

In 1971 I enrolled in an Iowa State University (ISU) graduate course in Leadership and Social Interaction. To complete a course requirement I researched and wrote a paper on, "The Original Board of the Merged Area XI Community College." Little did I know that 41 years later the topic would have general interest as a part of the college's history. The information shared here represents only a portion of the original paper content and findings on the backgrounds, interests, and personal histories of the nine original board members. Each member was elected to represent one of the nine districts in the college merged area and reflect the values of those constituents.

The Original Board of the Merged Area XI Community College Submitted by Carroll L. Bennett

Whenever a new political body is created it is a certainty that new power relationships will develop. The advent of the merged area school district in Iowa resulted in the birth of fifteen new geographic/political districts. Each had a tax base and would eventually have a community college with one or more campuses. The two purposes of this paper are to: (1) review the birth of these districts, and the Merged Area XI district in Central Iowa, and (2) to examine the power characteristics of the original Area XI board members.

The paper will discuss these questions:

1. What positions of leadership on a local and state level had been held by the individual board member prior to his election?
2. Were the board members power actors in their local communities?
3. Had the board membership held similar positions of leadership in their local communities?
4. Is there evidence that a regional power structure exists in the area encompassed by the merged area district?

PROCEDURE

Detailed information about the leadership activities and personal traits of each board member was obtained. This information was gathered from data sheets that were submitted by the board members, personal communications with board members to supplement the information on their data sheets, informal conversations with people in several of the communities that were represented by the board member, and interviews with Paul Lowery, Superintendent of the College, who had a direct working relationship with each board member.

A second source of information was a thorough review of the literature that deals with local and regional power structures. This reading supplemented the study already completed on community power as a part of the course in Leadership and Social Interaction. The information

gained in this review provided standards against which the Merged Area XI Board could be measured.

LIMITATIONS

The study has many limitations. Much of the information was gathered after the fact. The data for some board members was much more complete than it was for others. The analysis and conclusions are quite subjective and subject to considerable personal bias. At the same time, I consider the project to have been an excellent learning experience. It required an extensive review of the literature on leadership and community power. It also gave me an opportunity to apply some of this learning to an analysis of a real situation. The personal contacts that were made in the follow-up interviews gave me an increased understanding of these men as individuals. This will be helpful to me in my position as an administrator at the College.

DEFINITIONS

It is appropriate to discuss some of the concepts that will serve as points of comparison within the paper. Leadership and power are two central constructs. One's definition of leadership is probably dictated by the approach that is taken in identifying the concept. There are five basic approaches: positional or formal leadership, reputation of nominal leadership, social participation, personal influence or opinion leadership and event analysis or decision-making.

Gibb suggests another method of classifying leadership or the "way in which changes may be effected." He believes there are several types: the initiator, energizer, harmonizer, expeditor and the like. Frequently the group of individuals determined to be exercising leadership will differ with the method that is used in identifying the leaders.

Leadership implies the use of power. Weber's definition of power has been widely accepted. "Power is the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in communal action against the restraint of other participating in the action." This definition implies a self-assertive goal. In my interpretation it means that the man will seek to place himself in a position where he can have some influence over the direction of an action. This definition seems appropriate to the situation being described in this paper. Each director had to take a positive step (seek election) to become a member of the board.

Hunter's definition of power structure also seems appropriate. He defines it as "a dominant policy making group using the machinery of government as a bureaucracy for the attainment of certain goals coordinated with interests of the policy making group." If there is a regional power structure in the merged area it would be asserting its power through the bureaucracy of a quasi-governmental institution (a public community college) to achieve its goals.

The existence of a power elite is also fertile ground for speculation. Mills defines this group as being "composed of men whose positions enable them to transcend the ordinary environments of ordinary men and women; they are in positions to make decisions having major

consequences. He further states that every town and small city in America has such a group and that they held the keys to most local decisions because of their control and reputation.

Another consideration is the power actor himself. Powers has offered a system for determining whether an individual is likely to be a power actor in his community. Generally the term implies that the person would have a degree of social power or the “capacity to control the actions of others.”

