

## **Role Modeling in Public Relations: The Influence of Role Models and Mentors On Leadership Beliefs and Qualities**

Bruce K. Berger  
Juan Meng  
University of Alabama  
William Heyman  
Heyman Associates, Inc.

### **Abstract**

This study examined perceptions of 222 PR practitioners regarding qualities and characteristics of excellent leadership in the profession. Limited research has been devoted to leadership qualities and practices in public relations. However, technical and managerial roles have been studied extensively (Broom & Dozier, 1986; Dozier & Broom, 1995; L. Grunig, J. Grunig and D. Dozier, 2002), and some qualities and practices of excellent leadership are implicit in the managerial role. These include ethical practice and counsel, involvement in strategic decision-making and professional knowledge and expertise.

In addition, Excellence theory (D. Dozier, L. Grunig, & J. Grunig, 1995; J. Grunig, 1992; L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & D. Dozier, 2002) suggests that public relations leaders should be members of the dominant coalition, practice two-way symmetrical communication and report directly to the CEO or president, among others.

This study specifically examines two of the national survey questions that probed respondents' perceptions about 1) factors that influence their beliefs about excellent leadership and 2) the most valuable sources of leadership skills and development. A majority of respondents said role models and mentors exerted the greatest influence on their beliefs about excellent leadership. In addition, role models, on-the-job-experiences and individual initiative and desire were the most important sources of leadership development. These findings support the idea that leaders communicate values primarily through their behaviors, which influence organizational culture and those they lead (Schein, 1985). The study bears implications for practice and education and contributes to an emerging area of research regarding leadership in the field.

### **Role Modeling in Public Relations:**

#### **The Influence of Role Models and Mentors on Leadership Beliefs and Qualities**

Leaders are crucial to the success and future of organizations and professions, and leadership studies have been prevalent in the literature on management and organization behavior over the past 40 years. Research articles, books and papers on leadership numbered in the thousands even 20 years ago (Yukl, 1989), and publication rates have continued to rise.

Researchers have developed many concepts and theories to explain and predict leadership effectiveness and organization performance. Major theories and approaches have encompassed leader traits and skills, leader behavior and activities, leader power and influence, situational determinants of leader behavior, and leadership as an attributional process, among others

(Northouse, 2007). Of course, leadership in public relations also is crucial to the profession's success, image and future (Berger & Reber, 2006). However, the subject has been little explored by scholars in the field, and this study seeks to advance our knowledge in this area.

This study draws from a national survey of 222 PR professionals who shared their perceptions about the most important dimensions and characteristics of excellent leadership in PR. Specifically, we focus on responses to two of the survey questions that asked respondents to identify 1) valuable sources of leadership skills and development and 2) factors that influence their beliefs about leadership values and qualities. The results underscore the importance of role models and mentors as sources for leadership development and influencers of beliefs about appropriate leader values and qualities.

### **Public Relations Research and Leadership**

The concept of leadership in public relations is implicit in notions of excellence in communication management. Some public relations scholars have recognized the importance of applying leadership skills to develop successful communication professionals, enhance the practice, and help practitioners participate successfully in strategic decision making in dominant coalitions (e.g., Berger & Reber, 2006; Berger, Reber, & Heyman, 2007; Choi & Choi, 2008; Lee & Cheng, 2008; Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002; Werder & Holtzhausen, 2008a, 2008b).

One of the most comprehensive research projects in the field of public relations, the IABC Excellence Study, provides a conceptual framework for understanding the functions of public relations and for discussing leadership and its application in the scope of excellent public relations (Grunig, 1992; Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). Excellence theory investigates the characteristics and values that a public relations unit could (and should) have at the program level, the departmental level, the organizational level, and the economic level. The researchers suggested that, to achieve excellence in public relations and communication management, public relations managers (leaders) should be able to explain "*why* public relations contributes to organizational effectiveness and *to what extent* by asserting that public relations has monetary value to the organization" (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002, p. 10).

