

Can Leadership Competencies Differentiate Exemplary Performers from Typical Ones? A Case Study of the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program in U.S.A.

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This article presents a case study that examines the link between leadership's competencies and exemplary performance of Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program's leaders by analyzing opinions and perceptions of fellows who attended U.S. universities from 2005 to 2012. Since 1979, fellows have participated in the program sponsored by the U.S. government. The goal of the research is to document fellows' rankings of the program's coordinators and to examine fellows' perspectives of exemplary performance. Exemplary performance is "super performance," typically attributed to individuals who do things more easily than others do them and within which one has shown leadership and cultural competencies beyond reasonable expectations. The methodology involved was an on-line survey of 73 former Humphrey Fellows. Fellows identify leadership, interpersonal understanding and cultural competencies to account for superior performance. They also acknowledge these qualities as possible explanation for fellows' successes from professional development that followed yearlong participation in the program.

Keywords: Leadership competencies, exemplary competencies, exemplary performance

The concept of exemplary performance, or the notion of ranking individuals according to the highest standards of excellence, is not new in academic institutions. Often, performers account for excellence and sometimes become the distinctive indicators for high national rankings of institutions. Due to these rankings, scholars seek to identify which competencies produce distinctive or exemplary leaders (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). The current case study of individuals at U.S. universities examines leadership competencies that differentiate exemplary performers from average or typical ones. The persistent issue, eclipsing all considerations in this study is identifying the characteristic of exemplary performance: the connection between competent leadership and performance. This present case seeks to establish a hypothetical link between high quality, competent leadership and superior performance.

For example, common practice in academic disciplines identifies superior performers among

faculty, staff, and students who distinguish themselves by demonstrating exceptional and exemplary performance. Notably, distinguished professors are individuals so ranked by their peers due to excelling beyond established standards and exceeding reasonable expectations. Typically, several attributes describe exemplary qualities that differentiate a specific faculty member from a typical one, such as, an accomplished individual with exceptional contributions, demonstration of significant leadership in raising standards, or exhibition of excellent teaching skills which contribute significantly to education of students and subsequently achieves recognition for excellence in academia (Boyer, 1990; 1996; Gibson, 2011; UNISCOPE, 2000). An individual with these attributes is an "exemplary performer." Sometimes, the teaching profession bestows the moniker, "champions," on distinguished professors (Lemov, 2010).

Frequently, exemplary teachers let their light of excellence shine on the institutions

where they work. The criteria to determine excellence of institutional performance are different than those applied to faculty members. When ranking or vetting programs is according to excellence in contributions to society or for exceeding stakeholders' expectations, the task of determining exemplary programs is daunting and often based on *evaluations* rather than *perceptions* of qualities or attributes (Muse et al., 2000). The challenges for measuring exemplary programs lie in the discrepancies among standardized measurement methods due to the vast variety of programs existing at any particular time. Measuring all outputs with the same tools is impossible since different programs frequently have different missions, ranging from studies of language to cultural or economic development (Bureau, 2011).

These discrepancies prompt this case study's design for examining the link between competencies and exemplary performance instead of evaluating existing programs. A reasonable assumption is, therefore, an existing link between exemplary performers and the designated programs they serve or lead. However, uncertainty remains as to what the link might mean to a program or institution. Thus, this case study seeks to examine the extent to which excellence of leadership is linked to excellence of programs, and to do so, the inquiry draws on analysis of data collected by surveying former fellows and alumni of the Hubert Humphrey Fellowship Program (HHHFP) who attended professional training programs at U.S. Universities' campuses between 2005 and 2012.

The Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program

Participation in the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program (HHHFP) has common acceptance as an opportunity to leverage knowledge about public management and as a public exchange to establish the transfer of ideas and best practices across international borders (Gibson, 2001). The HHHF program serves this exchange since 1979, after President Jimmy Carter launched the initiative, in 1978, to honor the public service career of the late Senator and Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey (1911—1978) (Gibson, 2011). To date, over 5,000 Humphrey Fellows representing about 160

countries have participated. This case study is timely for identifying program's exemplary coordinators, and perhaps the significant lessons to be garnered, to leverage the program's improvement, and institutionalize successful strategies.

The State Department's Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs funds the HHHFP and it is one of the Fulbright scholarly exchange programs administered by the Institute of International Education (IIE). The program brings professionals at mid-point careers from designated countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East, Europe and Eurasia. These attendees seek opportunities to enhance professional capacities through participation in a specialized one-year (9 to 12 months) non-degree program developed specifically for small clusters of Humphrey Fellows. Each year in the spring, the IIE initiates two separate processes that focus on (a) selection of participating U.S. host institutions and (2) vetting applications to identify eligible fellows.

A solicitation for proposals from a broad range of institutions identifies interested universities wishing to participate. The IIE proposal-document outlines the program's requirements, the selection criteria, budget, program's guidelines, timeline for review and notification, and other relevant information (Bureau, 2001; IIE, 2012). Selection of prospective hosting universities occurs through a competitive process that awards participation in the program for five years. The basis of organizing competitions is according to specific disciplines with annual schedules focusing on one or two of the major fields. Despite the list changing over time from 2005 to 2013, the majority of participating universities are in the North East region. Selection is according to the institution's ability to develop specialized non-degree, interdisciplinary programs for diverse groups of 7 to 15 international fellows.

Second, the HHHFP's participants are competitively selected mid-point career professionals, visiting the United States to develop professional expertise and leadership skills for public service and intended to foster mutual understanding between the United States and other countries and to establish long lasting productive partnerships (Bureau, 2001).

Selection of participation requires the potential for leadership and commitment to public service in either the public or the private sector.

Figure 1 shows the regions, Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, South, Southwest, and West, the states, institutions (public and private since 1979) that hosted HHHFPs from 2005 to 2013. Despite the list changing over time, the majority

of these universities are in the North East region and selection is according to the institution's ability to develop specialized non-degree, interdisciplinary programs for diverse groups of 7 to 15 international fellows.

