
<b>After - General Take</b>	5	4	5	5
<b>Future - App. Essay</b>	2	2	1	4
<b>Future - Grp Activities</b>	5	5	5	5
<b>Future - Indiv. Inter.</b>	5	5	5	5
<b>Future - Ldrshp Style</b>	4	2	3	4
<b>Future - General Take</b>	5	5	5	5

Table 3 *Staff Decisions for Future Selection Information*

### **The Group Decision Making Process**

The decisions making process of the group was observed by the author to determine how the Leadership Grid© data was incorporated into the decision making discussion and process as well as to identify how decisions about the candidates were made. The decision making meeting required decisions on hiring new staff members and returning staff members. The discussion observed encompassed both categories of staff members.

*Leadership Grid© Data*

The Leadership Grid© data that differentiated styles of leadership among candidates was introduced to the selection process for the 2008-2009 Resident Assistant staff to provide comparatively more objective data to what is otherwise a fairly subjective, impression based process of decision making. The incorporation of this data was approved by the Director of Residence Life and was accepted by the rest of the professional staff to be used in the selection process. The information of the candidates' preferred leadership style and back-up style, as applicable, was provided to the decision making team. In the discussion of the decision meeting, there was no verbal reference to the leadership style data. However, staff members A, C, and D occasionally looked at the leadership style information.

*Decision Making Methods*

The decision making methods were fairly uniform throughout the meeting, however there were two specific hiring decisions that deviated. The professional staff progressed candidate by candidate through the applicants. Candidates were placed on a hire, possible hire, and no hire list. If there was a concern about a specific candidate, the concern was recorded. A similar list was made for the current RA staff members desiring to return to staff for the following school year. The hire lists were then compiled and decisions were made about placement in the thirty Resident Assistant positions in the four residence halls. Twenty-eight candidates from the original pool of forty-two total applicants (new candidates and returning RAs) were hired in a consensus decision by the four professional staff members. One candidate was hired by majority vote. One candidate was hired by authority decision after discussion. The decisions on no hires were also clearly by consensus.

The decision on the candidate by majority vote was made after a lengthy discussion. This candidate had been involved in a policy violation but had been fulfilling the job duties above satisfaction. Professional staff member B was opposed to keeping the RA on staff for another year while staff members A, C, and D supported rehiring the RA on the condition that all sanctions and probationary terms were completed. The staff member was hired.

The decision by the authority after group discussion also revolved around a returning staff member. Staff members A and C had concerns about the staff member returning to staff for another year while B and D saw no issue with the staff member continuing. The topic of rehiring this staff member was revisited twice in the meeting. The authority figure decided the staff member would be retained and a discussion would occur with the staff member in question to alleviate the concerns.

Overall, the hiring decisions about the returning staff members resulted in seventeen of the eighteen staff members being offered positions for the following school year. Thirteen of the twenty-four first time applicants were offered positions. Of the twenty-four applicants, fifteen were identified to be hires, six as possible hires and three as no hires. Because of a lack of available positions, the two hire lists (returning and new) had to be reviewed. The professional staff considered compatibility with co-workers and student population when deciding which candidates to offer positions to.

### **Applicants and Their Leadership Style**

The majority of the candidates applying for the RA positions for the 2008-2009 school year were 1, 9 leaders or 1, 9 style leaders whose backup style was 9, 9. The 9, 9 leaders were secondary to these relationship-motivated leaders in the candidate pool. The 9, 9 leaders would be most successful in the RA role, though 1, 9 and 5, 5 leaders will function with differing

performance levels. Six of the twelve 1, 9 leaders were offered positions while six of the seven 9, 9 leaders were offered positions. One Paternalistic leader was offered a position. No 5, 5 leaders were hired. A comparison of hires and non-hires by dominant leadership style is represented in figure 7.

