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### Leadership Traits: an Analysis of Perceived Leadership Qualities in Law Enforcement and Work Production

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**Regis University**  
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LEADERSHIP TRAITS: AN ANALYSIS OF PERCEIVED LEADERSHIP QUALITIES IN LAW  
ENFORCEMENT AND WORK PRODUCTION

by

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has been approved

August, 2012

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## ABSTRACT

Leadership is immensely important to most organizations, and its development is a recognized key to organizational success. Leadership, as a construct, has been researched in boundless depth and has been a focal point to establishing increased productivity and success. Law enforcement has placed a special interest in developing leadership as it relates to performance, productivity and succession planning. Although leadership development is a seminal part of law enforcement objectives, it is difficult to implement clear strategies for doing so. This study examines the gap in research as it pertains to leadership traits and work production by analyzing officers' perceptions of leadership qualities which impact job performance. The study provides guidance in creating established leadership traits which clearly impact patrol officers' willingness to increase productivity. In doing so, the researcher collected data using a mixed method approach to analyze the leadership traits of sergeants as perceived by line level officers which most impact their work production. Grounded Theory was employed as a way to develop theory at the conclusion of the data analysis; and as such, the analysis is best examined through Social Learning Theory.

*Keywords:* criminology, social learning theory, leadership traits, and law enforcement

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## **Introduction**

The topic of leadership saturates our daily lives and is discussed in a range of fields. From presidential elections to sports teams, the construct of leadership has nearly developed its own lexicon. In fact, leadership is a central focal point for nearly all organizations that have a desire for specific outcomes or goals. This point manifests itself in the analysis of an organization's productivity. As a result of this, it is reasonable to suggest an organization's yearning for increased productivity is the impetus for preferred strong leadership in most instances. Law enforcement is no exception to this.

Law enforcement is also subject to the scrutiny of leadership successes and failures with regard to productivity; and as such, an emphasis has been placed on the identification and development of leadership traits such as emotional intelligence, cognitive abilities, conscientiousness, and discipline (Bader, Kemp, & Zaccaro, 2004). These tenants of leadership, and others, are a prominent topic of contemporary law enforcement research; and have yielded prodigious amounts of information related to best practices among police administrations. Although leadership traits and behaviors ostensibly have been identified, it is difficult for agencies to implement these cannons of leadership effectively throughout the organization (Shafer, 2010). A better understanding of specific leadership behaviors, and the application of those behaviors, within the framework of law enforcement would have a positive effect on work production, thus creating a better organization to serve the community; a shared goal for all of law enforcement.

The Arvada Police Department, located in Arvada, Colorado, is no different in its desire for quality leadership; and it certainly does not differ in its struggle to infuse quality leadership throughout the organization. The Arvada Police Department, like the majority of law

enforcement agencies, has identified quality leadership as a vehicle to better serve the community, increase perceptions of work conditions, improve employee commitment, and increase productivity (Steinheider and Wuestewald, 2008).

### **Purpose**

This research projects attempted to identify leadership qualities, as perceived by line level officers, which most effect work place production. The perception of leadership qualities were narrowly reserved to the position of sergeant, which is the most direct contact with a rank-and-file officer has with agency leadership and supervision. The term “production” is defined by the officers perceived willingness to be proactive as opposed to a desire to only engage the public when called upon, i.e. radio dispatched calls for service. This dichotomy of service is critical to law enforcement as citizen calls for service are a limited amount of the officer’s time on shift. An increase in production, as defined by proactivity, will contribute to the overall goals of the law enforcement agencies and will enhance the relationship with the community they serve.

### **Rationale**

Research dedicated to leadership as a whole is robust in many ways; however, there is a gap in research collected with respect to the application of leadership traits in law enforcement as they relate to work production. It is necessary to add to the limited research in order to clearly identify what leadership qualities, as perceived by line level officers, most effect work production.

This is prominently visible when agencies struggle through a work stoppage or slowdown, commonly referred to as the “blue flu.” Most of these issues arise when officers are

upset with management. In 2009, the Cincinnati Police Department experienced a “blue flu” issue related to unsatisfactory working conditions which resulted in 25% of officers refusing to come to work (Perdergast, 2009). The same type of issue arose in Denver, CO, in 2004, when officers were angry about the perceived mistreatment of an officer suspended from the Denver Police Department. Officers began a job slow-down, only doing minimal tasks required (Kelly, 2009).

Whether the slowing, or outright stoppage, of work production is justified is not addressed here; however, the relationship between line level officers and leadership is at the heart of the issue. Understanding what leadership qualities promote increased work production is formative to law enforcement development and curing of leadership within the organizations. Leadership is instrumental in law enforcement performance, and research readily indicates employees who are satisfied with the organization and its leaders provide a better service (Dobby, Anscombe, & Tuffin, 2004).

This research adds to the limited research devoted to law enforcement leadership traits as they relate to work production, specifically at the sergeant level. Because there is a deficit in the identification of leadership qualities which effect production in law enforcement, much is learned from examining what line level officers require from those in leadership positions. This research is valuable because law enforcement in total is vastly different than most other professions. It is a quasi-militarist occupation with many stressors which influence overall work production. While leadership may be just one component to the explanation of work production, it is a worthwhile matter to scrutinize.