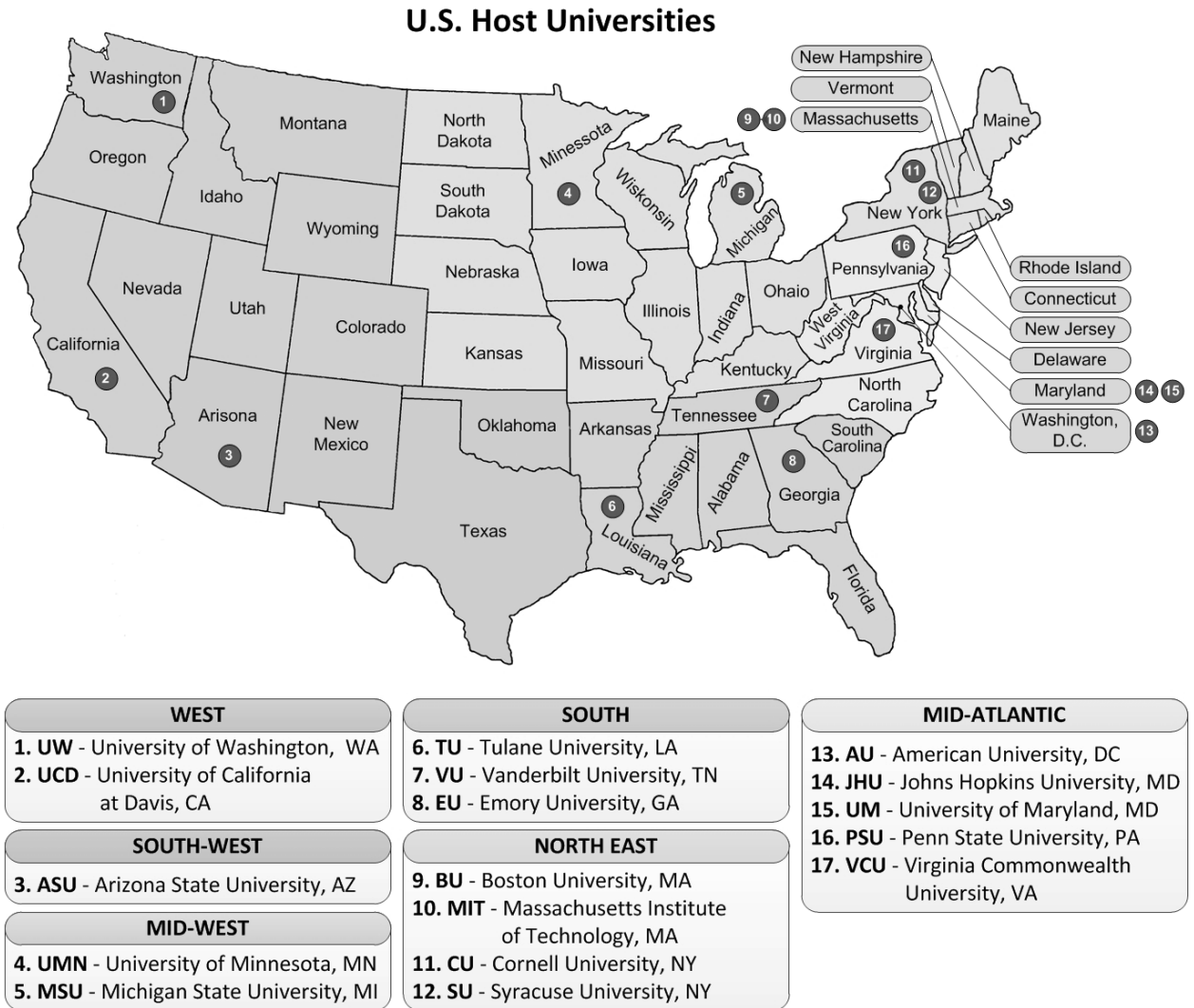


Figure 1. Location of Host Universities in the USA

During the past several years, HHHFP Fellows focused on topics such as food security, HIV/AIDS, human rights, climate change, education, public administration, and journalism (Gibson, 2001) (See Figure 2). The fellows spend considerable time engaged in professional

development: activities include consultations and affiliations with U.S. faculty and experts, field trips, workshops, research projects, and development of practical, useful strategies applicable to fellows' home countries.