Specifically, the researchers suggested that organizations should empower public relations as a critical management function. Senior public relations executives should be members of the dominant coalition of the organization and involved in the strategic management processes of the organization to ensure that public voices are heard and considered in key organizational decisions. To be effective in this role, public relations leaders required a managerial view and professional knowledge and experience. In addition, an organization's structure and culture also are seen to influence the effectiveness and role of public relations. A "culture for communication" is characterized by a participative organizational environment, a symmetrical system of internal communication, equal opportunities and high job satisfaction among employees (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002).

Researchers also have argued that some professionals do not possess the requisite capabilities or knowledge to perform effectively in the managerial or leader role. The lack of professional expertise, leadership skills, and organizational knowledge, and/or inexperience with organizational politics and power relations limit their success and the effectiveness of practice (e.g., Berger, 2005; Berger & Reber, 2006; L. Grunig, 1992; Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002).

For instance, Berger and Reber's (2006) power relations theory discusses the use of power to make PR units more active, effective, and ethical in organizational decision making. The researchers made the assumption that public relations is inherently political and suggested that "individual professionals can increase their influence if they become more politically astute, employ more diverse influence resources and tactics, and exert greater political will in organizational arenas where decisions are shaped through power relations" (Berger & Reber, 2006, p. 2). Berger, Reber, & Heyman (2007) further explored factors which help public relations leaders achieve professional success and maintain their leadership positions inside organizations. They found a complex set of factors and patterns that seemed important to success, including communication skills; diverse experiences and assignments; a proactive nature; and relationship-building, networking, and interpersonal skills.

Choi and Choi (2007) adopted a behavioral approach to explore what leadership means in public relations. By defining PR leadership as "the process of influence which leads to organization-wide collaborative endeavors to achieve public relations goals" (p. 2), they identified six distinct public relations leadership behaviors that favorably influenced the value of public relations in an organization. These included providing organization members with a clear vision about the organization's public relations policies and strategies, exerting upward influence, acting as a changing agent, and creating alliances in and out of the organization.

The relationship between leadership styles and the application of PR practice has been another area research interest. Based on a national survey of PR professionals, Holtzhausen and Werder (2008a) investigated how leadership styles have been presented in practice. They concluded that two leadership styles--transformational and inclusive--were most common in public relations environments. The researchers argued that the two styles are actually related, though have different focuses in application (i.e., transformational leaders focus on inspiring followers through communication, while inclusive leaders engage in participative practices). They suggested that combining an inclusive leadership style with transformational leadership behaviors might positively affect public relations strategies and outcomes.

This emerging area of research has the potential to help us better understand leadership qualities and perhaps even to enhance the preparation of leaders. Such development raises questions about how professionals come to learn leadership skills, and how they develop values and beliefs about leadership. Answers to such questions seem important to improving our ability to develop excellent leaders in practice and in the classroom. This study, then, explores one potential source of leadership values and skills—role models and mentors, which are related concepts.

To date, few public relations studies have examined role modeling and mentoring aspects of leadership in the field. Mentoring is recognized as important to professional development and advancement by professional associations like the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). University public relations educational programs, internships and campaign classes provide opportunities for mentoring of students. In research by Aldoory (1988) and Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001), female practitioners highlighted the importance of mentoring to their development. A recent study of PR professionals (Pompper & Adams, 2006) found that mentoring was more likely to be successful when 1) compatibility and rapport exist between mentor and protégé and 2) mentoring programs are formalized and reflected in organizational values, practices and structures. The researchers also found that mentors helped protégés to advance by providing

skill-development opportunities, empowering them and validating their work, guiding them through organizational politics, and introducing them to networks of relationships.