Powers summarizes the characteristics of power actors in a local community they usually are:

1. Persons 50 years of age or older.
2. In the higher income group in the community.
3. In a position of having control of, or access to, the resources of credit, money, jobs and mass media by virtue of their position in credit institutions, firms employing several people, mass media and/or elective offices
4. Above average in education for their age peers
5. In occupations described as self-employed, owner or executive
6. Long-term residents of the community.

They usually have been active in community affairs, have been members of community groups, and have held positions of formal authority in these groups.

The application of these criteria and definitions to the individual board members should provide a basis for determining their status as leaders.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE COLLEGE

The area school system in Iowa was made possible by the passage of Senate File 550 in 1964. This law permitted local school districts to organize collectively to establish a “merged area” as defined by the legislation.

The legislators had expected that one or two districts would be formed in the first years of the law. Generally the areas were organized along county lines although small portions of adjoining counties were often included in the school district that crossed the county line. By the end of 1967 all areas of the state were included in a merged area except portions of four counties: Audubon, Carroll, Cherokee, and Dubuque.

Merged Area XI was formed on March 18, 1966 after the Department of Public Instruction approved a petition for its formation that had been submitted by the County Boards of Education in Central Iowa. This merged area was the largest in the state in area, population and assessed valuation. It accounted for approximately 20% of each of these measures.

Representative director districts were established shortly after formal approval and election was held. The first board of directors was sworn into office on May 23, 1966. Their names and cities of residence were: Harry L Cowden, Guthrie Center; Ross Cramlet, Des Moines; Rollard

Grefe, Des Moines; Max Kreager, Newton; Robert Lounsberry, Colo; James Maggert, Ankeny; Dr. Dwight Mater, Knoxville; Harold Welin, Boone; and DeWitt Wilson, Des Moines.

METHOD OF APPROACH

The background of each director will now be reviewed with the guidelines previously described incorporated into the analysis. The positional method of identifying leadership will be followed. This approach assumes that those who hold important positions in organizations are the leaders in the community. Since this paper is being done four years after the election occurred it is important that the method that is employed have a basis for comparison. The positional method permits this analysis. The chief shortcoming of the method is that it ignores those who do not choose to assume leadership roles for various reasons. It is also dependent (in this study) on the memory of the directors involved. They may forget key leadership posts they held in the past.

LOCAL POWER ACTOR CHARACTERISTICS

Each member of the Area XI Board of Directors has held many positions of local leadership. The most frequent leadership experience has been gained as a leader in a community service organization. These organizations are typical of those that are numerous in Central Iowa (Kiwanis, Rotary, and Junior Chamber of Commerce). Eight of the nine members had experience in these activities.

Another frequent leadership experience has involved membership and often serving as president of the local school board. Six of the nine members served in this capacity. The status of the other three directors is significant. Two directors would not have been eligible because of their employment as administrators in a school district (Cramlet and Wilson). One other member's wife has served for several terms on the board of the Des Moines Community School District (Grefe). Prior leadership experience in education appears to be a universal trait of the group.

Seven of the nine directors held leadership positions in their country's political party organizations. Neither of the two educators on the board (Cramlet and Wilson) appears to have been actively involved in political party organizations, although Cramlet served as legislative representative for a state education association for twelve years.

Church leadership activity was also common to six of the group. In most instances they not only held leadership positions within their church but frequently had served in the top layman position.

My conclusion is that each of the nine directors has been actively involved in local leadership activities.

During the first year of employment at the college I formed a subjective opinion of the leadership abilities of the board members base on what I heard from their constituents. My assignment at the college offered me the opportunity to do extensive traveling to present programs on the college to groups in our merged area: in both small towns and cities. Usually after a presentation I would visit with individuals who wanted more specific information about the college. Often the person would know their board member personally. I heard statements like, “He is a fine leader and will help you get the college off the ground,” and “I am pleased that _____ chose to run and represent us on your board”. These statements confirmed that each board member had an excellent reputation as a leader in these communities.

STATE AND REGIONAL POWER POSITIONS

Several of the board members held leadership positions outside their immediate community. Maggert and Lounsberry had the greatest number of positions (three) while Wollin appears to have no leadership experiences outside his community.

Many of these positions were in political parties. It is evident that several board members are quite experienced at several levels of politics. Two have served on the state central committee of their political party.

Five of the nine directors have served in at least once as the president of a state organization.

Several of the group was also involved actively in working on a regional level to organize the various school districts into the merged area. This activity required compromise and strong leadership. The final proposal to form merged area XI was a result of their efforts.