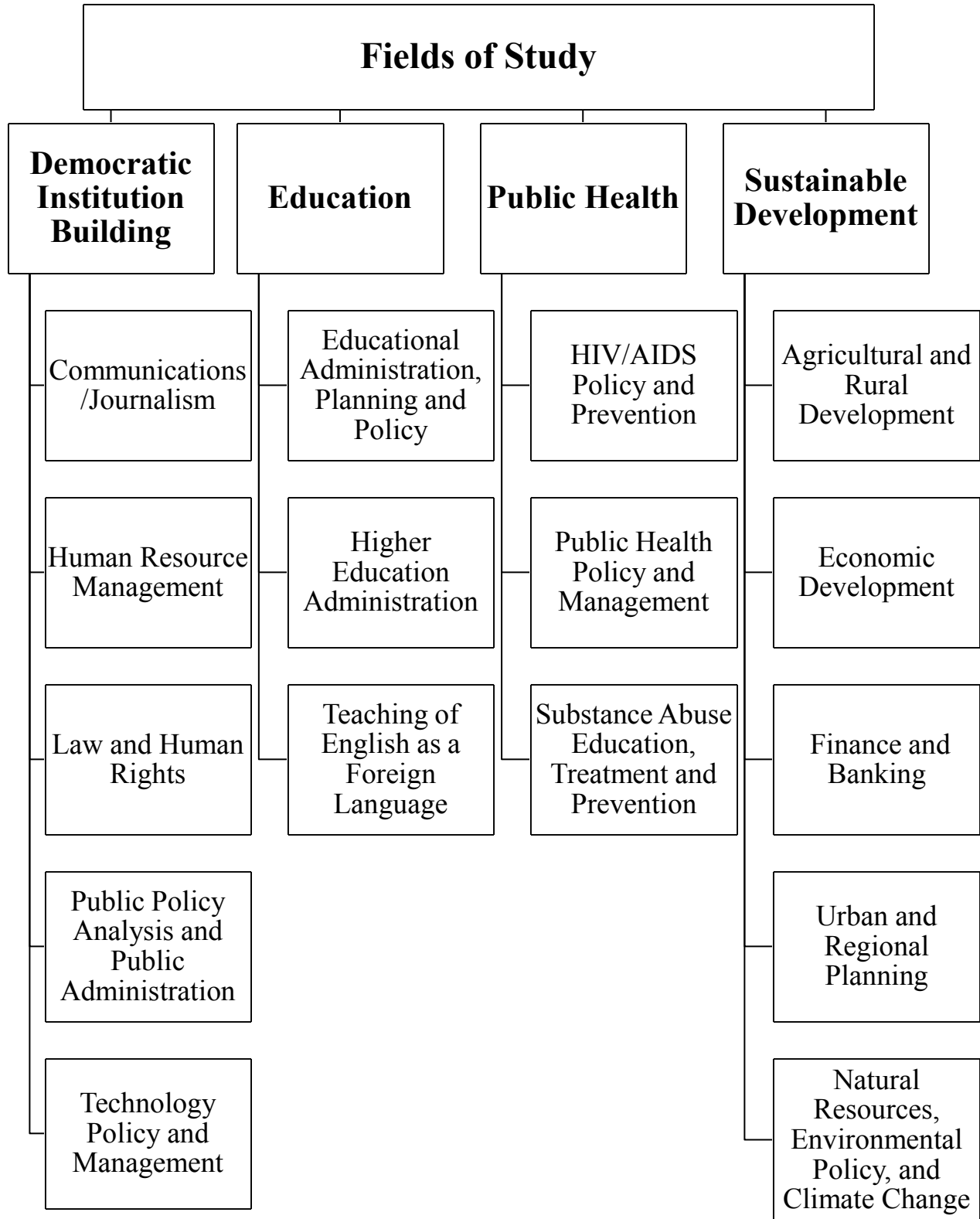


Figure 2. Study Fields for Fellows. Source: Adapted from Gibson, 2011.

Throughout the fellowship study at a host university, Humphrey fellows may enroll in non-degree graduate-level courses relevant to professional interests and in part fulfill their lifelong learning desires. For example, the 2010–2011 cohort, the largest in history, brought fellows to the U. S. from 93 countries, with 47 percent from the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Asia. Nearly half of attendees were women. Placement of fellows at designated U.S. universities coincided with fields of study submitted in the applications for participation.

Informal conversations with former fellows prompted the present case study of Humphrey Fellows' perceptions. These discussions recounted the complex dynamics involved in matching fellows' professional interests with program's goals, and the degree of fulfillment of expectations or disenchantment with the institutional culture of the assigned universities. Fellows described the usefulness of information received from embassies' officials in their home countries or the appropriateness of the program's website and brochures for matching career goals. These narratives are the motivation for the present case study.

Researchers' Positionality

This section introduces the context and institutional cultural issues pertaining to the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program. However, an appropriate caveat is clarification of the position from which interpretations occur. As Sword (1999) cautions those indulging in interpretative assessments need to consider some scholars' criticism of inherent subjectivity: No research is free of biases, assumptions, and personalities (p. 277). However, the confluence of descriptions, ideas and insights derived have the support of careful analysis and triangulation of data sources, resulting in elucidation of the institutional context, and in this particular study, the inner workings of specific issues surrounding "exemplary" performers.

As a result of personal experience as a Humphrey fellow during 2010 and 2011 at a research university in the Mid-Atlantic region and completion of the HHHFP, a well-established position allows offering insights into the inner workings of the program. Since 2005, further expertise for this study derives from

instructing and mentoring HHHFP Fellows at one of the Mid-Atlantic hosting Universities, and participated in the search committee tasked with selecting a program coordinator. The insights obtained from these two separate perspectives provide unobstructed access to perceptions of programs' insiders and outsiders. The accumulated cognizance lends authority for critical mindedness necessary to analyze the contested, subjective nature of leadership competencies, apparent from actual projects (Sanghi, 2007).

Arising from the characteristics of HHHFP's participants—cultural diversity, varied disciplines, and career professionalism, and previously self-reported data for extrapolating criteria to identify exemplary programs—the current inquiry seeks to determine whether or not former fellows recognized the contributions of programs' outstanding performers. Specifically, the current study seeks former fellows' rankings of leadership qualities or identifying coordinators whose efforts contributed significantly to HHHFPs, despite, perhaps, a lack of recognition. This study provides theoretical considerations, the research's methodology, and procedures for collecting data, analysis, and results. A discussion follows the results section and offers comments on lessons learned and implications useful for host universities and other stakeholders.

Theoretical Considerations

Theoretical considerations for the present case study involve potential connections between two key concepts: (1) leadership's competencies; and (2) exemplary performance.

Leadership Competencies

Competency refers to "a descriptive tool that identifies the skills, knowledge, personal characteristics and behaviors needed to effectively perform a role in the organization and help the enterprise (or institution) meet its strategic objectives" (Lucia & Lespinger, 1999, p. 5, cited in Gangani et al., 2006, p. 128). While this definition does not claim to be universal, no single standard definition for "competency" exists; indeed, the number of definitions is equal to the number of advocates for competent leadership. The issue of

competencies and their alignment with program coordinators' performance is pertinent to human resource personnel, whose generally accepted assessments range through selection, retention, and development to organizational strategic planning.

Parry (1996) offered a more detailed definition of competencies that refers to a broad variety of attributes: "a cluster of related knowledge, skills and attitudes that reflect a major portion of one's job." Parry suggested that such attributes might correlate with on-job performance, measured by accepted standards, or improved with training and development (p. 50). These distinctions are important for application of the multiplier effect of leadership's competencies, to benefit from leadership's competencies of experts, and to ensure accurate communications critical for sharing relevant education and training.

Parry further suggested while competencies have many definitions in the literature, overall, most of competencies embrace two common elements (p. 52): (1) competency presents an *observable* and *measurable* knowledge and set of skills, and (2) knowledge and skills must distinguish between *superior* performers (or exemplary performance) and other performers (thus implying a link between a leaders' competence and status as experts).

In practice, however, determining competency normally arises from analysis relying on interviewing and observing the *expert performer*. The analysis identifies key behavioral indicators for successful job performance. These behavioral indicators link to competency. In fact, management and adult education studies use the term "ability" often to mean either able to do or having special talent; while competencies relate to expertise and experience.

In general, a summation of competency is the state or quality of being well qualified to perform a task. A person gains competency through education, training, experience, or natural abilities. In referencing assessment of job competence, Klemp (1982) defined competence as "generic knowledge, skill, trait, self-scheme, or motive of a person that is causally related to effective behavior referenced to the external performance criteria . . ." (p. 42). Klemp distinguished competency from

performance in that competency is knowledge, skill, or trait that results in an effective performance; however performance is the behavioral outcome. Klemp views competence as generic and therefore translates to varying behaviors in different situations. Evaluation of competence is specific to the particular professional role and setting and requires a concise definition (p. 34).

Other studies consider managerial competencies and the appraisal process of managerial performance to be complementary. For example, Abraham et al. (2001) used a survey to investigate two general issues of appraising managerial competencies and performance: identification of a set of managerial competencies used by organizations to describe successful managers, and organizations' use of these same competencies as constituents of appraising managerial performance.