### *Role Models and Mentors*

Sociologist Robert Merton first used the term “role model” in a Columbia University study of the socialization of medical students (Holton, 2004). Role models were part of Merton’s theory (1968/1949) of basic units of social structure, i.e., reference groups and social roles. He argued that individuals compared themselves with groups who held social roles to which they aspired, and these roles were accompanied by a set of expected behaviors which others might emulate in order to achieve their goals. He also suggested that role models are important for people as sources of self-reflection about their own values.

Today, the term is used more broadly to refer to virtually any individual who provides a good example of positive behaviors. Parents are early role models for many, and some PR professionals have argued that parenting models and parental leadership may exert far greater influence on our society than presidents or other national leaders (Thayer, 1986). The growth and spread of popular culture has led to diverse, sometimes controversial and often public role models today, from sports figures (*Be like Mike!*), to film stars and celebrities, to rock and Hip Hop musicians.

The word “mentor” is taken from Greek mythology and the philosopher, Mentor, who tutored and counseled Telemachus when his father, Odysseus, was away on his journeys. Mentor’s counsel emphasized the value of logic, ethics and relationships (Sosik & Lee, 2002). Mentoring today is often a professional and workplace concept: a mentor is “an influential individual in your work environment who has advanced experience and knowledge and who is committed to providing upward mobility and support to your career” (Scandura & Williams, 2004, p. 455). Mentors may facilitate socialization and sponsorship into organizational networks, provide opportunities for learning and developmental relationships, and enhance work effectiveness and career development (Sosik, Godshalk, & Yammarino, 2004).

Role models and mentors can be closely related concepts, and they are linked in some of the literature. A mentor, for example, may also be a role model for a protégé, demonstrating consistent and positive behaviors in the work place. But not all mentors are role models, and individuals may be influenced by a variety of role models inside or outside of the organization. What’s of primary interest in this paper is the extent to which role models or mentors in organizations: 1) represent sources of leadership skills and development in public relations, and 2) influence practitioner beliefs about leadership values and qualities. Though these concepts have been little studied in the public relations literature, they have been examined in transformational leadership, vocational, career development and management studies.

### *Transformational leadership*

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, leadership research experienced a paradigm shift with the advent of charismatic and transformational theories (Northouse, 2007). Unlike traditional leadership theories, which emphasized rational processes, the new approaches focused more on affective dimensions, e.g., emotions, values, ethics and long-term relationships, as well as followers’ motives, needs, and satisfaction (e.g., Bass, 1985; House, 1977; Conger, 1999; Conger & Kanungo, 1987).

Theories of charismatic and transformational leadership are broader in scope because they involve leader traits, power, behaviors, and situational variables in a dynamic model. Moreover, charismatic and transformational leaders articulate a realistic vision of the future that can be shared by subordinates. Organizational behaviorists in this area have shown that the benefits of such leadership include broadening and elevating the interests of followers, generating awareness and acceptance among the followers of the organization's mission, and motivating followers to go beyond their self-interests for the good of the organization (e.g., Bass, 1985; Beyer, 1999; Conger, 1999; House, 1976).

The roots of charismatic and transformational leadership are found in Weber's (1947, 1978) original work on power and authority, which explained the rise of modernity, capitalism, and bureaucracy in the West. Trice and Beyer (1986) summarized Weber's (1947) conceptualization of charisma into five elements: (1) an individual with exceptional powers or qualities, (2) a social crisis or situation, (3) a set of ideas providing a radical solution to the crisis, (4) devoted followers who are attracted to the exceptional person; and (5) the validation of the person's extraordinary gifts by repeated successes.

Conger and Kanungo (1987) suggested that charisma is an attributional phenomenon: followers attribute charismatic qualities to a leader based on their observations of the leader's behavior. Leaders who make self-sacrifices, take personal risks, and are willing to incur high costs to achieve a shared vision will more likely be perceived as charismatic by their subordinates. Bass (1985) regarded the idealization of the leader by followers as the most important feature of charisma. He suggested that transformational leadership focuses on developing followers to their full potential, i.e., leaders transform followers by making them more aware of the importance and values of task outcomes and by activating their higher-order needs. Transformational leaders, then, help create an environment of trust and serve as role models (Bass, 1985, 1990) who may influence the beliefs, values, behaviors and career success of organizational members (Sosik et al., 2004).