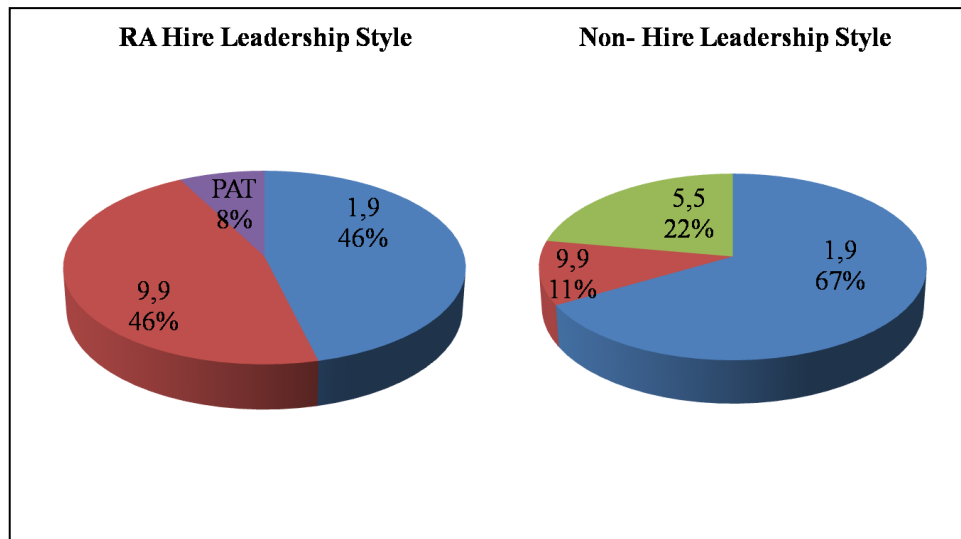


Fig. 7

### Summary of Findings

The decision making of the group was primarily done by consensus as each candidate was evaluated individually. The two cases where the decision was not made by consensus resulted in dissatisfaction by one or more staff members. However, little consensus was reached in considering the importance of each piece that informed the group in selecting the staff. The five different factors were anticipated to be more important to the decision than each actually was. The group's prioritizing of which information was most to least used in the decision indicates that the application questions and leadership styles information were not integral to the process. This sentiment is further echoed in the importance these two elements should play in the future selection processes.

The three most important information sources as identified in the set of questions administered after the decision making meeting were individual interviews, group activities, and general take on the candidates. Each of these components has a significant amount of observation and interpretation in the documentation by multiple different individuals when written during the selection process. The RA and professional staff conducting the observations have varying levels of familiarity with the candidates and the interview process and this knowledge is often reflected in the evaluations. When the professional staff looks at the documents at the decision meeting, the information is subject to another level of interpretation. These three components are composed of subjective information, yet are integral to hiring decisions.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The leadership styles of the RA candidates pool were mostly of the 1, 9 style. The RA role could be described as one of a helper, mentor, coach, and friend, secondarily as a disciplinarian. Due to this interpretation of the job, a certain type of leader could be attracted to the role. Additionally, one of the professional staff members tells the RA staff during fall training that “the RA job is all about relationships.” If this understanding is considered to be true, a self-fulfilling prophecy will occur within the department. Relationship motivated leaders will be hired to fill positions, rather than the more effective 9, 9 leaders who have a balance for completing tasks while building and maintaining relationships.

The selection process used to determine the staff of Resident Assistants for the 2008-2009 school year was based primarily on subjective, impression-based information and interpretation. The most significant pieces informing the decisions made were individual interviews, performance in group activities, and general “take” on the candidate. These sources

relied completely on interpretation of behaviors and communication—a very subjective set of impressions rather than any objective criteria. Though more objective data was integrated into the process, the assessment of Leadership Grid© report material played a minor, if any, role in the final hiring decisions that were made.

Although the Leadership Grid© data was not considered to be “important” in the final hiring decision, the professional staff identified potential for its use in the future. In order for this information to be utilized properly in the future clear guidelines should be set for weighting each components importance to the decision. These guidelines could result in providing a greater role for this more tool in future hiring practices for RAs.

Further study could be conducted at the college and university level on the hiring of student staff members as the workplace is significantly different from the business world where objective data is increasingly be used to inform hiring decisions. Factors that inform the hiring decisions, as well as how hiring decisions vary based on size of the department and college and university are areas to be considered.

Consensus decisions in the hiring process are important for satisfaction, staff dynamics, and later supervisory and team relationships. The confidence in the decision by consensus can sustain difficult situations with the employee as the decision making group has ownership of the decision. However if the decision is not made by consensus, and issues arise, the staff dynamic can deteriorate as blame is placed for the decision made.

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**APPENDIX***Resident Assistant Leadership Styles and Status*

<b>Number</b>	<b>Preferred</b>	<b>Back-up</b>	<b>Hire</b>
1	1,9	9,9	Y
2	9,9	1,9	Y
3	1,9		N
4	9,9	1,9	Y
5	5,5	PAT	N
6	9,9		Y
7	1,9	9,9	Y
8	1,9	9,9	N
9	1,9	9,9	N
10	1,9	9,9	Y
11	9,9	1,9	N
12	1,9		Y
13	9,9	1,9	Y
14	9,9	5,5	Y
15	1,9	5,5	Y
16	1,9	5,5	N
17	1,9		Y
18	PAT	1,9	Y
19	5,5	1,9	N
20	1,9	9,9	N
21	1,9	9,9	N
22	9,9	1,9	Y