In today's competitive and constantly changing business environment, *models for competency* can assist human resource professionals improve the skills' portfolio and efficiency levels of workforces to match changing market demands and to respond to competitive business challenges. In such business environment, competencies probably most closely relate to "*abilities*." However, practitioners recognized that attitudes, traits, or personalities also play a major role in the range of competencies, despite not being normally observable or measurable. For example, McClelland (1973) and other researchers tended to group attitudes with competencies, while other researchers, such as Gerras et al. (2003) separate competencies by listing attitudes under attributes to create a *Capability Model: Attributes-Competencies-Performance Outcomes* (Gerras, et al., 2003; Northouse, 2004).

The assumption of the *Capability Model* is its reliance on individual attributes to trigger and provide the motivation for expert's performance toward high quality outcomes. The Model is useful for development of professional competencies to improve performers advance in careers within an organization. However, this linear conception of the *Capability Model* is not without its critics: It seemly lacks a common definition and understanding, and perhaps,

promotes *ethnocentric* perceptions (Sanghi, 2007). Notably, when considering competencies as a cluster of related abilities, knowledge or skills enabling effective activity, promotes the assumption that abilities are sufficiently significant to indicate knowledge for creative activity in a variety of situations.

Since each level of responsibility has specific requirements, competence can occur in myriad ways during stages of life or careers. Competencies' often encompassing attitudes creates the danger of a degree of specificity sufficient to promote perceptions of ethnocentrism, and consequently an atmosphere of "bias." Therefore, research conducted to gather opinions of leadership's competencies needs to be wary of these two pitfalls.

The current study adopts the general view of human resource management, in the United States and internationally (Athey & Orth, 1999) that competencies act as *predictors* of performance. Since one of the main uses of competencies is assisting the interview and selection of new employees, competencies are sometimes embedded in questions created to elicit responses from job-seeking candidates that reveal past behaviors, from the premise that a record of performance indicates fulfillment of future expectations. From a management perspective, competencies require serious consideration for training or hiring best-in-class (exemplary) performers, rather than merely training or hiring qualified or typical performers (Dubois & Rothwell, 2004).

By applying a systematic framework to evaluate employees' competencies, an organization may build a snapshot of the overall knowledge and skills portfolio of its workforce. An organization can also utilize this information to perform assessment to improve HR programs, including practices for acquiring talent, performance-management-training systems and the development of practices for retaining employees (Gangani, et al., 2006).

Exemplary Performance

In general, identifying exemplary performers and links between performers competent leadership are vague. Little available information identifies exemplary coordinators in the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship program. Despite the performance of HHHFP

Coordinators throughout the U.S., known for some time to exceed expectations, as reported by participating fellows (e.g., Bashir, 2012), few studies have examined the link between leadership's competencies and exemplary performance. A trend for identifying exemplary performance (Smith, 2008; Spencer & Spencer, 1993) in business environments in recent years has been to focus on training or developing (and hiring) best-in-class performers. The goal is to identify competencies that are above and beyond threshold competencies, perhaps necessary for a particular position, but may be linked to superior performance (Boyatzis, 2008).

In an attempt to establish threshold competencies that predict superior performance, Boyatzis (1981) studied managers and discovered a set of competencies that consistently distinguished superior managers throughout organizations and functions. Encouraged by success in identifying "generic" competencies, Boyatzis expanded the original study in 1989 to consider competencies for more than 200 jobs for which models of competency were available. Reports of models of competency based on distinguishing characteristics of superior performers, organized distinguishing competencies into clusters or groups. Each cluster contained a number of competencies and designated each competency with behavioral indicators or specific behavior that demonstrated competency on the job.

The work of Boyatzis (1981) and other researchers was the beginning for establishing models later included in databases that became the basis of a comprehensive compendium of competencies (Spencer & Spencer, 1993, pp. 10—21). To develop the compendium, a list of all behavioral indicators appearing in 286 competency models resulted in identifying approximately 760 separate types of behavior. Of these, 360 indicators defining 21 competencies accounted for 80 to 98 percent of behaviors reported in each model. The remaining 400 behavioral indicators described rarely observed competencies, called "uniques."

Models for competency in the database include technical/professional, human service, entrepreneur, sales/marketing/trading, and managerial jobs in industry, government, military, health care, education, and religious organizations. When several studies of a

common job exist, the database was used to produce generic competency models (e.g., jobs for health care managers, high tech salespersons, or internal trainer/consultants. For example, database probes can test for similarities among different levels of a job family, different types of jobs, or job studies from different environments). Competencies for superior performance in similar jobs were found to be essentially the same everywhere in the world

(see Spencer & Spencer, 1993, chapter 17). Spencer and Spencer (1993) identified 21 most common (generic) competencies that cover behavior in a wide range of jobs and can be adapted for a variety of applications (p. 23). Figure 3 illustrates Spencer & Spencer's competency clusters that includes two to five generic competencies for each cluster which could facilitate understanding of the analysis of the present HHHFP case study.

