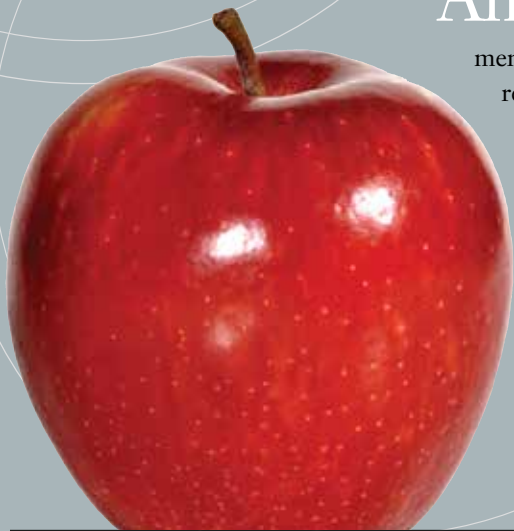# LEADERSHIP
The Heart of Excellence

CFaR | Center for
Facilities Research

An apple dropped in the middle of a pond will create ripples of concentric circles that affect the entire pond. What is the "apple in the pond" for facilities departments that will initiate the ripples of change leading to organizational excellence? My recently completed APPA's Center for Facilities Research (CFaR) project identified leadership as the "apple in the pond."

Using a phenomenological research design, the purpose of the study was to identify the key factors and conditions needed to initiate and sustain a culture of excellence on university campuses. The standard for excellence for the educational facilities sector is the Award for Excellence in Facilities Management (AFE), a Baldrige-based peer-review program for excellence awarded by APPA. Utilizing the Award for Excellence as the criterion for inclusion in the study, the researcher attempted to gain a deeper understanding of the process and mechanisms associated with a pursuit of excellence.

by Joseph K. Han, Ed.D.

Established in 1988, the Award for Excellence is APPA's highest institutional honor and provides educational institutions the opportunity for national and international recognition for their outstanding achievements in facilities management. Award for Excellence nominations are evaluated using the same criteria applied through the Facilities Management Evaluation Program (FMEP) in the areas of: leadership; strategic and operational planning; customer focus; information and analysis; development and management of human resources; process management; and performance results. For additional information, check out *http://www. appa.org/membershipawards.*

WHAT WERE THE DRIVING FORCES THAT LED CAMPUS PERSONNEL TO EXCELLENCE?

According to Burke & Associates (2004), the higher education sector has three key stakeholder groups that define excellence and serve to drive institutions to pursue excellence: 1) the state priority that represents the public interests, 2) the market force that represents the individual interests of the people that have the power to choose, and 3) the academic concern, which represents the faculty and administrators who have strong views about how education should be delivered. In the Spellings Commission report of 2006, the U.S. Department of Education highlighted the provision of quality, affordable, accessible, and accountable education as the driving forces for U.S. institutions of higher education. Surprisingly, these forces were not significant drivers for study participants. Instead, the impetus for pursuing the AFE was the instruction or direction of the vice president, the senior facilities officer, and/or facilities leaders. Additional

reasons cited by the participants for pursuing the AFE were narrowly focused at the facilities department level and include 1) the aspiration to improve the perception of the team through positive recognition internationally, regionally, and from their campus community; 2) the requirement to improve the overall performance; 3) the need to accomplish the departmental vision and goal; and 4) the need to gain more credibility with an external organization. Participants also mentioned pursuing excellence as a way to alleviate being worried about outsourcing. The concern for outsourcing appeared to be market force related.

WHICH CHANGE MODEL OR THEORY IS RELEVANT?

To discuss change, one must ask, change from what to what? Participants recognized that there were differences between the pre-Award for Excellence culture, a culture that existed before the AFE process began and the culture of excellence, as defined by achieving the AFE. Participants of the study identified

pre-AFE departmental culture as having two general overtones, resistive or supportive.

Resistive cultures require behavior-based change approach. Participants characterized the resistive culture as having an air of skepticism and generally lacking trust between staff and leadership and within members of the facilities leadership team. For the campuses with a resistive pre-AFE culture, the *behavioral-based approach to change model* best fit the participants' experience. In 1951, Kurt Lewin introduced the classic behavior-based three-step change mode: unfreeze, create new momentum, and refreeze. More modern behavior-based change models include *Leading Change* by Kotter (1996) and *Management Systems' Phases of Change* by Flamholtz and Randle (2008).