In their analysis of the bond trading scandal at Salomon Brothers, Sims and Brinkman (2002) found that the company's leader had reinforced an unethical organizational climate through his decisions and actions. The researchers concluded that leaders represent "significant others" in the lives of organizational members through the power and communication of their behaviors. Scarnati (2002) reached a similar conclusion, arguing that leaders bear a responsibility to model desired behaviors for the benefit of the organization and those they supervise: "Leaders model the standards, the climate and the expectations of the organization" (p. 181).

### *Mentors and mentoring*

In a brief review of the literature, Scandura (1992) noted that mentoring has been demonstrated to enhance work effectiveness, job and career success, and salary and promotion opportunities for protégés. Other studies suggest that mentoring also benefits the mentor (Kram, 1983; Ragins & Scandura, 1999), who may develop coaching skills, enrich his or her own work experience, and gain the respect and support of the protégé.

Mentors serve two primary functions for protégés: *career development* and *psychosocial support* (Kram, 1983). In the career development function, mentors provide protection, coaching, challenging assignments, career planning advice, sponsorship in the organization and a network of social connections. These support activities help the protégé develop professional and political

knowledge and skills and gain social visibility and recognition. Psychosocial support for the protégé is provided through a mentor's friendship, counseling, acceptance and confirmation of work, and role modeling of expected values and behaviors.

According to Grosjean et al. (2004), role modeling by mentors and leaders represents a "powerful communication mechanism that conveys the expectations, values and assumptions of the culture and climate to the rest of the organization" (p. 228). Research also suggests that protégés and other organizational members are likely to adopt the leadership style of mentors or other organizational leaders if they are respected and seen as ethical and competent (Bass, 1990).

Organizations also benefit from a mentoring system, especially during times of rapid changes in markets and organizational structures (Eby, 1997). Such changes are prominent in the work world today, e.g., globalization, pervasive restructurings, growing participative work arrangements, spread of new technologies, and so forth. As a result, employee career paths have changed: organizations are flatter, job changes are more frequent and opportunities for advancement are scarcer, so employees need increasingly diverse and portable skill sets (Hall & Mirvis, 1995). These and other alterations in the work place heighten the importance of mentoring to provide social, vocational, and role modeling support to help employees and organizations better cope with changing requirements.

### *Social learning theory*

Sosik et al. (2004) identified a number of theories that have been used to explain how mentor-protégé relationships form and lead to learning. These include transformational leadership, human development, leader-member exchange, personal learning, mentoring functions and social learning theories. Bandura's (1977, 1986) social learning theory helps explain how protégés and other organizational members may learn through the role modeling of mentors and leaders. The theory describes how people learn by observing others' attitudes, behaviors and the outcomes of the behaviors:

Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action (1977, p. 22).

Bandura argued that four conditions are necessary for an individual to observe and successfully model a particular behavior of another. The observer must first pay attention to who is modeling a behavior. Then the observer must retain or remember the behavior in order to, third, be able to reproduce or replicate the behavior. Finally, the observer must be motivated to want to actually demonstrate the behavior. In this regard, self-efficacy plays an important role: people who are confident of their abilities to model the behavior successfully are more likely to do so. Each of these four conditions may be complicated or affected by a number of factors, which suggests the pace and amount of successful modeling will vary among individuals.

Social learning theory suggests, then, that mentors and transformational leaders may serve as important role models for protégés and organizational members through behaviors they exhibit. Further, protégés and organizational members may successfully model those behaviors

to the extent to which they attend to observing the behavior, retain it, are able to replicate it, and possess the motivation to demonstrate it at some point.