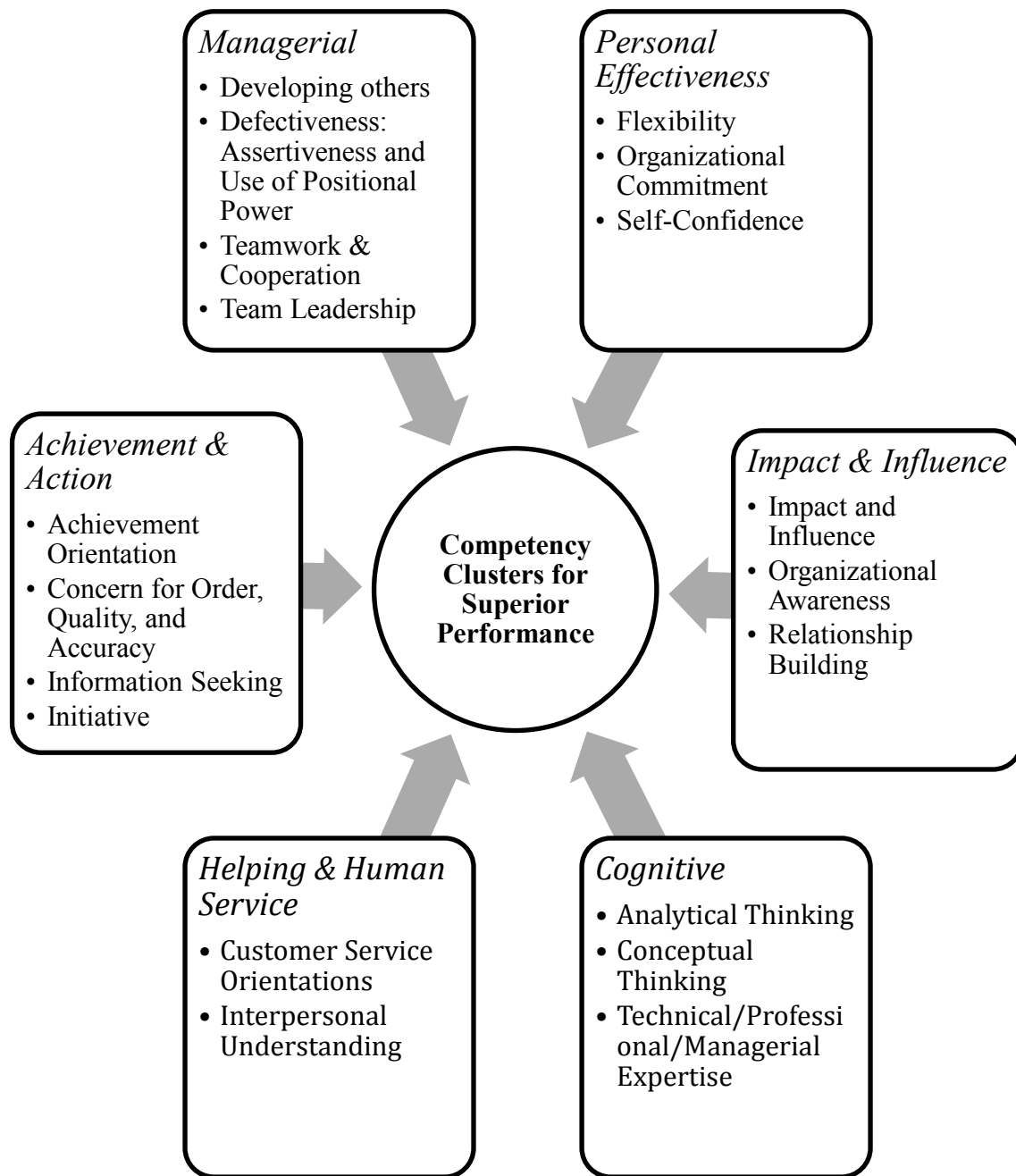


Figure 3. Competency Clusters for Superior Performance. Source: Adapted from Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 23.

In some way these competencies for each cluster affirm Gilbert's (1978) observation that high performance often consists of personal characteristics and motivations. He surmised:

Superior performers usually "don't work harder, know more, or are more motivated" (Gilbert, 1978, p. 96). Notably, exemplary performers accomplish tasks more easily than others. In

sum, Smith (2006) captured important considerations from a review of the literature to identify meanings associated with “*exemplary performance*” that illustrate the overlap between leadership’s competencies and exemplary leadership. Smith found that “star, top, high, competent, superior, expert, proficient, super performer,” etc. are synonymous (p. 445).

Studies that Account for Exemplary Performance

A study conducted by Xu and Davidson, (2012) that examined perspectives of exemplary teachers, identified several inter-related aspects of participants that accounted for success of the program. Some of the aspects are: (a) program host having a genuine interest in participants’ work; (b) scaffolding participants’ interests; (c) providing new exposure; (d) encouraging participants to take charge; offering multiple stances, promoting hands-on activities; (e) incorporating technology and involving the community.

These attributes of exemplary teachers raise important considerations for the present study: What makes a program (or institution) more successful than another? To what extent do performers account for such success—partly or wholly? How does a hosting exemplary program address participants’ interests and cultural diversity, particularly relating to instructional practices that resonate with participants’ interests and cultural dispositions (Seiler, 2001; Upadhyay, 2006)? What is the role of exemplary performers in this process? Since most participants are professionals, does the mission and vision of the program coincide with the mission and vision of hosting institutions, and how does congruence of both missions account for success of professional programs? In sum, how do exemplary coordinators promote Humphrey Fellows’ interests in professional development through ongoing scaffolding and guidance activities?

Based on the conclusions of Xu and Davidson’s (2012), perhaps one hypothesis is that an exemplary coordinator must also be an expert. The literature on leadership affirms that to lead is not about personality but behavior—an observable set of skills and abilities. Kouzes and Posner (2007) collected thousands of narratives from ordinary people to explain what great

leaders actually do to exemplify “personal best.” Spencer and Spencer (1993, p. 78) considered personally effective competencies to reflect some aspect of an individual’s maturity in relation to others and to work, share common characteristics. These competencies control the effectiveness of the individual’s performance when dealing with immediate environmental pressures and difficulties. (See also, Chapter 9 in Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

Despite differences in culture, gender, age, and other variables, Kouzes and Posner’s “*Personal Best*” narratives revealed similar patterns of behavior, which identify five core practices common to all “personal best” leaders: (1) They model the way, (2) inspire a shared vision, (3) challenge the process, (3) enable others to act, and (5) encourage the heart (passion).

Two important principles emerge from these core practices that clarify exemplary performance: Leaders foster collaboration and build spirited teams. Leaders establish principles treatment of people (constituents, peers, colleagues, and customers alike) and the pursuit of goals. Leaders create standards of excellence and then set an *example* for others to follow. Since the prospect of complex change can overwhelm people and stifle action, leaders set interim goals to allow incremental accomplishments while pursuing larger objectives. Leaders unravel bureaucracy that impedes action; and provide direction for those unsure of succeeding steps or how to proceed, and leaders create opportunities for success.

Leaders foster collaboration and build spirited teams. They actively involve others. Leaders understand that *mutual respect* is what sustains extraordinary efforts and leaders strive to create an atmosphere of trust and human dignity. Leaders encourage, making each individual feel capable and powerful.

Accomplishing extraordinary things in organizations is *hard work*. To maintain hope and determination, leaders recognize individuals’ contributions. In every winning team, the members need to share in the rewards from efforts, so leaders celebrate accomplishments, and make people feel like *heroes*. The lessons learned from Kouzes and Posner’s “*Personal Best*” seem to indicate an overlap with competencies. Notably, the

significant words include the descriptors: commitment, excellence, share that vision, exciting possibilities, mutual respect, hard work and feel like heroes.

Kramer's Social Work Exemplary Qualities

Another perspective of exemplary performers is through examination of propositions from studying exemplary teachers. Betty Kramer's "Social Work" suggested approaches that exemplary teachers employ (Kramer, et al., 2005). The highlighted qualities (e.g., clarity of communication, connecting with others, listens, enthusiastic, demonstrates concern) point to attributes of a performer who is an example for others to emulate.