## **Research Questions**

This study unfurled the leadership traits which most impact work production at the line level officer level by examining the Arvada Police Department in the framework of the following research questions: RQ 1, Do Arvada Police Officers perceive particular leadership traits as important to their work production? RQ 2, If Arvada Police Officers do perceive particular leadership traits as important to work production, what are those traits which most impact their work performance?

## **Delimitations and Limitations**

Limitations of this research are typical of qualitative research in that it depended on the openness and honesty of the participants (Babbie, 2010). This was compounded by the fact the researcher conducting the data collection is currently an acting line level supervisor. This was overcome by aggregate data collection, confidentiality, and the fact the research is not driven by the Arvada Police Department itself. An additional limitation to the study is participants may not be highly engaged in their profession, and consequently may not provide valuable responses due to an apathetic or intrinsically aloof attitude. Again, this was overcome by aggregate data collection.

Delimitations to this research were the access to the participants, as the researcher is also a member of the agency and had unfettered access to the sample participants. Also, the research is based on perceptions of officers without the comparative value of a statistical analysis of work production.

## **Definitions**

Work Production: The desire to self-initiate police activity, i.e. police work not related to radio dispatched calls for service.

Sergeant: A position of rank at the Arvada Police Department with responsibility for direct line level supervision of patrol officers.

Leadership Qualities / Traits: Behaviors and traits (positive or negative), as perceived by subordinates, exhibited by persons in the leadership position of sergeant.

Cognitive abilities: Intelligence; the ability to mentally process information, formulate decisions and actions, and to problem solve.

Extraversion: The quality of being gregarious and outgoing.

Conscientiousness: The quality of being thoughtful and considerate.

Emotional stability: Solidity in demeanor

Openness: Approachable and transparent in character

Agreeableness: The quality of being affable and congenial

Motivation: Having strong intrinsic drive

Social Intelligence: The ability to correctly perceive group dynamics

Emotional Intelligence: The ability to correctly perceive emotions

Problem Solving: The ability to work through dilemmas using pragmatic methods

Discipline: The demonstration of self-control

## **Review of Literature**

The research matter associated with leadership as a whole is very wide ranging. The expanse of available data, while worthwhile in the examination of the general concept of leadership, is not addressed here for the sake of the narrowness of the research topic. As leadership traits are germane to the research here, it is necessary to flush out the available material that addresses leadership traits as they apply to the desired effectiveness in organizations specifically. The following literature review will intently focus on leadership trait studies and supporting research, and the application of leadership qualities in organizations. The utilization of scholarly resources, news media, management texts, and internet data bases were applied to the collection of the review using the keywords: leadership qualities, leadership traits, police management leadership, law enforcement leadership practices and leadership theory.

### **Historical Overview of Leadership Trait Analysis**

The trait approach to leadership analysis is well traveled in the last century, and Northhouse (2012) contents it has its roots in the “great man” theory, focusing on innate traits possessed by prominent leaders of the past. Leaders like Alexander the Great, Mohandas Gandhi, and Abraham Lincoln are argued to have specific leadership traits that distinctly separate them from their constituency (2012).

The postulation successful leaders have idiosyncratic characteristics apart from followers has ebbed and flowed within the research community. Again, the argument leaders possess a certain set of skills which allow emergence has been tentatively accepted; although, it has been refined several times over. It was first diligently reviewed by Stogdill in 1948, by conducting an analysis of previous studies dedicated to leadership traits. Stogdill (as cited by Bass, 1981)

concluded that situational leadership was more influential than direct personal leadership traits. That is to say, different circumstances call for different leadership skills. To draw out this point, consider that the head of a criminal organization may have substantially different leadership skills than the head of a religious community. Stogdill suggests (as cited by Northhouse, 2012), leadership is a relationship between people in a social settings; and as such, relationships and situations can vacillate. A counter argument to this stance, and a poignant construct to the model of leadership trait analysis, are both the mobster and the pontiff possess common elements of intelligence, influence, and fortitude (Bass, 1981). Evidence supports the position that leadership is not purely a situational occurrence, but more so connected to individual attributes; and the trait approach to leadership is valid to the examination of effective leaders (Flippo, Jordan, Kemp, & Zaccaro, 2004; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991). This point will be expounded on in greater depth in the following sections.

In later studies, Stogdill resolved that there were common traits among those considered to be successful leaders. The refined list of qualities associated with strong leadership included responsibility, emotional control, intelligence, adjustment, extroversion, and dominance (Curphy, Hogan, & Hogan, 1994; Bass, 1981). Although Stoghill was less supportive of a pure leadership trait value for effective leadership, his research does provide a demonstrative association between personality and leadership. The connective properties of personality traits and leadership are further supported by research conducted by Curphy, Hogan, and Hogan (1994).

*We believe that a leader's personality has predictable effects on team performance. For example, leaders with higher surgency scores communicate more with their teams, which increases the possibility that the team understands its goal and the performance standards to achieve it. (pg. 16)*

### **Contemporary Leadership Trait Analysis**

Continued analysis of leadership traits has generated voluminous leadership and management models. The book, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't*, (Collins, 2001) received high reviews (it was even mandatory reading for the Arvada Police Department Command Staff) for its remarks about what makes organizations thrive. Collins takes pain to illuminate the charismatic, dominate leader is not always what is needed for success in organizations. This was discovered by examining businesses that were identified as having financial success over time. In fact, according to Collins leaders should strive for Level Five leadership, which is characterized by humility and personal will (2001).