Of course, not all mentors/leaders are positive role models. Examples of those whose behaviors are less than exemplary are frequently portrayed in the media. Sociological theorists have referred to this as “anomie,” a condition that occurs “when there is an acute disjunction between the cultural norms and goals and the socially structured capacities of members of the group to act in accord with them” (Merton, 1968, p. 216). Some people cannot consistently behave in line with social norms and values.

In addition, various factors render it difficult for mentors/leaders to consistently serve as positive role models (Sosik & Lee, 2002). Such factors include potential problems inherent in power imbalances between mentors/leaders and their protégés/members, undercurrents of gender or racial issues or differences, and organizational or professional contexts and structures. Despite these and other issues, the various literatures suggest overall that mentoring and role modeling may be powerful sources of learning, development and even advancement for organizational members, and they also facilitate achievement of organizational goals.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the literature review, this study examines the following research questions:

**RQ1:** Do public relations professionals view role models and mentors as valuable sources for developing leadership skills?

**RQ2:** Do role models and mentors influence PR practitioner’s beliefs about leadership values and qualities?

### **Method**

Some of the data collected in a national online survey of 222 PR professionals were used to assess the research questions. That survey (Meng, Berger, Gower & Heyman, 2009) examined practitioners’ perceptions about the relative importance of five dimensions of excellent leadership in the field -- relationship building, self-dynamics, ethical orientation, strategic decision making and communication knowledge and expertise. The survey also captured perceptions about the extent to which organizational culture and structure influence actual leadership practices. The overall goal of the research project was to develop a measurement model for assessing the most important qualities and characteristics of excellent leadership, and the study confirmed the importance of the five dimensions and the influential role of culture and structure.

A stratified sampling strategy was used with the survey to draw participants from a database of names of more than 50,000 PR professionals, which is maintained by Heyman Associates, a PR executive search firm in New York. To capture perspectives of more experienced and higher-level professionals, and to ensure diversity of gender and organization type, the initial sample was deliberately drawn and included 1,000 full-time PR practitioners. An email invitation was sent, followed by a reminder email one week later. Data collection was completed through the Zoomerang online survey service. Of the 1,000 professionals invited to participate, 338 visited the survey link and 222 (22.2%) actually completed the questionnaire.

Females represented 59.9% (n=133) of the sample, and males 40.1% (n=89). Participants overall were experienced professionals in mid- and upper-levels of management. More than three quarters of the sample (n=170, or 76.6 %) had worked in public relations for more than 15 years and were older than 40 years of age (188, or 80.2%).

The largest percentage of respondents worked for public corporations (83, or 37.4%), followed by private corporations (43, or 19.4%), PR agencies (39, or 17.6%), nonprofit organizations (27, or 12.2%), government organizations (15, or 6.8%), and educational institutions (14, or 6.3%). Ethnicity of the sample was predominantly Caucasian (198, or 89.2%), with a small number of African American (8, or 3.6%) and Hispanic (8, or 3.6%) participants.

Responses to two of the questions in this survey are analyzed in the present study. The first question asked survey respondents to “Identify the three most important sources contributing to the development of leadership skills in public relations.” Participants were invited to select responses from a list of nine possible sources, based on the literature, or to write in other sources. All but one of the 222 participants responded to this question, and their answers were used to examine RQ1.

The second, open-ended question that was assessed asked participants to “Briefly describe an experience or event in your life which strongly influenced your beliefs about leadership qualities and values.” Of the 222 survey participants, 119 (53.6%) wrote answers. The demographics of respondents to this question were similar to those of overall participants. The researchers coded these answers using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), whereby the data are coded, discussed, conceptualized, and organized according to patterns, themes and anomalies that emerge. These data were used to assess RQ2.

## **Results**

The first research question examined whether public relations professionals view role models and mentors as important sources for developing leadership skills. According to survey participants, they do (Table 1).

