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Leadership Styles and Volunteer Administration Competence: Perceptions of 4-H County Faculty in the United States

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Leadership Styles and Volunteer Administration Competence: Perceptions of 4-H County Faculty in the United States

Abstract

The study described here sought to determine the perceived leadership style of 4-H county faculty. There were 238 county 4-H faculty randomly selected to participate. Participants completed three Web-based questionnaires, the Volunteer Administration Leadership Competency Instrument, the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, and a demographic instrument. Regression models predicted transformational, transactional, and laissez faire leadership. The importance of systems leadership ($\beta=.97$) and organizational leadership ($\beta=-.94$) contributed the most to transformational leadership. Proficiency in organizational leadership ($\beta=-6.24$) contributed to transactional leadership. The importance of organizational culture ($\beta=1.10$) and commitment to the profession importance ($\beta=-.85$) contributed to the prediction of laissez faire leadership.

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Introduction

From 1999 - 2002, 4-H youth participation increased by 2%, while 4-H volunteer participation decreased by 8% (National 4-H Council, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002). The decrease in volunteer participation moved the ratio of volunteers to youth from 1:9 in 1999, to 1:12.5 in 2002. Volunteer support is important in fulfilling programmatic objectives for 4-H, such as providing, "care," "guidance," "respect," "knowledge," and "wisdom" to youth participants, and an increase in the ratio of volunteers to youth raises concerns for this reason. If the volunteer to youth ratio continues to increase, 4-H programs are in danger of decreased program quality, increased risks, and decreased 4-H participation.

4-H programs have a long history of helping youth become strong and vital citizens in the United States (National 4-H Headquarters, 2003). The volunteers who supported 4-H during the 1900s developed a legacy for volunteers in 4-H that still exists today and is evident in the many vital roles volunteers hold in the operation of 4-H programs throughout the United States (Culp, McKee, & Nestor, 2003).

Volunteers contribute by carrying out many roles for 4-H youth development programs and fill positions that both directly and indirectly affect youth (Boyce, 1971). Without volunteers, the 4-H program would not be able to accomplish the wide array of youth development activities it does. Boyce (1971, p.2) wrote, "It is not reasonable to expect that 4-H will ever have enough funds to employ enough professional people such as you to work with significantly expanded numbers of people." Volunteers, both adult and youth, fill positions of program leaders, club leaders, camp

counselors, teachers, board and committee members and middle managers.

Without a better understanding of how 4-H faculty can utilize volunteer administration competence and leadership behaviors, there may be a continued decline in volunteer contributions. As the profession of volunteer administration continues to expand, it is necessary to identify leadership styles and skill proficiency needed by volunteer administrators. As the number of youth participants in 4-H increases, the need for skilled volunteer administrators to design volunteer administration systems that attract, retain, and motivate volunteers will become central to the success of volunteer-led 4-H programs. The National 4-H Strategic Plan (2001) addresses this concern and recommends 4-H work toward the achievement of shared leadership, including the role of volunteers; however, there is no documentation of the leadership practices currently used by 4-H faculty administering volunteer programs.

Leadership has emerged as an identified key competency for volunteer administrators in the next decade (Boyd, 2003). With past research emphasis being on management-oriented models, it is important to determine how state and county faculty can use transformational and transactional leadership styles in a complementary manner.

The purpose of the study described here was to determine the perceptions of 4-H county faculty within the United States with respect to leadership style and volunteer administration leadership competence.

The guiding objectives of the study were to:

1. Determine the demographic make-up for 4-H county faculty,
2. Determine the relationship between demographics, volunteer administration leadership competence, and leadership style, and
3. Predict leadership style based on demographics and volunteer administration leadership competence.

Theoretical Framework

There were two theoretical frameworks supporting the development of the research, Stedman and Rudd (2004) theoretical dimensions of volunteer administration and Bass and Avolio (2000) full range leadership.