In the same vein as Collins' work, Abrashoff (2002) compiled a series of leadership techniques and suggestions in his book *It's Your Ship: Management Techniques from the Best Damn Ship in the Navy*. A driving point Abrashoff makes is the willingness to give up control to subordinates and provide an environment of empowerment. This tendency for humility is supported by the outstanding performance his ship produced. Abrashoff, anecdotally, reports that his ship had higher moral, more sailor retention, and superior performance because of his leadership traits (2002). The book reinforces the construct that leadership traits have a direct effect on work production.

More evidence that traits matter in leadership can be found in examining the traits leaders possess that non-leaders do not. Research has identified traits such as pronounced drive, honesty, self-confidence, and knowledge, which are lacking in non-leaders (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991). There are core personality traits that contribute to success among business leaders, and which are found to be significantly lacking among others. This is reasonable and

evident in many organizations. There is a need for leaders to have an ability to communicate and compel others to strive for organizational goals and consider the good of the organization rather than personal goals (Murphy, 2007). This is referred to as transformational leadership, a valuable leadership practice in law enforcement, and which is predicated on the positive leadership traits exuded by leaders (Dobby, Anscombe, & Tuffin, 2004).

### **Leadership Trait Analysis Applied to Law Enforcement**

Identifying effective leadership behaviors and encouraging law enforcement agencies to accept the importance of good leadership practices has been a focus of law enforcement research recently (Murphy, 2007). This research has identified traits which best suits the law enforcement realm, and which may not have merit in other professions. Although common leadership qualities are equally important from one profession to another, law enforcement has a unique culture which requires a specific brand of leadership (Shafer, 2010). This is in part due to the complexity of the law enforcement culture – a mix of militaristic hierarchy and civilian principles – and because leadership failures in law enforcement are vivid and highly publicized. One must look no further that the exodus of police chiefs after a perceived failure of leadership including the Sanford, FL Chief of Police after the recent Trayvon Martin shooting in 2012.

The specific qualities of leaders are predominantly focused on positive aspects and traits. This is understandable and has produced several models of leadership training focused on what leadership traits to encourage and what behaviors will generate the best followership. One of the most widely accepted types of effective leadership is identified as Transformational Leadership, outlined by Bass (1985). Transformational leadership, in short, is defined as a leader's ability to motivate followers to transcend personal gain for the good of the group, or agency in this

context. This is accomplished by connecting with followers on a base level and emphasizing their importance as individuals and how that relates to the goals of the organization (Andreescu & Voto, 2010; Murphy, 2007). Understandably, the perception of value would impact the commitment level and work production of an employee/ officer. The perception of fair treatment and value by an officer from a leader increases work productivity and service (Andreescu & Voto, 2010; Dobby, Anscombe, & Tuffin, 2004).

Leadership traits that espouse to Participatory Leadership, while not supremely conducive to the law enforcement culture, have some acceptance and benefit. Authors Steinheider and Wuestewald (2008) conducted research into the area of collaborative participation within the police culture, and found that while Participatory Leadership did encourage greater commitment from officers, it undermined the authority of the administration and created a lack of accountability. Accountability is the cornerstone of policing, and one could reason that drifting from personal accountability is problematic in such a high liability profession. Participatory Leadership encourages the shared responsibility of decision making and invites subordinates to actively participate in the direction of the organization (Northhouse, 2012). A leader who exhibits qualities of Participatory Leadership may garner support from subordinates, but it is unlikely to be fostered by the agency as a whole because of the aforementioned issues related to it.

The study conducted by Steinheider and Wuestewald (2008), using quantitative surveys, illuminated officers who were subject to the Participatory Leadership were more productive and felt more committed to the agency. Ostensibly, greater involvement in the decision making process does have a positive effect on production. This is a seminal point to the research being

conducted here, as it will allow the vetting of the leadership traits associated with Participatory Leadership.

As previously mentioned, the positive attributes of effective leadership are well documented; however, juxtaposed to the positive behaviors are pronounced negative leadership qualities. These are equally important to identify, as powerful lessons can be gleaned from leadership failures (Schafer, 2010). An officer's exposure to poor leadership can have a powerful chilling effect on job commitment and productivity. Schafer identifies several poor leadership qualities in a study conducted using open-ended surveys which reportedly adversely impact police officer performance. The most prominent of which were: self-focus, arrogance, close mindedness, micromanagement, capricious actions, failure to act, and lack of integrity (2010). It would behoove leaders to self-reflect and seek to repress any of the aforementioned behaviors.

### **Parallel Research and Moving Forward**

Very little research has been devoted directly to the analysis of leadership traits as they pertain to police officer work production. Dobby, Anscombe, and Tuffin (2004) conducted a comprehensive study about how particular leadership was linked to police effectiveness. The researchers' analysis found, through a method of surveys and interviews, subordinates want their leaders to invest in them and make them feel rewarded for their service. This was achieved by leaders supporting staff, displaying high standards, and reprimanding those who behaved poorly, encouraging the development of officers, and being knowledgeable and adept. Also notable was the researchers' discovery of the negative traits displayed by leaders which impact performance. Laziness, temperamental dispositions, unethical behavior, as well as not correcting unacceptable



performance were among the negative traits identified. The study definitively states there is a connection between leadership traits and officer performance. The authors reported “...leadership behaviors regarded by officers as inappropriate, might not be altogether uncommon and that individual motivation and performance might be suffering to a significant degree as a result” (Dobby, Anscombe, and Tuffin, 2004, pg. 2).