Lewin's model illustrates the phenomenon observed in the study. The first step in Lewin's process is to unfreeze the existing deeply anchored behavior, in this case the resistive culture. Participants described the role of leadership was to apply enough force to unfreeze the existing status quo. Vice presidents and senior facilities officers initiate the unfreezing effort by setting the vision and direction for change, and an expectation of excellence and to pursue the APPA Award for Excellence.

The second step is to create movement and momentum in the desired direction. Movement toward desired direction, in this case a culture of excellence, is driven by the senior facilities officers, and facilities leaders who: 1) implement the expectations necessary to drive the change effort, 2) established a priority for and the focus necessary to achieve the AFE recognition, and 3) ensured that progress was maintained. The third and final step is to refreeze the behavior to anchor the new patterns. Participants identified three actions taken by leaders to anchor the culture of excellence: 1) make certain that assessment and inclusion were ongoing, 2) confirm new expectations for continual improvement were upheld, and 3) intentionally improved processes and leadership practices.

Social-based change theory works for supportive cultures. Participants described the supportive culture as ready to embrace change with team members that were generally prepared to take action. Participants described the supportive group as having a "team approach" and well established leadership engagement.

The participants described the supportive culture as one that is change ready and used cooperative language. For this group, the experience of the AFE application process was positive and relatively enjoyable.

The social approach to change suggests that change is a social event and requires willing participants. Fullan (2007) described the change process as a social event that involves a three-stage process: initiate, implement, and institutionalize. Fullan's three stage process appears similar to Lewin's three steps; however, the difference between the models is highlighted by the manner in which the change takes place. For Fullan, the approach must be initiated though relationships, developing of shared meaning and mutual respect with broad stakeholder participation. For the supportive pre-AFE cultures, this study supports Fullan's view that recognizes change as a social event. Other social-based models can be applied to the supportive pre-AFE culture: Watkins and Mohr's (2001) 5–D Model, and Kouzes and Posner's (2007) five core practices and ten commitments of leaders.

WHICH LEADERSHIP THEORY OR APPROACH WAS UTILIZED?

Participants identified their leadership in two ways. First, leaders were described in terms of what they did. Leaders 1) initiated the action required to begin the AFE journey, 2) set the expectations necessary to drive the change effort, 3) established priorities and focus, and 4) ensured the change progress was maintained. According to this study, the role of leadership was foundational in the AFE journey. The vice president and the senior facilities officers were perceived to be vital primary catalysts required to initiate the journey, by setting the vision, establishing a goal, or setting the expectations necessary to drive the change effort. This includes working to convert the resistant pre-AFE culture to a supportive culture. In this process, the senior facilities officers, with support from facilities leaders, were key agents in prioritizing resources and bringing the focus necessary to achieve the AFE recognition. The senior facilities officer was also identified as the person responsible to ensure that progress was maintained. These findings are consistent with Bridges (2003), who believes that the leaders' job is to understand what to do in each stage and help people transition through organizational changes with minimal disruption. The findings are also consistent with Kotter's (1996) belief that overcoming the natural resistance to change requires great leaders who can drive change by creating power and motivation to overcome the opposing inertia. According to Kotter a leadership focus required to initiate change. This study has identified five traits and skills that leaders exhibited during the AFE journey: initiate, set expectations, set priority and focus, assign resources, and ensures progress is maintained.
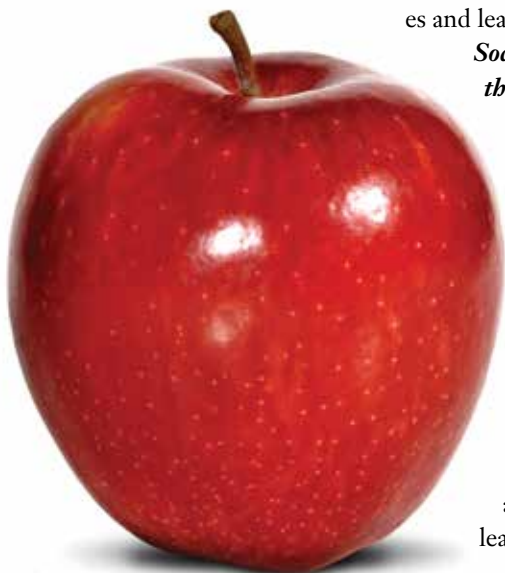
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Second, the participants described their leaders in terms of how the leaders accomplished these tasks related to the AFE journey. Participants described their experiences with leaders along a large range of leadership styles: laissez-faire, consensus, democratic, compassionate, empowering, authoritative, hierarchical, micromanaging, demanding, pace setter, and visionary. The experiences of the participants closely resemble the six leadership styles presented by Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002). Goleman et al. encouraged the leader to become fluent in all leadership styles, applying the appropriate style as the situation demanded. In this study, the participants attributed multiple styles to many of the leaders. General observations related to leadership styles are listed below:

