An investigation into the leadership practices of volunteer leaders

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Abstract

Purpose – While numerous studies of leadership have been conducted in the corporate and public sectors, there are lots of people leading in civic, social, and community service organizations and little is known about either how they lead or how their leadership practices are similar to or different from those leading in other sectors. The purpose of this paper is to fill that gap by examining leadership practices unique to leadership that occurs within organizations where both leaders and followers are volunteers.

Design/methodology/approach – The sample involved surveying over 60 percent of the volunteer ($n = 569$) leaders across a national youth sports organization based in the USA.

Findings – Volunteer leaders engaged more frequently in leadership behaviors than did paid leaders. Some differences in leadership behaviors were found on the basis of respondent gender, age, educational level, and employment status. Leadership behaviors were systematically related to quality of respondents' volunteer leadership experience. While objective measures of organizational effectiveness were unrelated to the leadership behaviors of the voluntary leaders, subjective assessments did impact how leaders behaved.

Research limitations/implications – The research relied upon the self-reported leadership behaviors of respondents, and the organization's measure of effectiveness was unrelated to respondent leadership behaviors. Future studies would benefit from leadership assessments provided by observers and constituents, samples involving different kinds of volunteer organizations (both settings and services) and more complex and nuanced empirical relationships.

Practical implications – It is problematic that a volunteer organization cannot clearly define what it means to be an effective leader. Knowing the direct relationship between leadership behaviors and how favorably people feel about their voluntary leadership experience implies making certain that volunteer leaders actually have the opportunity to lead.

Social implications – Because so many people volunteer and voluntary (and not-for-profit) organizations are vital to economic well-being it is important to know more about what effective leadership looks like within this domain.

Originality/value – Few studies of volunteer leaders have been done, and none in this particular type of youth sports organization. Extends an understanding of leadership and what people do when they are leading others, especially in terms of settings involving volunteer participants rather than paid participants.

Keywords Leadership, Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI),
The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership, Volunteer leadership, Youth sports organizations

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

There are more than 2.3 million non-profit organizations in the USA, whose revenues account for over 5 percent of the national gross domestic product, an estimated dollar value of nearly $300 billion (Blackwood, 2012). An estimated 63 million people volunteered (26.8 percent of the population), contributing a median of 50 hours (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). In the European Union it is estimated that over 92 million adults (22 percent of the adult population) engages in volunteer activities (Study on Volunteering in the European Union, 2010).

Given the impact on GNP, and the significant number of organizations that rely on volunteers to both provide labor and lead others it be would beneficial to understand

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more about the practice of leadership by volunteers. Researchers have suggested that "volunteer leadership is a unique and distinct construct that requires further research in its own right, not as a corollary to generic volunteerism or leadership" (Chiariello, 2008, p. ii). The heavy reliance of non-profits on volunteer labor further underscores the importance of taking a closer look at what people actually do when leading as volunteers. This research investigated whether volunteer leaders lead differently than other leaders and how their leadership behavior is related to effectiveness (within the unique constraints of non-profit organizational objectives).

Significance of volunteer leadership

Chiariello (2008) argued that a "qualitative examination of volunteer leadership would assist researchers to understand its characteristics, to construct a definition based on these characteristics, and to identify possible antecedents and motivators for engagement in volunteer leadership" (p. 76). Other scholars support the need for further research into the area of volunteer leadership and in different volunteer contexts (e.g. Rowold and Rohmann, 2009).

In studies of unpaid workers, Pearce (1980, 1982) discussed how organizational differences affected leadership within volunteer organizations. Pearce matched seven all-volunteer run and staffed organizations with seven all-employee run and staffed organizations that worked on the same, or similar, tasks and found differences not only in the authority invested in their leadership positions but also in the desire of leaders to accept positions of authority and leadership. Authority in organizations staffed by volunteers (and concomitantly compliance and commitment) was largely granted to leaders by the membership in a bottom-up process, rather than on the basis of traditional hierarchical positions. Leaders in volunteer organizations were hesitant about taking on leadership positions and expressed the desire for "less organizational influence than they currently held" (Pearce, 1980, p. 89). This marked difference in the availability, type, and use of authority by leaders in volunteer settings is a common theme in the literature.

Kajer (1996) conducted interviews with nine volunteer leaders in separate Minnesota agricultural associations. From their descriptions about their leadership experiences and the meaning they ascribed to their leadership, he identified six themes which highlight aspects of the leader-follower relationship and the role it plays in effective volunteer leadership. This supports Salacuse's (2006) description of leadership as being a relationship and studying the practices of volunteer leaders would contribute to understanding how they create a relationship with other volunteers (Kouzes and Posner, 2012).