This research provides a “jumping off” point for the research intended here. It probes the notion of leadership traits as they relate to performance; however, a more intimate look through a qualitative lens may provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of leadership skills impacting individual officers’ work production. It should also be noted there may be a number of officers who will work diligently and have a high degree of production regardless of leadership. This study flushed out the desired leadership traits which promote, or decrease, officers’ willingness to produce at a higher level.

## **Methods**

This research attempted to identify leadership traits exhibited by Arvada Police Department sergeants which most impact line level officer production. This study relied on a mixed- method approach of qualitative and quantitative data collection, utilizing grounded theory method (GTM) to process the data quarried. The use of qualitative methodology allowed the research to be deeper, and allotted more substance from the sample analyzed by utilizing surveys and in-depth interviews of the sample participants (Babbie, 2010). The use of quantitative methodology is purposeful in data comparison to established leadership trait criteria provided by prior research.

Deputy Chief Lynn Johnson of the Arvada Police Department, who is the patrol operations bureau manager, gave permission to the researcher to query the sample participants from the patrol bureau of the Arvada Police Department.

### **Method Utilized**

Babbie (2010) states the use of qualitative analysis allows the interplay of data collection, theory and analysis to be closely woven together; thus it is well suited for the study. Qualitative research also lends well to identifying explanatory patterns (2010). The intent of the study was directed toward identifying patterns, and common themes, of leadership behavior by Arvada Police Department sergeants through the examination of perceptions by patrol officers.

The quantitative data collected consisted of demographic information and also information collected from a Likert scale asking the degree to which a leadership trait impacts work performance, see appendix A. This was beneficial for identifying the grade of intensity a

specific leadership trait impacts work production, and it did provide a mode of measurement within a quantitative context (Babbie, 2010).

The specific use of GTM is appropriate because it provides a framework for the researcher to observe the sample and use inductive reasoning to develop theories for behavior (Babbie 2010). In this case, the researcher observed and identified behaviors of leaders and the perceived impact on officers' work performance. The utility of GTM is also substantiated because the application of established theory, specifically criminological theory, prior to the completion of the study is impractical; and, furthermore, the data analysis provided the foundation for future theory.

### **Research Design**

The participant sample was provided with a survey consisting of demographic information, tenure/experience, and closed-ended as well as open-ended questions pertaining to perceptions of leadership traits as they relate to officers' willingness of productivity, see Appendix A and B. The quantitative data collected from the Likert scale survey was measured within the frame work of the established leadership criteria, seeking to identify the most impactful leadership trait recognized by Bader, Kemp, and Zaccaro (2004). The survey was followed-up by open-ended questions further exploring the participants' responses to the survey questions. The data collected from the open-ended questions was coded according to qualitative data processing (Babbie, 2010). The coding was cataloged into patterns related to established leadership trait criteria provided by Bader, Kemp, and Zaccaro (2004), see Appendix C.

The dependent variable is the officers' perceptions of leadership traits and the impact on work productivity by line level officers at the Arvada Police Department. The utility of this

dependent variable is promoted by a desire for high productivity within police agencies, specifically the Arvada Police Department, and because work performance/productivity is a highly scrutinized topic in related research.

The independent variables in the context of this study are the actual leadership traits demonstrated by the sergeants of the Arvada Police Department. The use of leadership traits as independent variables was supported by prior research devoted to similar studies (Anscombe, Dobby, & Tuffin 2004; Bass, 1985; Gorgan, Hogan & Hogan, 1994; Bader, Kemp & Zaccaro, 2004).

### **Sample**

The study used nonprobability, purposive sampling. Purposive sampling allows knowledge of a subset of a group to drive the design of the data collection device, in this case a survey and follow-up interview (Babbie, 2010). Additionally, because this study was qualitative in nature, the utility of purposive sampling is supported by prior research design (2010).

The participant sample was collected from the sample frame of the patrol bureau of the Arvada Police Department. The sample was representative of the sample frame, and as such, the sample size was targeted at 12 participants; however, only eight returned surveys (Babbie, 2010). This number consists of nearly 13% of the total officers working at the patrol level– the APD has a total of 166 sworn officers including special assignments, administrations and detectives. The patrol bureau has approximately 60 patrol officers working under the auspices of sergeants. The targeted sample size provided a quality overview of the general Arvada Police Department patrol bureau, thus giving credence to the conclusions drawn from the research. The reliability of the study was not contingent upon the sample size, but rather the openness of the participants.

**Measurement**

The data collected and coded was measured against established criteria of recognized leadership traits provided by researchers Bader, Kemp, and Zaccaro (2004). The traits are as follows: cognitive abilities, extraversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability, openness, agreeableness, motivation, social intelligence, self-monitoring, emotional intelligence, and problem solving. Using the pattern established by coding the data, the researcher was able to measure the established leadership traits against the officers' willingness for productivity as related to leadership traits. Analysis of the measurement provided a clear indication of what leadership traits most effect officers work production.