1. Awareness and importance of leadership styles were central to the AFE journey.
2. While no one style was dominantly present across all campuses, 21.4 percent of the campuses predominantly utilized a top-down approach, which included authoritative, hierarchical, demanding, and pace-setting styles.
3. One campus noted a compassionate and empowering environment.
4. One leader utilized a visionary/consensus approach.
5. Each campus utilized numerous leadership styles at various levels of the organization.

According to participants, achieving the culture change did not depend on a particular style of leadership. However, participants identified a slightly larger number of authoritative, hierarchical, and micromanaging leadership styles present among the campuses represented in this study. These leaders tended to use a behavior-based change approach. The collaborative and democratically inclined leaders took more of social-based change approach.

Follower-leader interaction-based theories share the idea that to the extent the interaction between the follower and leader is positive, the greater the likelihood of multiple positive outcomes (Northouse, 2007). This model suggests that leaders should build

relationships with all employees to positively affect the organization. Participants on 42 percent of campuses identified situations where the leaders engaged their line staff on a regular basis. It must be pointed out, however, that on two of the campuses, leadership interaction was initially negatively interpreted.

WHAT FACTORS SUPPORTED OR IMPEDED THE CONTINUATION OF A CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE?

Participants identified three facets of a culture of excellence. First, assessment and inclusion were significant principles and practices in a culture of excellence. Assessment and inclusion included seeking feedback from the staff and customers through surveys and task forces. Second, new expectations for mutual accountability, progressive discipline, engaged leadership, effective hiring, continual improvement, and employee empowerment were identified as important components of creating and sustaining a culture of excellence. Third, the creation and maintenance of a culture of excellence required exercising improved procedures, improved leadership practices, and improved operations.

Participants identified factors that were supportive of efforts to achieve excellence and factors that could undermine these efforts. Positive efforts in support of the continuation of a culture of excellence included recognition through celebrations and presidential speeches. Such recognitions generated pride, excitement, and positivity for the participants, and enthusiasm for maintaining the newly established culture of excellence.

Factors anticipated to undermine the continuation of a culture of excellence include decreased funding and a mindset that the pursuit of AFE was regarded as a check-off goal rather than as a commitment to sustained excellence. Another key concern was whether or not the new department leadership would support the continued excellence. Participants declared succession planning to be crucial for long-term continuation of a culture of excellence.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES PROFESSION

The pursuit of excellence is a journey in which every campus must engage. The pressures on institutions to provide quality, affordable, accessible, and accountable education are very real. As leaders in our industry, we have the opportunity and the responsibility to support our institutions as they face these growing external pressures. A powerful way to demonstrate support of our institutions is by pursuing and achieving the Award for Excellence. To that end, I challenge my APPA colleagues to engage in the excellence journey. If you are not sure how to begin the journey, APPA's Facilities Management Evaluation Program is a good starting point.

Remember, the quality of education is determined by the quality of the educational facility. The quality of facilities depends on the caliber of the facilities departments. In the journey of excellence, leadership is the "apple in the pond" that initiates, achieves, and sustains a culture of excellence. Therefore, leadership is the heart of excellence. 🖊

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