Table 1

*Sources of PR leadership skills and development (n=221)*

<u>Sources of leadership skills</u>	<u>1<sup>st</sup> mention</u>	<u>2<sup>nd</sup> mention</u>	<u>3<sup>rd</sup> mention</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Percent</u>
On-the-job experiences	63	61	38	162	73.3%
Individual initiative, desire	46	33	54	133	60.2%
Examples set by role models	59	43	29	131	59.3%
Personal experience or event	24	28	24	76	34.4%
Communication skills training	12	22	25	59	26.7%
Mentors, mentoring programs	4	22	28	54	24.4%
University education	9	5	6	20	9.0%
Professional development programs	1	5	14	20	9.0%
Genetics	3	1	2	6	2.7%
Other	0	1	1	2	0.9%
Total	221	221	221		

Examples set by role models were mentioned second most frequently as the first (59 mentions, or 26.7%) or second choice (43 mentions, or 19.5 %) of leadership development sources, and third overall (131 total mentions, or 59.3%). Based on the results, participants seemed to suggest that role models, on-the-job experiences and individual initiative and desire to become a leader are the three most important sources of leadership skills and development. Though mentioned far less frequently by participants, mentors and mentoring programs were nevertheless named by nearly one-quarter of participants (54 total mentions, or 24.4%) as being among the most important sources of leadership skills and development.

When combined, and we have discussed relationships between the two concepts, role models and mentors appear to be the most important sources of leadership development and skills, according to surveyed professionals (187 total mentions, or 84.6%). These two categories, along with job experiences and individual initiative, far outpace more formal sources of leadership development such as communication skills training, university education and professional development programs such as those offered by PRSA and other associations.

No significant differences were noted by gender, organization type or size, or years of professional experience.

*Qualitative results*

RQ2 focused on whether role models and mentors influence PR practitioner's beliefs about leadership qualities and values. Responses to an open-ended question on the national survey were used to assess this RQ. The open-ended question asked participants to "Briefly describe a personal experience or event in your life which strongly influenced your beliefs about

leadership qualities and values.” Of the 222 survey participants, 119 (53.6%) wrote brief responses, which averaged about 70 words in length. These responses were subsequently coded into categories that are depicted as simple frequencies in Table 2.

Table 2

*Influences on PR practitioners’ beliefs about leadership values and qualities (n=119)*

<u>Category</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Role models	53	44.5%
Mentors	16	13.4%
Crisis experiences	15	12.6%
Work experiences	12	10.1%
Education or training	6	5.0%
Epiphanies	5	4.2%
Life events	5	4.2%
Others	7	5.9%
Totals	119	99.9%

Most of the experiences or events were work related (96 of 119, or 80.7%), and role models (53) and mentors (16) collectively were mentioned by more than half of the respondents (57.9%). Crisis situations (15) and an accumulation of work experiences (12) were mentioned by at least 10% of respondents. Formal education and leadership training programs (6), life events (5), e.g., a military event, and epiphanies (5), i.e., moments of sharp insight or realization, were mentioned infrequently. Other responses included mentions of a specific book, the Tylenol case example and particular characteristics of excellent leadership.

Most of the role models or mentors who were mentioned were public relations professionals (33) or organizational executives (23), e.g., CEO or president. Parents, politicians, religious leaders and members of the medical and military communities also were cited. About three-quarters of the role models mentioned set positive examples, while the others demonstrated negative behaviors. Both apparently influenced practitioners’ beliefs about excellent leadership values and qualities. Characteristics of positive role models that were mentioned most frequently include a strong ethical orientation, vision, communication and decision-making skills, and empathy and concern for others in the organization, or among its publics.

Some of the responses were general in nature:

- I learned from watching successful and unsuccessful PR leaders. The successful ones were visionary and forward looking, always five steps ahead.
- For me, it was watching successful mentors and mimicking their behaviors.