## **Results**

The results of the research were robust; although, only eight surveys were returned completed. Other officers were asked to participate but failed to return a completed survey. The reasons for this are suggestive of all data collection which requires voluntary participation. Babbie (2010) contends qualitative data collection, of which this research is in part, is susceptible the weaknesses of the individual participant. Participants may not be forthcoming, they may intentionally deceive or provide false information, or, in this case, they may not participate at all. None the less, the data that was collected in this research is full-bodied and valuable in the pursuit of the research goal of better understanding law enforcement leadership traits as they relate to work performance.

### **Demographics**

Of the eight participants, two were female, and six were male. All the participants chose to record their gender on the survey. The age range was 24 years old to 60 years old, and the average age for all the participants was 34. The years in law enforcement varied from one year to 36 years, the average of which was 10 years. Only two participants had prior law enforcement experience before coming to the Arvada Police Department.

The demographic information collected provided a solid cross-sectional look at the Arvada Police department as a whole. The ratio of male officers to female officers who participated in the research is very similar to the ratio among the patrol bureau, and very close to the national average of 1 female to every 8 males (retrieved on July 30, 2012 from: [http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov /index.cfm?ty=t p&tid=71](http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=t p&tid=71)). Additionally, the average tenure of the participants is

reflective of the department as a whole; notwithstanding one participant who has 36 years of experience.

### **Close ended-question responses**

All of the participants answered yes to question number 1 (Appendix A), indicating the leadership traits of their sergeant matters to them. All but one officer responded yes to question 2, asking if their work production was impacted by who their sergeant was. This seems to be consistent with research suggesting leadership trait analysis is valid (Stoghill, 1948; Bass, 1981).

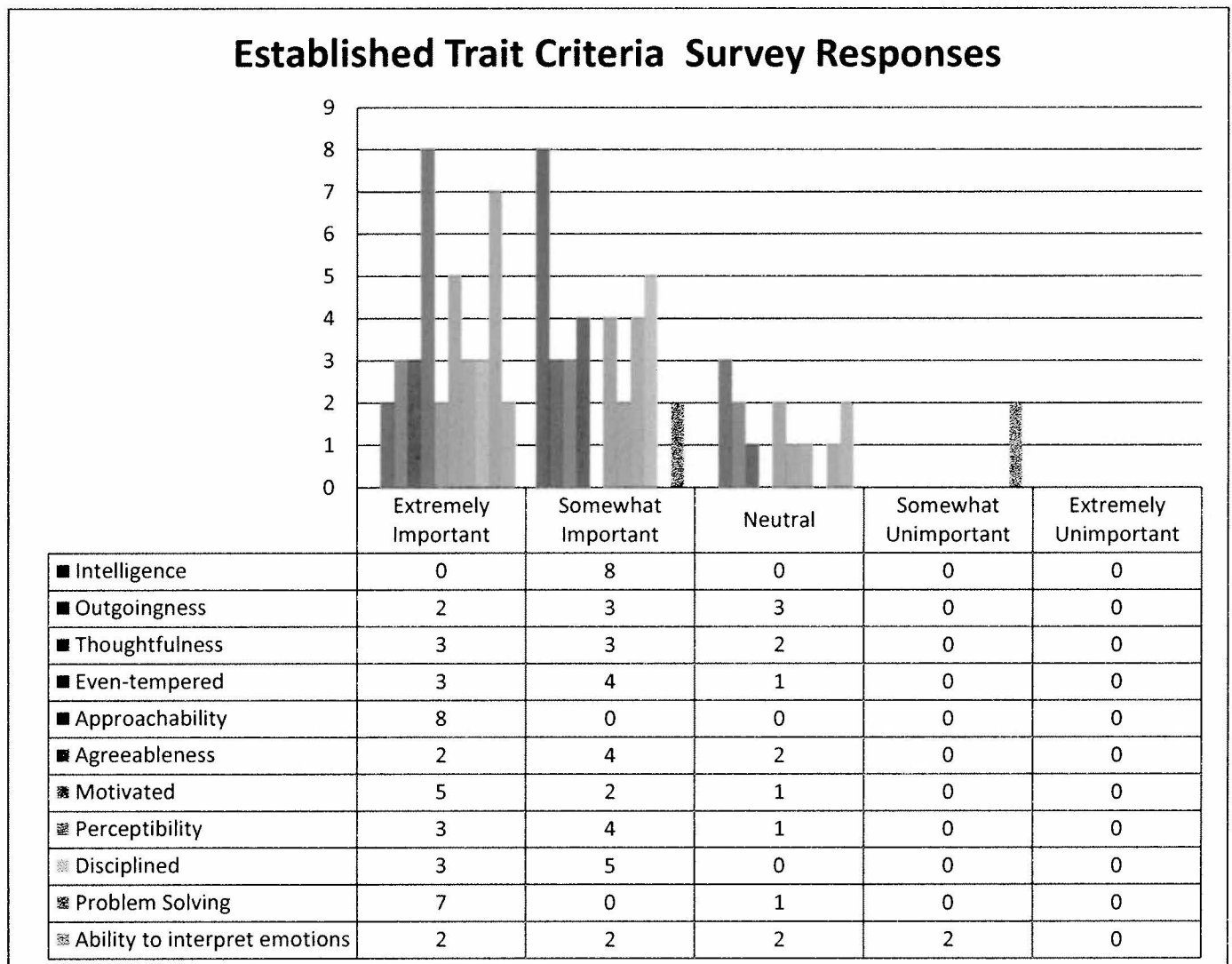
Only one officer answered “no” to question 3, asking if the officer was more willing to engage in self-initiated activity if the sergeant’s leadership style was agreeable to them. It should be noted the officer who answered “no” to question 2 was not the same officer who answered “no” to question 3.