Studying volunteer leaders and members in eight clubs of a national civic organization, leadership emerged as a predictor of volunteer members' attitudes and commitment to the clubs (Schneider and George, 2010). The overall attitudes of volunteer members were impacted by leaders' focus on ethical behavior and concern for the well-being of their followers. Empowerment was also found to be a strong mediator in the relationship between leadership and volunteer satisfaction, volunteer commitment, and volunteer's intention to stay active in their clubs. Leaders need to understand that volunteers possess a strong achievement orientation and address their desire to accomplish tasks and goals in order to feel satisfied with their volunteer experience (Li *et al.*, 2007; Wisner *et al.*, 2005).

Catano *et al.* (2001, p. 258) suggested that the transformational leadership model provides a useful lens for studying volunteer leadership because it "influences commitment and participation without the use of rewards or punishments" (which volunteer leaders generally have quite limited opportunities to use). Transformational leadership was also

found to be a factor in effective volunteer leadership by women in philanthropic organizations. Banducci (2005, p. 51) opined that "women's leadership – relational leadership – is fundamentally inclusive and transformational." The relational aspect of volunteer leadership focusses on acknowledging differences between leaders and followers, understanding the differences, adapting others to the leader's unique perspectives, and adapting the leader's perspectives to those of followers. This leadership style is effective in a volunteer setting since it meets the needs and motivations of followers, whether they are other volunteers, or in the case of Banducci's research, philanthropic donors. The point is that there appear to be specific perceptions, methods of communication, and leadership practices that are particularly effective in the volunteer leadership context.

Bowers (2012) conducted multiple searches of EBSCO, ProQuest, Sage, and Emerald Insight databases and found a total of 386 results matching one or more of the following terms: "volunteer leadership," "volunteer leader," "voluntary leadership," "voluntary leader," "voluntarism" and "leadership," "volunteerism" and "leadership," and "leading volunteers." Of the results that were research articles, the topics fell into three general categories: volunteer satisfaction and motivation, service learning, and the impact of employee volunteerism on corporate engagement. These search results add further testimony to the claim that "few researchers have empirically studied and analyzed the topic of leading volunteers" (Jager *et al.*, 2009).

Catano *et al.* (2001) measured transformational leadership in Lions Clubs and labor unions in Newfoundland (Canada). Pearce (1980, 1982) compared the leadership behavior of leaders in both volunteer and paid settings. Schneider and George (2010) investigated what leadership styles best explained the commitment level of volunteers in a civic organization. Bowers (2012) studied 75 Kiwanis club presidents and 105 Kiwanis club members from Indiana and reported that these volunteer leaders engaged in leadership practices differently than paid leaders.

Volunteer leaders generally do not have financial (extrinsic) incentives to motivate volunteers. Therefore they must consider the intrinsic needs, motivations, and goals of the volunteers they lead. Without the traditional forms of authority and motivation inherent in paid positions, volunteer leaders must connect with followers in other ways in order to be successful. This suggests that volunteer leaders must engage in leadership practices that are specifically focussed on meeting these challenges: leading without formal sources of power and leading volunteers who can freely choose whether or not to follow.

In the present study, each of the people involved is a volunteer, and each has responsibility for leading other volunteers. Volunteers accept the responsibility of leadership but lack the authority inherent in paid leadership positions. The interaction that occurs requires the volunteer leader to exercise influence so that other volunteers will be motivated to accomplish the goals of the organization, and derive sufficient satisfaction from doing so that they will remain with the organization. The volunteer leader must be able to clearly articulate the goals of the organization and exercise influence without the benefit of clearly defined and accepted sources of power. Considering the traditional bases of power (French and Raven, 1959) volunteer leaders generally have little positional power sources, like coercive or reward power and often may not be perceived as having legitimate power ("title" or hierarchical position that provides a social obligation to be followed). Personal power sources may also be problematic for volunteer leaders as they may not have any expert power or special proficiency, except for their personal willingness (and time) to volunteer to do more work than others, or hold referent power, in the sense that others personally identify with, respect and/or like the individual leader.