- Exposure through work to excellent leaders with highly developed mentoring and decision-making skills and vision. Leadership requires a steady hand, good insights, inspiring vision and a superior understanding of the external world. Other respondents described powerful experiences on the job or in their personal lives with both positive and negative role models:
  - I learned how NOT to lead through a male director who used company resources and female colleagues like his personal play things. While I'm also male, I found this offensive, immoral and was sick to my stomach when I was compelled to bring these problems to light with the CEO.
  - Working as a press secretary for a Senator. I never saw the man side-step responsibility, even in the most adverse situations. He treated everyone with respect and dignity, even if they did not afford him the same. He also had a great ability to "cut through" the matter to clearly see the end game, even though he may have been in the middle of a mud storm. He trusted his instincts and his own character and, in turn, that taught me to trust mine.
  - At the age of 12, I learned that my local minister, a man who was my hero and role model, then, was having an affair with a lady in the church choir. It had a major impact on me and led me to distrust to some extent the words of all leaders. I came to believe strongly that actions were far more important than words.
- Respondents also described some experiences with role models that were less direct, but nonetheless influential in their beliefs about leadership values and qualities:
- Watching a client in another city operate—an excellent leader. He unwittingly became my role model for how to successfully lead an organization.
  - Seeing the Dalai Lama speak live in Houston, Texas and comparing his easy, unaffected and joyful manner to the typical manner of many CEOs.
  - Reading about what Mark Hurd did when he learned of spying on HP board members; he was open and honest and confronted the issue immediately.
  - Seeing how President Reagan was able to attitudinally lead the US out of a serious economic funk by projecting a belief in America, a belief in our collective ability to right our course and a return to a prosperous, forward-looking nation.

Many of the role model and mentor experiences highlighted specific attributes. These included open-mindedness and the ability to seek and evaluate ideas from all sources; giving credit to others; being enthusiastic; bringing out talent in others and creating a sense of shared risk and reward; upholding a strong set of values in every situation; and the power of warm, genuine communication with all.

### **Discussion**

This study examined practitioner perceptions of role models and mentors in public relations and discovered that they are sources for leadership development and influencers of beliefs about excellence in leadership. The findings contribute to a slim literature on leadership in public relations. However, they can't be generalized to the profession because the sample was relatively small (222), and it was deliberately constructed to capture perspectives of more experienced, higher-level practitioners and to ensure diversity of gender and organizations.

Nevertheless, the study provides some evidence that what professionals do and experience on the job, and what they observe leaders and mentors doing on the job, along with their own initiative and desire to lead, far outweigh other sources of leadership development and other factors that influence their beliefs about leadership values and qualities. These findings support social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986), which argues that people learn by observing others' attitudes, behaviors, and the outcomes of those behaviors. The results also support Schein's (1985) contention that leaders communicate values primarily through their behaviors, and, in doing so, they influence organizational culture and those they lead.

These findings seem intuitive, but little empirical research provides evidence of the value of role models and mentors in the profession, or documents the extent to which role modeling and mentoring are incorporated into workplace learning and development, or into educational or external professional development programs. Yet, if excellent leadership is crucial to the PR profession and its future, it seems important to examine these concepts more closely and use the knowledge we gain to enhance the preparation of current and future leaders. In this section we briefly sketch out the current state of leadership development in public relations and suggest some next steps.

The landscape of leader development and cultivation in public relations is populated here and there with a number of somewhat disconnected structures and approaches that may be grouped into three rough categories: individual organizations, university educational programs and professional associations. Some organizations, for example, have long-time internal development programs where individual or team-mentoring programs are formalized, and leadership development programs and extensive curricula help prepare individuals for broader responsibilities (e.g., Whirlpool's Worldwide Leadership Academy). These programs may rely on internal experts or specialist providers, e.g., Center for Creative Leadership, to prepare and deliver training. Participants volunteer or are more often selected for such programs based on past performance, future promise, or political relationships.