Therefore, taken together, Kouzes and Posner's (2007) *common core practices*, Kramer's *exemplary teachers' attributes*, and Spencer and Spencer's (1993) *competency clusters for superior performance*, imply that "exemplary performance is not about what actors do but rather how they do." The qualities of "*who they are*" and "*how they do*" provide clues for examining coordinators—the quest for the present study, which examines fellows' perceptions of critical indicators that determine exemplary performers. The study seeks to discover how participants logically interpret of program's leadership competencies and if such competencies link to the exemplary performance of the coordinator. The goal is to show that for programs' coordinators to be worthy of the role, title, or value from fellows and university administrators, they must have qualities that others lack.

Gilbert (1978) suggested a need for reliable data of the nature of "*perform*," since past

studies relied on self-reported data to extrapolate criteria to determine attributes of exemplary programs and success. Thus, taking into account these propositions, this study hypothesizes that for coordinators to receive awards of HHHFP training grants for consecutive years, they must be exemplary. An outcome from the study, therefore, is to reveal possible misconceptions that permit assuming too much from exemplary performers without scrutiny or sufficient reliable data of how to *perform*—a situation Gilbert (1978) aptly cautioned.

Research Method

This study draws directly on data from an on-line survey administered to former Humphrey Fellows who attended professional training at U.S. universities between 2005—2012. While 1449 fellows enrolled during the seven-year period (See Figure 4). The survey, distributed to 73 fellows, contained 11 questions. The content of the questionnaire sought two types of information; (1) leadership competencies were captured by closed-ended questions and (2) exemplary performance, gathered through both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The goal was to obtain fellows' rankings of programs' leaders, perspectives of leadership's competencies and qualities of exemplary Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Programs' Coordinators. Additionally, the questionnaire sought demographic information, and through open-ended queries, individual's expectations from programs, and opinions of experiences and observations during the yearlong fellowship training.

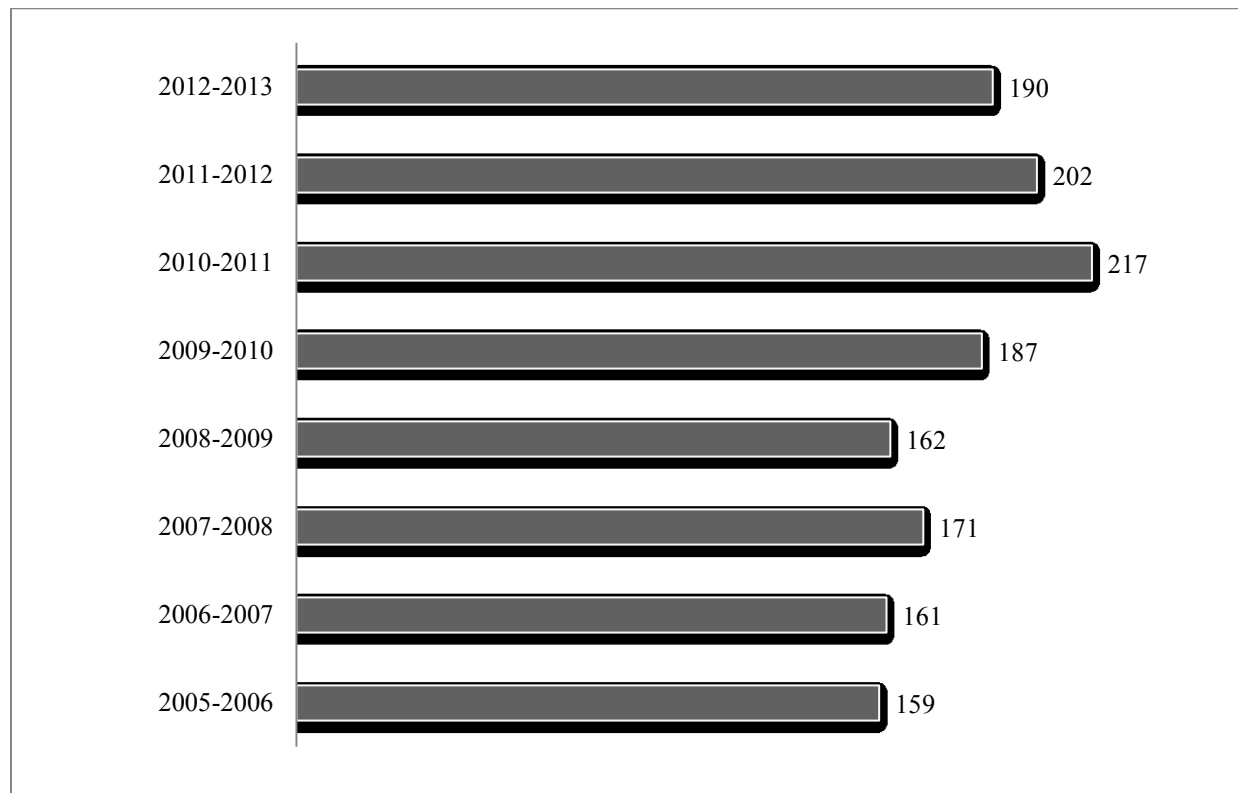


Figure 4. Participating Humphrey Fellows, 2005—2012. Data retrieved from <https://www.humphreyfellowship.org/>

Convenience sampling identified participants, through research team’s members’ naming possible former fellows. This method, supplemented by a snowballing approach, ensured reducing the possibility of overlooking former fellows. Since the Humphrey Fellows formed a tight network, the snowballing approach relied primarily on “whom you know” strategy, which deemed peer referrals to be most effective and appropriate for establishing trust among fellows for the research.

In addition, attempts to reach “hard-to-find” fellows, identified by the snowballing process, used websites of hosting universities for contact information for some fellows. Of the 12 fellows targeted by this effort to maximize potential response rate, only two responded. Personal experience as a former Humphrey fellow and familiarity with the fellows’ networks allowed initiating contacts and that personal association with the programs by way of introduction reduced angst and resistance of some individuals who were reluctant to disclose contact information of former fellows to participate in the survey. The strategy of contacting people through referrals and clearly describing the

goals of the study possibly increased the number of fellows from the cohort of Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Programs, 2005 to 2012, attendees. Choosing the eight-year period for this study is a result of a scan of the online Facebook network in existence since 2004.