POWERS POWER ACTOR CHARACTERISTICS

Most of the board members appear to have those characteristics suggested by Powers to be indicative of power actors in the local communities. The trait that appears to be missing is that of being in a position of economic control within their community. Some directors may have this experience but I was unable to find it documented. It also isn't consistent from the current and past occupations.

Two of the directors would probably not be classified in the “high income” criterion (Cramlet and Wilson). Four of the directors appear to meet five of the six criteria (Cowdin, Grefe, Lounsberry, and Mater.)

REGIONAL POWER

No real evidence of the existence of a regional power structure emerges based on the positions of leadership that have been held by the directors. This may be because of a lack of earlier regional organization structures prior to the formation of the merged area districts—hence

there was no opportunity for regional power. It could also be explained simply by the fact that it exists but cannot be detected by the analysis process in this study.

Since there was no master plan for area schools in Iowa prior to the enactment legislation, most districts were formed on the basis of political maneuvering by county boards of education. In this sense a semblance of regional power structure was formed through a coalition (usually based on economic considerations). It would have been possible at this point for a "power elite" in each local director district to select the person they wanted to represent them on the College Board. In effect, this happened since only two of the nine districts had a contested election.

It is significant in Iowa that regional planning in education has always appeared to emerge only after political differences and considerable friction. In recent years the state superintendents of public instruction in Iowa have lost favor with the legislature when they attempted to increase regional planning. A fear of the loss of small school districts continues to exert pressures against planning that would lead to consolidation.

Even the area school concept emerged only after many years of uncertainty and confrontation. One goal of the system was to create an educational framework for all levels of education within the geographic boundaries of the merged district. This concept has been implemented on a small scale through the organization of area media resource centers and the formation of area-based administrator organizations. In the planning state are area computer centers that will serve as a service to all local school districts in the area. Also planned is a consolidation of specialized educational services in special education, psychology, and career education programming that would supplement the programs in small high schools. If these ideas are implemented the regional structure will take on an ever great significance. This trend would be in line with Lind's findings that showed that local leaders tend to reach general agreement when they are assembled to consider problems of a regional nature.

SUMMARY

It is apparent that the Merged Area XI Board was composed of men who had exhibited leadership at both a local and state level prior to their election to the board. In general, these men possessed many of the traits suggested by Powers as characteristics of community power actors. The leadership backgrounds of the individuals appear to be centered in three sources—education, politics and local service clubs. The strong influence of the Republican Party is noteworthy. Kreager has served as Chairman of the Republican Central Committee (at the time when our current governor, Robert Ray, was party chairman.) Maggert was top assistant to Governor Erbe. Lounsberry is presently serving as the number two administrator in the Iowa Department of Agriculture. Cowden was an active Republican State Senator for several terms.

Notably absent on the board is a representative from heavy industry. However, Kreager appears to be active with the corporate leaders at the Maytag Corporation in Newton.

It would be interesting to speculate on the representation which the current public education system at the local levels had on the board. It was rumored that both Wilson (former principal of a Des Moines high schools) and Cramlet (former director of industrial education in the Des Moines Schools) were both encouraged to seek board seats to protect Des Moines Technical High School from the area college. Grefe also should have been well informed about the position of the Des Moines School Board based on his wife's membership on that board. Other post-secondary schools in the merged area appear to lack representation. Dr. Walsh, Assistant to the President of Iowa State University did seek election but was defeated by Lounsberry.

Probably the only potential elitist in the group is Dr. Mater. He appears to be one of the key people in the Knoxville and Marion County communities—possibly approach the “boss” stereotype. Grefe appears to know the top elitists in Des Moines through contact in his prominent status in a law firm. The same would probably be true of Welin, the funeral director from Boone.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The original board of directors for Merged Area XI was composed of power actors from local communities in Central Iowa.
2. Many of the original board members had a considerable number of state-level power characteristics in both politics and professional associations.
3. No identifiable regional power influence is apparent in the backgrounds and activities of the board members.
4. Board members tended to have common experience backgrounds in certain types of leadership positions (school board membership, church board leadership, political activity, service club leadership).
5. Only one board member appears to be a potential member of a “power elite” although several members probably communicated with members of these groups.