University education programs in public relations provide some course content related to leadership, but a quick review of leading textbooks, course syllabi and some current but incomplete research suggests that little formal attention is devoted to leadership in classes. On the other hand, as Pompper and Adams (2006) and others have noted, students may learn from mentors and role models through internships and campaign courses, shadowing exercises with professionals, team or club project assignments, and involvement in the Public Relations Student Society of America, among other groups.

Professional associations like PRSA, The Arthur W. Page Society (AWP), and the Institute for Public Relations (IPR) also may play a mentorship role by providing professionals with challenging association assignments, recognition for work, social networks, and professional and career development opportunities (Eby, 1997). In addition, associations deliver leadership development programs for some members or member organizations. These programs typically consist of two- or three-day sessions where professional experts deliver knowledge or skills training in various subject areas, e.g., new technologies, ethics, and measurement. The programs also provide social interaction time for participants to build networks and learn from the experiences of each other. These are valuable programs, but they reach relatively few of the more than 250,000 practitioners in the US today due to costs and capacity. Further, only about 10% of professionals belong to these organizations.

A number of roadblocks to advancing leadership also mark the PR development landscape. First, not all PR mentors and leaders are equal in capabilities and practices, and the real problem of anomie is ever present. Second, not all education and professional development programs are created equally, and the content and quality of instruction vary. Third, such programs are but moments in a long professional chain; once participants re-enter the workplace, they confront ongoing issues and responsibilities that may constrain their efforts to enact what they've learned. Fourth, the job marketplace today is dynamic, and professionals may or may not transport and use their learning into new positions or organizations.

Fifth, participants in professional development and education programs often evaluate the quality of their workshops and courses, but there appear to be few if any metrics to assess the long-term outcomes of development and educational programs. As Bandura (1977) noted, four conditions are necessary for an individual to observe and successfully model a particular behavior in the classroom, the workplace, a workshop, or other venues. Attention to, and retention of desirable behaviors are the first two steps. The other two crucial steps are the ability to model the behavior and the motivation to actually do so. We know little about the extent to which those who undergo leadership learning or development activities actually model or enact desired leadership behaviors on the job.

Given this brief and general overview of the current situation, we suggest three steps that might help us enhance and advance leadership in the profession:

1. Designate the leadership challenge as a national priority in the profession. This seems especially crucial at a time when public trust in organizations and the profession are very low, and new technologies, globalization, and the rise of new and empowered stakeholders are reshaping traditional communication practices and placing a premium on ethical and transparent leadership.
2. Create a national forum through which we begin to develop consensus regarding the key dimensions or qualities of excellent leadership in the field. We imagine there are as many definitions of leadership, and approaches to leadership preparation, as there are definitions for public relations. Some agreement in the field about what leadership is and means is a prerequisite to implementing educational or development programs.
3. Catalog and analyze existing leadership development programs--in associations, organizations, and universities--to identify content, delivery approaches, metrics, and best practices. Examine the extent to which mentoring and role modeling are present in such programs. This initiative might provide the basis for meaningful systemic change in the preparation of leaders.

In fact, we believe there's already a foundation for such actions. The AWP Society, for example, is populated by high-level corporate and agency executives and leading academics. This is an ongoing forum for information sharing and problem-solving by current leaders in the field. The Page Center supports research into ethics in practice and has produced a video series of oral histories of long-time and recognized leaders in the field. The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations provides grants and support for research into leadership and seeks to recognize and advance leadership in the classroom and the practice. It has produced a series of video interviews with 15 recognized leaders who speak directly to the topic.

IPR has long supported and led efforts to create and make visible research and measurement approaches that can enhance ethical and effective practice. PRSA possesses expertise in the delivery of skill- and career-development programs and the distribution of information and knowledge to thousands of practitioners.

Imagining the possibility of these and other professional groups working together to address the leadership challenge in public relations is a crucial first step to actualization. It also is an opportunity for current leaders in the field to perform an important role-modeling function for the profession.

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