Using Facebook’s social media to negotiate entry and to initiate contact with fellows e-mails to potential participants in 47 countries spread throughout Europe and Eurasia (23), East Asia and the Pacific (7), the Americas (8), North Africa and the Middle East (9), Africa (12 - sub-Saharan) and South and Central Asia (14).

These geographically dispersed professional fellows made the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program an appropriate case study for investigating a link between coordinators’ competent leadership and exemplary status of the program’s coordinator. The data collection took approximately two months in 2013. Overall, a total of 45 participants from 25 countries responded to the survey. Nine respondents did not indicate their countries of origin, but instead provided a regional affiliation. By the end of the first month, 36 had responded.

Follow-up queries, via Facebook and email yielded another 9 respondents. Twenty-eight did not respond. Nonetheless, the response rate was 61 (45 out of 73 fellows contacted). This response rate is comparable to studies such as the national telephone Survey of Consumer Attitudes, which generated a response rate of 48% (Curtin, Presser & Singer, 2005).

To reduce community bias, communication was with each respondent individually, and with respect for confidentiality the information did not flow throughout the targeted group or allow fellows to compare responses. A consent form accompanying the official request sought fellows' participation, explained the goals of the study, and delineated measures for maintaining confidentiality, anonymity, right of refusal to respond, and contact information for the research.

Two phases guided a study of a pilot survey: Phase 1 targeted a small group of potential participants, while Phase 2 included current (in attendance) Humphrey Fellows at two hosting universities. A research methodologist reviewed the survey's questions before and after field-testing. The final survey consisted of 17 questions, a mixture of open-ended questions (6) and close-ended questions (11). The questions probed perspectives of characteristics of programs' leaders, their abilities to help fellows address the challenges encountered during training and identification of critical indicators of exemplary program coordinators. The estimated completion time for the questionnaire was 10–20 minutes.

Results

Of the fellows who responded, 51 percent were females (N=37) and 49 percent were males

(N=36). Apparently, judging from the lack of response, the network used for contact did not reach alumni from the two cohorts of 2006-2007 and 2008-2009. Perhaps the void is partly due to absence of fellows' contact information or a refusal to refer colleagues from those time periods. Frequencies of respondents' perspectives were tallied, and analysis of responses to open-ended questions used qualitative methods including coding, response scales, and thematic analytical strategies. Since no other research studies addressing a comparable topic are apparent, selected variables reflect the research's theoretical propositions. Equally, carefully sifting Fellowship Programs' feedback ensured addressing important issues omitted in the survey.

Leadership Competencies

Table 1 presents participants' perceptions of the importance of program coordinators' work and their leadership qualities. The survey requested respondents to reflect on incurred challenges, programs' coordinators tactics for addressing those challenges, and whether or not coordinators were instrumental for fellows' successes in the program. Overall, respondents rated the tasks performed by coordinators highly from "very important" (n=32) to "quite important" (n=10). Equally, the leaders' effectiveness received high ratings, between very helpful and helpful (n=37) (See Table 2). Five individuals estimated the effectiveness of coordinator's work as "somewhat helpful and two individuals did not find coordinators to be helpful at all.

Table 1
Perceptions of the Importance of Program Coordinators' Work

| Importance of Work | N | % |
|----------------------|----|--------|
| Not At All Important | 0 | 0 |
| Slightly Important | 1 | 2.27 |
| Fairly Important | 1 | 2.27 |
| Quite Important | 10 | 22.73 |
| Very Important | 32 | 72.73 |
| Total (N=44/72) | 44 | 100.00 |

Table 2
Effectiveness of the Program Coordinators' Work

| Level of Effectiveness | N | % |
|------------------------|----|--------|
| Very Helpful | 23 | 52.27 |
| Helpful | 14 | 31.82 |
| Somewhat Helpful | 5 | 11.36 |
| Not Helpful At All | 2 | 4.55 |
| Total (N=44/72) | 44 | 100.00 |

Exemplary Performance

The findings presented in Table 3 provide insight for fellows' perspectives of exemplary performance. Table 4 reflects how these perspectives fit with Spencer and Spencer's (1993) clusters. For example, interpersonal understanding was flagged 22 times by fellows. The findings provide clues to exemplary

competencies. The survey showed *interpersonal skills* to be an important attribute to distinguish an exemplary performer from an average or typical one. According to Spencer and Spencer (1993), this attribute belongs to the Helping and Human service cluster, which involves meeting someone else's needs: attuning oneself to the concerns, interests, and needs of another.

Table 3
Perceived Exemplary Competencies

| Perceived Exemplary Competencies | 5 items that define an exemplary performer | Additional 3 items that distinguish an exemplary performer from a typical one | 5 attributes of exemplary performer |
|------------------------------------|--|---|-------------------------------------|
| Cultural Knowledge | 16% (N=14) | | |
| Developing Others | | 17% (N=8) | 12% (N=13) |
| Interpersonal Skills/Understanding | 26% (N=22) | 31% (N=15) | 32% (N=34) |
| Leadership | 23% (N=20) | 19% (N=9) | 21% (N=23) |
| Networking | 16% (N=14) | | |
| Planning and Organizing | 19% (N=16) | | |
| Professional Expertise | | 17% (N=8) | 21% (N=23) |
| Teamwork & Cooperation | | 17% (N=8) | 14% (N=15) |

Note. The data are based on the responses to three survey questions that are indicated in columns 2-4.

Table 4
Perceived Competencies, Knowledge and Skills Compared to Spencer & Spencer's Clusters

| Exemplary Competencies | Spencer & Spencer's Clusters | Spencer & Spencer's Corresponding Competencies |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| Interpersonal Skills/Understanding | Helping & Human Service | Interpersonal Understanding |
| Cultural Knowledge | Achievement & Action | Information Seeking |
| Networking | Impact & Influence | Relationship Building |
| Teamwork & Cooperation | Managerial | Teamwork & Cooperation |
| Leadership | Managerial | Team Leadership |
| Planning and Organizing | Cognitive | Analytical Thinking |
| Developing Others | Cognitive | Developing Others |
| Professional Expertise | Cognitive | Technical/Professional/Managerial Expertise |

Note. Source: Adapted from Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p.35-73.

Thus, according to the clusters' compendium, *Interpersonal skills* account for competencies such as listening and understanding, being supportive and culturally

sensitive, and having cultural knowledge, respect and ability to communicate.