A volunteer leader must be able to motivate other volunteers to action despite the ability of the other volunteers to choose to do otherwise with few personal consequences. Volunteers often have loyalties both to other groups within the organization and to groups outside the organization. They will often be more loyal to specific programs and projects than to particular organizational leaders. Indeed, the people that volunteer leaders may be leading do not generally even see themselves as followers. Moreover, many of the people in volunteer organizations hold leadership positions in their professional capacities and may be unlikely to respond to traditional methods of motivation (Salacuse, 2006).

Leadership in an organization staffed by volunteers differs from leadership in an organization staffed by people who receive financial compensation for their services because there are differing motivations, generally provide fewer resources and there is a reliance on other volunteers (vs employees) to accomplish tasks (Pearce, 1982; Rowold and Rohmann, 2009). Volunteer leaders operate with limited authority and lead volunteers who may not see themselves as followers (Catano *et al.*, 2001; Jager *et al.*, 2009). What differences are there in the leadership behavior of volunteer leaders as compared to the leadership behavior of paid leaders is the overarching question addressed in this study. A secondary question, clearly *post-hoc*, was whether any demographic factors might impact the behaviors of volunteer leaders. Four characteristics were explored: gender, age, educational level, and employment status. Finally, the study investigated how leadership would be related to individual and organizational performance. This issue is challenging because organizational effectiveness is difficult to measure in non-profits and volunteer organizations. Typically stakeholders rely on processes and inputs as assessments, rather than on outcome measures (Smith and Shen, 1996; Macpherson, 2001; Herman and Renz, 2008).

Leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow. As the literature suggests, relationship building is critical to leading in volunteer organizations, settings in which leaders have limited authority over followers and follower motivation differs from that in paid settings. Kouzes and Posner (2012) emphasized the importance of high-quality relationships in order for effective leadership to occur and focussed on leadership practices that build effective relationships. Kouzes and Posner (2012) provide an effective framework for studying how individuals practice leadership in a way that strengthens the critical leader-follower relationship. They refer to this as *The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership*®:

(1) *Model the Way*: leaders must exhibit the behavior they expect of followers. When actions are contrary to words, followers do not develop the trust needed for a strong relationship. Leaders must clearly articulate their own, and the organization's values and choose to act in accordance with those values. Leaders represent not only themselves, but also the organization. Their deeds must demonstrate a deep commitment to the shared values of the organization and the individuals they lead. Leaders set the example through their actions, and match their words with their deeds.

(2) *Inspire a Shared Vision*: leaders have a vision for the future, a picture of how the organization will look or operate that is better than today. Leaders envision the future results of sustained effort. To drive the organization forward, the vision must be shared by followers and leaders must engage others in their efforts to make the vision a reality. To inspire a vision in others, leaders must understand their followers – knowing their motivations, interests, and aspirations – and be

able to show how the vision is beneficial for everyone and worth achieving. When talking about the vision, leaders are passionate, enthusiastic, and able to inspire others to follow.

(3) *Challenge the Process*: leaders seek to address uncertainty and opportunity by changing the status quo. Leaders must guide followers through innovation, change, or the unknown. Leaders are willing to look outside the boundaries of their current organization and discipline, and to get others to do the same, searching for opportunities to grow and improve the organization. People are encouraged to follow because leaders create a climate that is conducive to experimentation. Followers feel supported and are willing to join in the risk. Leaders see mistakes as learning opportunities.

(4) *Enable Others to Act*: success requires a team effort and leaders turn their followers into leaders themselves by fostering collaboration and building trust. They promote building relationships between themselves and their followers, as well as among the members of the team. A sense of teamwork exists because leaders are willing to share power and to help followers develop the confidence and capabilities necessary to succeed. A leader's focus is not on his or her individual accomplishment, but on how the group can work together to realize the vision.

(5) *Encourage the Heart*: leaders demonstrate their genuine care and concern for followers. Contributions are recognized and a culture of celebrating wins develops. Encouragement and motivation are not insincere, but rather genuine and meaningful because they are personalized, and leaders get personally involved. Leaders specifically link recognition and reward with performance so that followers clearly understand how their behavior is linked to the values of the organization. The result is a strong sense of community and collective identity within the group.

Researchers have found that *The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership* (Kouzes and Posner, 2012) provides a useful conceptual framework for studying the behavior of volunteer leaders, and it is an appropriate choice for the current research. For example, while not specifically comparing paid and non-paid leadership practices, other studies provide insight into the use of Kouzes and Posner's model in non-profit and volunteer settings. Berry (2008) studied the relationship between organizational climate and commitment and leadership practices in 97 supervisor-subordinate dyads within church ministry, and concluded: "Pastors and church leaders can increase organizational commitment within their ministry settings by engaging in specific leadership behaviors and intentionally seeking to develop positive congregational climates within their churches" (p. 58). Despite the limitations of the context, Berry suggested a link between leader behavior and the commitment of individuals to the organization, an effectiveness measure suggested by Rojas (2000).