Leadership Styles

The researchers used Burns' (1978, p. 425) definition of leadership as, "the reciprocal process of mobilizing, by persons with certain motives and values, various economic, political, and other resources, in a context of competition and conflict, in order to realize goals independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers," which Bass (1985) elaborated to develop the model of full range leadership. Bass (1990) wrote that transformational leadership encompassed four dimensions--charismatic, inspirational, intellectually stimulating, providing individualized consideration. Transactional leadership, likewise, had a unique set of characteristics contingent reward, management-by-exception (active), management-by-exception (passive). The last leadership style identified was laissez faire leadership. This is also distinguished as non-leadership or passive leadership.

Bass and Avolio (2000a) developed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), which measures these three leadership styles. However, in the development of the MLQ, the characteristics of transformational leadership were delineated as idealized influence (attributed and behavior), intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and inspirational motivation.

Idealized influence (attributed and behavior) is described by the admiration, respect, and trust for the leader by the followers. Followers want to emulate the leader behavior, and there is a sense the leader considers others' needs before own.

Intellectual stimulation is shown in the leader's ability to encourage followers to question the status quo and to try new means of problem solving. When the leader focuses on understanding the needs of each follower and works continuously to get them to develop to their full potential, he or she is using individualized consideration behaviors.

Last, leader behaviors that provide followers with a clear sense of purpose that is energizing and provide a role model for ethical conduct that builds identification with the leader and his or her articulated vision, epitomize idealized influence (Bass & Avolio, 2000b).

In the MLQ, transactional leadership maintained the same characteristics described above, contingent reward and management-by-exception (active and passive). Contingent reward behaviors are described when the leader clarifies what is expected from followers and what they will receive if they meet expected levels of performance. Management-by-exception has two distinct behavior groups, active and passive. Management-by-exception (active) is characterized by a leader who focuses on monitoring task execution for any problems that arise and correcting those problems to maintain current performance levels. In contrast, in management-by-exception

(passive) the leader does not focus on employee performance until it is brought to his or her attention. Corrective action contains negative feedback and reprimands (Bass & Avolio, 2000b).

Volunteer Administration

The volunteer administration competencies are a compilation of the Association of Volunteer Administration (AVA) core competencies (AVA, 2001) and Boyd's (2002) study, identifying competencies needed in the next decade for volunteer administrators. These two sets of competencies were integrated and developed into the dimensions of volunteer administration (Stedman & Rudd, 2004).

The dimensions are an educational approach to volunteer administration leadership. There are four levels, the theoretical base, foundation, discipline, and the processes. Each has a unique contribution to what is considered volunteer administration. The theoretical base is supported by psychology and sociology, followed by the foundation, which is made of leadership and management, community development, and teaching and learning. The discipline is volunteer administration, and volunteer administration is accomplished through the processes of organizational leadership, systems leadership, organizational culture, personal skills, management skills, and commitment to the profession (Stedman & Rudd, 2004). Measurement of the seven processes or competencies was completed through the Volunteer Administration Leadership Competency Instrument (VALCI). The instrument developed by Stedman (2004) provided an in-depth analysis of the competencies.

Methods

Dillman's Tailored Design Method (TDM) (2001) was used to guide the data collection process. Two distinct groups made up the study. A total of 238 4-H county faculty were randomly selected from a national database ($N=510$) and invited to participate. There were a total of five contacts made with participants over a 6-week period. Initial contact was made via first class U.S. mail, and all subsequent contacts made using electronic mail.

All three instruments were administered in an on-line form. Responses were sent to a central database in order to ensure participant anonymity. Early and late respondents were compared in order to control for non-response using a "double-dipping" technique (Lindner, Murphy, & Briers, 2001). Researchers determined there were no significant differences between the two groups.

The VALCI was tested for validity and pilot tested for reliability. The VALCI was a two-part researcher-developed questionnaire determining perceived skill importance ("1" Not important to "5" Very important) and proficiency ("1" Poor to "5" Excellent) using a Likert-type scale. It also included a short demographic instrument. Validity was established using a full literature review and face validity using a panel of experts. Reliability was established during pilot testing using Cronbach's alpha for each of the seven competencies. Cronbach's alphas are reported in Table 1.