Table 3 (See Column 2) summarizes respondents' appraisals of exemplary

performance, arising from a request to identify and *rank qualities* of exemplary performers by selecting five qualities from 19 possibilities that differentiate an exemplary performer from an average or typical one. The results showed *interpersonal skills* to be the most frequently chosen quality, followed by *leadership*, and *planning and organizing*. Other qualities included *networking* and *cultural knowledge*. In addition, participants noted exemplary performers are mentors, possess strong leadership skills, cooperate with subordinates, and display effective conflict management, decision-making, and negotiating skills.

Participants responded to an *open-ended question*, which requested listing three qualities important for differentiating an exemplary coordinator from an average one (See Table 3, Column 3). Each participant chose three attributes, which resulted in tallied frequencies with the highest attributes being *interpersonal skills*, *leadership*, *teamwork and cooperation*, *professional expertise* and *developing others*.

Interpersonal understanding includes the ability to listen and understand, cultural sensitivity (i.e., cross-cultural sensitivity in conflict resolution and a focus on the needs of fellows), cultural knowledge (a desire to know more of things, people, or issues), and knowledge of foreign languages. In addition, interpersonal understanding includes personal attributes such as being respectful, polite, patient, and tolerant. Respondents indicated the necessity to have effective social skills and life experience for a leader to be counted as exemplary. In addition, comments arising from this open-ended question suggested that the coordinator should be culturally intelligent, which includes a desire to become familiar with cultures and countries the fellows represent, respect these cultures, and appreciate diversity. Notably, an exemplary coordinator who effectively manages the social climate and creates a family environment was an important characteristic.

According to Spencer and Spencer (1993), leadership refers to “developing others,” “directedness” (assertiveness and use of positional power), “teamwork, cooperation” and “team leadership.” (See Table 4). Teamwork and cooperation include the desire to collaborate and the abilities to motivate, facilitate, and

resolve conflicts. Professional expertise consists of professional and managerial skill.

Finally, participants responded to requests for opinions of the competencies, knowledge and skills characteristic of an exemplary program coordinator. Table 4, shows the results with *interpersonal understanding*, *leadership* and *professional expertise* having the highest frequencies, indicating fellows’ ranking of important and perhaps necessary qualities for exemplary program coordinators.

Thus, according to Table 4, in all three questions participants indicated *helping and human service* and *managerial* competency clusters as those that accompany exemplary performance. *Interpersonal understanding* and *leadership* competencies were indicated as the most desirable competencies for exemplary performers in all three questions. Figure 5 describes what these competencies include according to Spencer & Spencer (1993).

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

This case study examined the link between leadership competencies and exemplary performance of Hubert H. Fellowship Program leaders by analyzing opinions and perceptions of fellows who attended U.S. universities between 2005—2012. Since 1979, fellows have participated in professional development activities sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). The goal of the study is to clarify fellows’ rankings of program coordinators and to examine fellows’ perspectives of exemplary performance. Exemplary performance is “super performance,” typically attributed to individuals who do things more easily than others and who displays leadership and cultural competencies beyond reasonable expectations.

Despite the fact that the findings of this case study cannot be generalized to other management structures and leadership styles, several lessons may arise. The results reveal that perceptions of program coordinators’ competencies include leadership, interpersonal understanding, and cultural sensitivity. As illustrated in Tables 3 and 4, an overlap exists for the conceptions of leadership’s competencies and the notion of exemplary leadership. A reasonably safe conclusion is that after

comparing survey's data with Spencer and Spencer's (1993) clusters of competencies, apparently an implicit convergence exists for perceptions of leadership and exemplary performance. Specifically, in Figure 5, the results show that for coordinators to be counted as being competent leaders, they must be experts in their professions and also must, among other

attributes, have interpersonal understanding of fellows with whom they interact and have the ability to network. According to the competency database, (Spencer & Spencer, 1993), leadership is about decisive, ingenious, dynamic, influential, helpful, goal or vision-driven, and results-oriented.

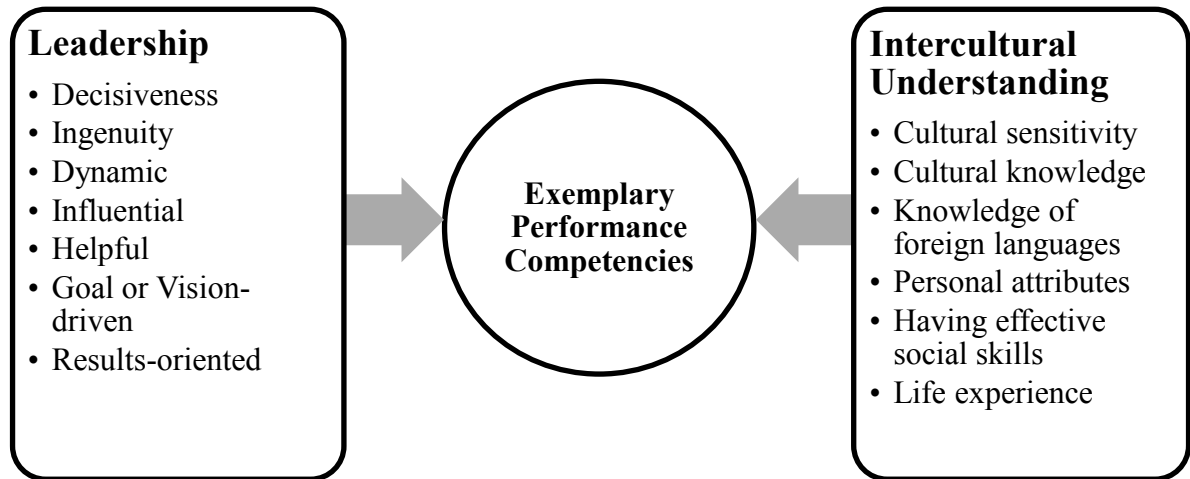


Figure 5. Exemplary Performance Competencies. Source: Adapted from Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 23.

In this study, a summation of leadership's competencies could reflect two specifics: expertise and "people" skills. In addition to people skills, the study shows that "cultural" competence is a part of quality leadership and in this instance; coordinators' leadership qualities were specifically instrumental in guiding fellows' professional training, the core mission of the HHHFP. In sum, leadership qualities and cultural competencies account for the success of professional development and effective participation. The results also show that Humphrey Fellows perceived campus coordinators as "pivotal performers" in the operations and success of Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Programs. The data shows that participants associate leadership competencies with exemplary performance. In practical terms, unsurprisingly, leadership traits and exemplary performance are often serious consideration during interviews for choosing employees who are best-in-class (exemplary) performers, rather than merely qualified or typical performers (Dubois & Rothwell, 2004).

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