Question 4 asked if officers would intentionally decrease self-initiated work production if the sergeant’s leadership traits were disagreeable to them. Five of the participants answered definitively “no”, while one other participant answered “yes.” Two other participants answered in less pithy terms. One participant answered “under some circumstances,” and another answered “No, but not willing to work as hard” in effect answering “yes” to the question.

The 5<sup>th</sup> question asked the participants to rank eleven established leadership trait criteria using a Likert scale range of (1) extremely important (2) somewhat important (3) neutral (4) somewhat unimportant and (5) extremely unimportant. The established leadership criteria, as defined by Bader, Kemp, Zaccaro (2004), was listed in a table as follows: intelligence, outgoing, thoughtfulness, even-tempered, approachability, agreeableness, motivated, perceptibility of team dynamics, disciplined, ability to interpret emotions, and problem solving. The terms were

slightly modified in the survey for the sake of readability and the ease of understanding; however, the responses were coded in a manner consistent with the established criteria provided by prior research conducted by Bader, Kemp, and Zaccaro (2004). Table 1 represents the responses to the established leadership criteria. The only trait which was categorically selected as extremely important was “approachability.” “Intelligence” was categorically selected by the officers as somewhat important. The only trait which received a rating of somewhat unimportant or below was “ability to interpret emotions.”

Table1





### **Open-ended question responses**

Qualitative research provides a deeper understanding of the data collected and can unfurl information a sheer quantitative study may miss (Babbie, 2010). This research project is no different in that aspect, and the data collected in the qualitative research does provide further insight into the impact leadership traits have on officers. The open-ended questions (see Appendix B) were designed to follow-up on the responses to the aforementioned close-ended questions. The researcher evaluated the responses to the open-ended questions and coded the responses into the established leadership trait criteria, see Appendix C. The process of coding relied upon a pattern analysis of the responses, and used common language which would indicate categorization into the established trait criteria. During the analysis of responses a clear, but unexpected, pattern emerged which is not addressed by the established leadership trait criteria. This pattern, identified as a desire for “support,” was common among officers sampled. This will be expounded on more in the forthcoming paragraphs.

Eight out of eight participants answered “yes” to closed-ended question 1 on the survey; consequently not requiring them to answer open-ended question 1, which asks for an explanation of why sergeant leadership traits do not matter to them. Although not one participant would be required to address this question by virtue of the close-ended question response, four of the participants did provide an answer to open-ended question 1. Two participants provided answers in contrast to their responses to close-ended question 1. One stated “...despite the ‘wants’ of my supervisor, I continue with what has worked for me,” and another reported “My own drive motivates me to be the best I can.” Two other participants who provided an answer did not directly address the question, but rather restated the value of a “motivational” sergeant, and the desired qualities they have for a supervisor. It is unclear if the responses to open-ended question

1 were intentional or if the participants failed to read the question carefully. The information provided by the four subjects that answered open-ended question 1 speaks to RQ1; suggesting that sergeant leadership traits may not matter in some instances.

The participants' responses to open-ended questions 2 through 4 provide some patterns of language related to the established leadership trait criteria; although, as mentioned, "support" as a leadership trait surfaced as more robust language pattern.

The language patterns that do arise which speak to the established leadership criteria were somewhat anemic. In addressing open-ended question 2, which asks if work production is impacted by the participants' sergeant, only one participant directly reported a supervisor being "even-tempered" and "approachable" as being a factor for work production. One other participant reported "motivation" as a factor for work production. The other participants reported a variety of other factors that impacted work production. 25 percent of participant's reported "trust" as being important to work production, and 25 percent reported "micro-managing" supervisors would negatively impact their work production. One participant stated they would tailor their work production to the desire of the supervisor but made no mention on what impacts the work production itself.

The clearest pattern of responses emerged in the evaluation of open-ended question 3, which directly addresses RQ 2. Question 3 asks if self-initiated activity is impacted by the sergeant's leadership traits. Similar to question 2, there was not a clear pattern which addressed the established leadership criteria; however, a prominent pattern of desired "support" from the officers' sergeant materialized. 75 percent of the participants reported "support" from the sergeant as being impactful on self-initiated activity. "Support" was both tacitly mentioned as

well as directly mentioned as important to an officer's willingness to engage in self-initiated activity. One participant reported if a sergeant is "positive, supportive, and motivated, it inspires you to be proactive." Another stated "a sergeant who supports their officers and chalks mistakes up to a learning experience is a good leader." A different officer reported "if troops think that they will be 'written-up' for making honest mistakes then they won't do anything to cause problems."

Open-ended question 4 asks participants if they would intentionally slow down their work production if their sergeant's leadership characteristics were disagreeable to them. Half of the respondents reported they would slow their work production, and, again, "support" was a factor in the response. One officer reported "Support your troops when they do well and this will improve their work product." Another officer reported if they thought they did not have the support of their sergeant during citizen complaints they would avoid doing more self-initiated activity. One participant answered the question "no," but went on to explain they would have "hesitation" to engage in self-initiated activity if they had an unsupportive sergeant.