Table 1.
Cronbach's Alpha for Skill Importance of Each Competence Area (n=120)

Competence Area	α
Organizational Leadership	.88
Systems Leadership	.83
Accountability	.85
Management Skills	.88
Personal Skills	.87
Organizational Culture	.82
Commitment to the Profession	.80

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass and Avolio (2000a) established validity and reliability. Bass and Avolio (2000b) discussed reliability of the instrument and used 14 samples to validate the MLQ with Cronbach's alphas ranging from .91 to .94. The MLQ measured transformational, transactional, and laissez faire leadership of respondents. The MLQ used 45 questions on a Likert-type scale ranging from "0" (Not at all) to "4" (Frequently, if not always).

Two forms of multiple regression were used to determine predictive power of independent variables and volunteer administration competency scores on leadership style. In order to analyze data from 4-H state volunteer specialists, stepwise multiple regression was used due to the small number of respondents and backward multiple regression for 4-H county faculty.

Findings

The findings of the study addressed the significant demographics and predictive models of leadership style. There were 97 4-H county faculty responding for a response rate of 41%.

Objective 1

The significant findings relating to the demographic questionnaire are summarized in Table 2. This included the race, gender, and age of respondents. Of the 4-H state volunteer specialists, 69% were women, 73% were between the ages of 41 and 55, with 12% between 18 and 35, and only 9% were categorized as "non-white." Of the 97 4-H county faculty respondents, 66% were women, 51% were between the ages of 41 and 54, with 28% between 18 and 35, and only 4% reported "non-white."

Table 2.
Race, Gender and Age of 4-H County Faculty (*n*=97)

Race	White	88
	Non-White	4
Gender	Female	64
	Male	32
Age	18-25	3
	26-30	14
	31-35	11
	36-40	9
	41-45	20
	46-50	18
	51-55	13
	56-60	5
	61-65	3
	66-70	1

Objective 2

A combination of independent demographic variables and volunteer administration leadership competency scores was used to determine predictive power on leadership style. The transformational model for 4-H faculty included eight variables, five of which were found to be significant. There were two factors that appeared to hold the greatest impact on the transformational leadership, systems leadership importance ($\beta=.97$, $t=3.26$, $p<.05$) and organizational leadership importance ($\beta=-.94$, $t=-2.72$, $p<.05$). The complete model had an adjusted R^2 of .30 with $F=3.46$, $p<.05$. Table 3 provides the unstandardized coefficient B, the intercept, and estimated standardized regression coefficient (β).

Table 3.
Backward Multiple Regression Explaining Transformational Leadership Style of
4-H County Faculty ($n=97$)

Competency/Construct	B	SE	Beta
(Constant)	1.49	.62	
Race	.52	.30	.23
Volunteer Administration Certification	.01	.00	.40
Extension Tenure	-.01	.01	-.44
Organizational Leadership (Importance)	-.03	.01	-.94
Systems Leadership (Importance)	.03	.01	.97
Personal Skills (Importance)	.03	.01	.86
Organizational Culture (Importance)	-.03	.01	-.77
Organizational Culture (Proficiency)	.01	.01	.26
<i>*Note: $R^2=.30$</i>			

Transactional leadership was the second predictive model found with significance for 4-H county faculty. Transactional leadership predicted by six variables, five of which were significant, with organizational leadership proficiency ($\beta=-6.24$, $t=-3.33$, $p<.05$) being the single most contributing factor. The completed model had an adjusted R^2 of .24 with $F=3.66$, $p<.05$. Table 4 summarizes the model the unstandardized coefficient B, the intercept, and estimated standardized regression coefficient (β).