The participants who directly answered "no" to question 4 cited reasons such as an intrinsic desire to work hard and the simple joy the job as reasons to not intentionally slow down their work production. Two participants simply answered "no" with no further explanation.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The research conducted was intended to add to the limited data compiled about the impact of leadership traits on police officer work production. In doing so, this study set out to answer two research questions: RQ1, Do Arvada Police Officers perceive particular leadership traits as important to their work production? RQ 2, If Arvada Police Officers do perceive particular leadership traits as important to work production, what are those traits which most impact their work performance? The research yielded some expected results anticipated by professional experience and law enforcement knowledge; however, data materialized which was novel and supports the importance of this study for the criminological field. The results of the research here in conjunction with the prior research cited in the literature review provides future studies with a positive foothold on the seminal topic of leadership traits and police work production.

The officers who participated represent 13 percent of the patrol officers working in the Arvada Police department. This sample is small; however, the consistency in responses, the aggregate nature of the study, and the qualitative sampling, lends credence to the results obtained. Many more officers were asked to participate, but declined. This may be the result of the timing of the research, as the patrolmen have been asked to participate in other surveys not related to academic research. Survey fatigue could have hampered the willingness to participate in the study.

### **Close-ended question result analysis**

Every participant answered “yes” to question 1 indicating sergeant leadership traits are important to the officers. This response is also supported by the data collected and analyzed in

the literature review for this study, further validating research dedicated to leadership trait analysis (Anscombe, Dobby, Tuffin, 2004; Schafer, 2010). All but one officer responded “yes” to questions 2, asking if officer work production was impacted by the officer’s sergeant. Similarly, all but one officer answered “yes” to question 3, asking if the officer was more willing to engage self-initiated activity if the sergeant’s leadership style was agreeable to them. This is important because development of agreeable leadership would ostensibly increase work production. The results of question 4, asking if officers would intentionally slow work production if the sergeant’s leadership style was disagreeable, were somewhat predictable. Only three respondents stated yes. Most officers are not willing to sacrifice public safety even if they disagree with supervision. This is further supported by the infrequency of “blue flu” incidences.

RQ 1 is partially addressed in the evaluation of closed-ended questions 1 through 4 in combination; the results of which clearly conclude leadership traits matter, and work production is impacted by the sergeant. The relationship between work production, the sergeant position, and leadership traits is robust.

Question 5 of the close-ended questions addressed which of the established leadership traits impact work production by allowing participants to rate the importance of the trait using a Likert scale. The results, indicated in table 1, clearly show officers prefer sergeants to be intelligent, approachable and able to problem solve. The desire for intelligence and problem solving ability are understandable because of the technical knowledge required of sergeants and because the position itself requires individuals to provide direction and assistance to patrol officers. The officers’ rating of approachability as an important trait was somewhat unexpected. Approachability is a quality that is much more particular and is not as identifiable as other qualities such as intelligence or discipline. However, it would reason approachability is a

coveted leadership trait among the Arvada Police Department patrol officers because the sergeant has daily contact with the officers and has a greater degree of interaction with them; much more than say a commander or a chief. Intelligence, problem solving and approachability were prominently more important to the officers than were the other leadership traits.

### **Open-ended question result analysis**

The nature of qualitative research allows for a deeper understanding of the data collected, and this postulation held true for the examination of the open-ended questions. The intent at the outset was to collect data that could be easily coded into the already established leadership trait criteria. What occurred during the evaluation of the open-ended questions was the emergence of a distinct pattern of “support” as an impactful leadership trait for a sergeant as it relates to work performance. In fact, few of the officers responded in specific term related to the established leadership criteria; stating “motivation” and having being “even-tempered” were impactful on work performance. The majority of officers either directly spoke about the value of support or provided narrative which tacitly spoke to support as impactful on work production.

Support from the sergeant, according to the officers’ responses, may come in several forms; be it during citizen complaints or positive reinforcement for their work product. Perhaps the most interesting point about the notion of support is that it may be to the detriment of the agency if the sergeant is too supportive, i.e. investigations in use of force, or citizen complaints. Clearly, officers see support from the sergeant as important to self-initiated work production. This is supported by the study conducted by Anscombe, Dobby, and Tuffin (2004) cited in the literature review herein.

The analysis of the close-ended questions, in combination with the open-ended questions, readily identify intelligence, approachability, ability to problem solve, and support as the key tenants to answering RQ 2. RQ 2 asks: if Arvada Police Officers do perceive particular leadership traits as important to work production, what are those traits which most impact their work performance? This is further validates leadership traits studies conducted by Stogdill (1948) and Bass (1981) referenced in this research.

### **Limitations to conclusions / alternative explanations**

Limitations to this conclusion may be the bias in the analysis of the open-ended questions, as the researcher may interpret language to mean one thing but it was intended to mean something differently. The use of Grounded Theory Method provides a means to gather and code data; however, it can give opportunity for bias. This study may suffer from innate qualitative research weaknesses. Additionally, there may be other reasons for the officers' to respond so emphatically that the leadership traits of approachability and support are impactful to work production. Within the last two years the Arvada Police Department suffered from a wide ranging internal affairs investigation that impacted a significant amount of the patrol officers. It would be reasonable to suggest that there was a pervasive feeling that the administration, including the sergeants, was unsupportive and unapproachable during the extended investigation. This limitation is somewhat diluted by the support of prior research conducted on this topic which has provided commonalities to the results established here.

### **Utility and further study**

The use of Grounded Theory Method to evaluate the data collected in this research gave rise to a suitable criminological theory of explanation. The elements of Social Learning Theory

are appropriate, and give this study context in the criminology field. Examining the findings here within the framework of Social Learning Theory provides law enforcement incentive to further develop quality leadership as it relates to work production. Social Learning Theory submits a person – or officer in this case- will pattern their behavior, thoughts, and actions after another person who is exemplary (Bandura, 1969). This postulation speaks to criminal or deviant behavior, but has equal utility for positive behavior. Observational learning is done in three ways: live model, when an actual person models behavior; verbal instruction, when behavior is instructed; and symbolic, when media plays a part in the modeling through real or fictional characters (Bandura, 1969; Sincero, 2011). The sergeant position in law enforcement has the opportunity to display all three observational learning elements; thus making it critical to the overall goal of increased officers' work production. If law enforcement agencies select supervisors with quality leadership traits, officers are likely to model their behavior after the positive attributes displayed by the supervisor.

This study also adds to the limited research dedicated to leadership trait analysis as it pertains to law enforcement work production. There is great utility in this data analysis for law enforcement to increase and foster greater work production. It may also assist in the event an agency experiences a work slow-down or stoppage such as the “blue flu.” The identification of the four seminal sergeant leadership traits – intelligence, approachability, ability to problem solve, and being supportive - which most impact work production will assist agencies seeking to better train current sergeants and providing a formula for the selection of future sergeants.

Although this research was successful in identifying what sergeant leadership traits impact work production, more research is needed to identify how these specific leadership traits not only impact work production of the line level officer, but also how crime is then reduced as a



consequence. Law enforcement agencies typically seek to reduce crime in their respective communities, and increased work production may be a vehicle to achieve this goal. Law enforcement should attempt to improve strategies to combat crime, and the continued examination of leadership traits is fundamental to this objective.

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## Appendix A

## Close-Ended Survey

This survey implement is designed for the gathering of information to be used in a research project dedicated to better understanding leadership traits, specifically those that impact work production. Your name will not be recorded on this document, and the research is not sponsored by the Arvada Police Department. The information collected from this study will be aggregated, thus further ensuring the anonymity of the participant. The data collected will be stored for a period of three years with the Department of Criminology at Regis University. For the purposes of this survey, work production will be defined as: The willingness to engage in self-initiated work production beyond calls for service, i.e. radio dispatched calls.

Gender	
Age	
Years on the job	
Prior law enforcement Experience (yes or no)	

1. As a patrol officer, do the leadership traits of your sergeant matter to you?
2. Is your work production impacted by the sergeant you work for?
3. Are you more willing to engage in self-initiated activity if your sergeant's leadership style is agreeable to you?
4. Would you intentionally decrease your self-initiated work production if your sergeant's leadership characteristics were disagreeable to you?
5. If you answered "yes" to any of the previous questions, please rate the following leadership traits a sergeant may possess, and which would impact your work production, as: (1) extremely important (2) somewhat important (3) neutral (4) somewhat unimportant (5) extremely unimportant

Trait	Rating
Intelligence	
Outgoingness	
Thoughtfulness	
Even-tempered	
Approachability	
Agreeableness	

Motivated	
Perceptibility of team dynamics	
Disciplined	
Ability to interpret emotions	
Problem solving	

## Appendix B

### Open-ended Qualitative Interview:

This interview is designed for the gathering of information to be used in a research project dedicated to better understanding leadership traits, specifically those that impact work production. Your name will not be recorded on this document, and the research is not sponsored by the Arvada Police Department. The information collected from this interview will be aggregated, thus further ensuring the anonymity of the participant. The data collected will be stored for a period of three years with the Department of Criminology at Regis University. Thank you for your participation.

If you answered “no” to question #1, could you explain why your supervisor’s leadership traits do not matter? What motivates you in your work production? Is your work product the same no matter who supervises you? Please provide a detailed response.

Question 2 of the survey asked: “Is your work production impacted by the sergeant you work for?” If you answered “yes” to question #2, could you provide an explanation for why? What differentiates one sergeant from another? This may include positive or negative impacts a sergeant has on work production so long as you find it impactful.

How, if at all, is your self-initiated activity impacted by the sergeant’s leadership traits? Please be descriptive about whether there is an impact or not.

Question 4 of the survey asked: "Would you intentionally decrease your work production if your sergeant's leadership characteristics were disagreeable to you?" If you answered "yes" to question #4, could you provide a detailed explanation for why you would slow your work production?

## Appendix C

## Leadership Trait Criteria for Coded Responses

Established Criteria

Terms used for close-ended questions

Cognitive Abilities	Intelligence
Extraversion	Outgoingness
Conscientiousness	Thoughtfulness
Emotional Stability	Even-tempered
Openness	Approachability
Agreeableness	Agreeableness
Motivation	Motivated
Social Intelligence	Perceptibility of team dynamics
Emotional Intelligence	Ability to interpret emotions
Disciplined	Disciplined
Problem Solving	Problem Solving

Bader, Kemp, Zaccaro (2004)