Table 4.
Backward Multiple Regression Explaining Transactional Leadership Style of 4-H
County Faculty ($n=97$)

Competency/Construct	B	SE	Beta
(Constant)	2.45	.44	

Volunteer Administration Certification	.00	.00	.30
Extension Tenure	-.01	.00	-.35
Organizational Leadership (Proficiency)	-.03	.01	-6.24
Systems Leadership (Importance)	.02	.01	.57
Accountability (Importance)	-.02	.01	-.68
Management (Proficiency)	.02	.01	.62
*Note: R ² =.24			

Last, laissez faire leadership was predicted for 4-H county faculty. This model had five contributing variables, with organizational culture importance ($\beta=1.10$, $t=3.44$, $p<.05$) and commitment to the profession importance ($\beta=-.85$, $t=-2.96$, $p<.05$) providing the greatest impact. The completed model had an adjusted R² of .19, with $F=3.60$, $p<.05$, indicating that 19% of the variability in the model is from the independent variables. Table 5 summarizes the model the unstandardized coefficient B, the intercept, and estimated standardized regression coefficient (β).

Table 5.
Backward Multiple Regression Explaining Laissez Faire Leadership Style of 4-H County Faculty ($n=97$)

Competency/Construct	B	SE	Beta
(Constant)	1.54	.62	
Management (Importance)	-.02	.01	-.54
Personal Skills (Proficiency)	-.02	.01	-.38
Organizational Culture (Importance)	.05	.01	1.10
Commitment to the Profession (Importance)	-.03	.01	-.85
Commitment to the Profession (Proficiency)	.02	.01	.47
*Note: R ² =.19			

Conclusions

As 4-H youth participation continues to increase, it will become more important to examine the methodologies used to lead and manage volunteers. It is critical to develop an understanding of, first, the perception of 4-H county faculty towards volunteer administration and the impacts on leadership style, but second, how to capitalize on the strengths of 4-H county faculty to create stronger volunteer programs.

Maintaining a quality volunteer program is an important factor for 4-H, which depend a great deal on the strength of its volunteers. Understanding leadership and how it can be applied to volunteer programs can increase the overall quality of the volunteer program and the quality of experience for an individual volunteer. Bass and Avolio (1994) integrated the individual styles of leadership into one over arching leadership style, full range leadership. This practice included the timely and appropriate use of all three leadership styles, transformational, transactional, and laissez faire. The study described here, in predicting these leadership styles based on volunteer administration, provided a base for what Extension state specialists can use to plan and execute education curricula based on need for volunteer administrators in 4-H.

Based on these findings, initiatives for developing transformational leadership can focus on the positive influence of systems leadership, in other words, the manner in which fully understanding and becoming an expert within the system that one operates develops transformational leadership. At the same time, there can be more analysis of how the importance of planning and operation takes away from transformational leadership. In other words, the more a county faculty member feels his or her attention must be paid to operational needs, the less transformational he or she is.

In terms of transactional leadership, it is important to recognize that county faculty who do feel proficient in organizational leadership are less likely to be transactional. With that, the more one is proficient in the daily planning and operation of the program, the less likely they are transactional, and this could be because with operational planning, there needs to be some examination of long-term or visionary goals and objectives.

Last, with laissez faire leadership, the more emphasis placed on the importance of organizational culture, maintaining the norms and values of the organization, the greater the influence on laissez faire leadership. However, the more importance of being committed to the profession and participating in professional development activities, the less laissez faire. This may be attributed to the fact that, if one is engaged in professional development, he or she is clearly engaged in creating a better experience for his or her volunteers.

In terms of additional research, there are two main areas that should be explored further. One is the need for more specific inquiry to examine the influential elements of all three leadership styles to determine the impact of leadership style on programmatic effectiveness. Second is to complete a 360° evaluation of 4-H county faculty leadership styles, using peers, 4-H youth, and volunteers. Additionally, a qualitative study examining how leadership style affects the overall volunteer experience would add to the educational curriculum for 4-H volunteer administrators.

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