Lyons' (2004) phenomenological study is also grounded in Kouzes and Posner's (2012) leadership model. She conducted in-depth interviews, combined with observation and review of organizational materials, with eight women volunteer leaders on non-profit boards of directors. Lyons found that the five leadership practices were "particularly important for a non-profit volunteer leader whose methods of persuasion and influence within a connected group of individuals are different than those used in the private sector" (p. 40). In a study of Taiwanese non-profit organizations, Yeh (2007) found a

strong positive linear relationship between leadership, organizational trust, and commitment. On the basis of in-depth qualitative interviews, Yeh (2007, p. 345) also concluded that leaders "need to be more concerned with the intrinsic motivations for the retention of their volunteers."

In a study of Rotary club leaders, Siriwoharn (1995) compared the leadership practices of most successful and least successful chapter presidents. The leaders of more successful chapters engaged in the five leadership practices to a greater extent than did leaders of less successful chapters. King (2007) studied the relationship between pastoral leadership practices and church size and growth, which were considered indicators of pastoral leadership effectiveness. Significant relationships were found between Model, Inspire, and Encourage and at least one measure of church growth.

Methodology

RQ1. What differences are there in the leadership behavior of volunteer leaders as compared to the leadership behavior of paid leaders?

The first research question was tested by measuring the degree to which the volunteer leaders in the study engaged in each of *The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership* and comparing these results to paid leaders, as reported by Posner (2010). How the use of these leadership practices might vary due to demographic differences (both individual and organizational characteristics) between the volunteer leaders was also examined. The second research question addressed:

RQ2. How the leadership behaviors would be related to performance?

Participants in this study were volunteers in a national youth sports organization. From the population of 967 leaders at all levels, a total of 569 leaders responded to the survey (with 46 missing addresses, for an effective response rate of 62 percent). By organizational hierarchy, all members of the National Board of Directors ($n = 11$) and National Commissioners ($n = 5$) participated, along with 13 Section Directors (87 percent), 91 Area Directors (93 percent), and 449 Regional Commissioners (54 percent).

Invitations to participate in the study were extended to all leaders via e-mail. Individuals were asked to complete the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) (Kouzes and Posner, 2003) and provide some demographic information via SurveyMonkey. The LPI measures *The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership* using a 30-item survey; there are six statements measuring each of the five practices. Each statement is rated on a scale of 1-10, based upon the frequency with which that leadership behavior is practiced. The scale ranges from almost never (1) to almost always (10). Responses for each of the six statements are totaled to reach a combined score for each practice. A score for each leadership practice may range from six, indicating all six of those leadership behaviors are almost never practiced, to 60, indicating all six of those leadership behaviors are almost always practiced. Previous research has shown that the LPI has strong psychometric properties (Posner, 2010). Internal reliability coefficients for this sample population were all above normally acceptable levels: Model the Way (0.77), Inspire a Shared Vision (0.88), Challenge the Process (0.83), Enable Others to Act (0.72), and Encourage the Heart (0.87).

There were 377 men and 192 women who participated in the study, which approximates the same gender distribution as the population. The average age of respondents was 48 years, with a range between 25 and 73; which is somewhat higher

than the average age of non-respondents (44 years). The majority of respondents were college graduates (58 percent), with another 11 percent receiving an AA degree. Most respondents indicated that they were employed full time (74 percent); 8.5 percent indicated that they worked part time, 3.9 percent said that they were self-employed, and 6.4 percent were stay-at-home parents. Just over half (51 percent) of these respondents had a child involved with the organization, and 61 percent indicated that their spouse (partner) was also involved. In addition to their involvement with this organization, two-thirds of these leaders (66 percent) indicated that they currently volunteered in other organizations. Less than one out of five respondents (17.8 percent) had participated in this organization as a youngster (player or volunteer capacity). In total, 86 percent of the respondents indicated participating in the 2012 national meeting and/or 2013 national meeting and between 55 and 59 percent participated in the 2012 and/or 2013 sectional meetings.

Responses to two questions where used to measure the "quality of their voluntary leadership experience" with this organization. The first question – "Overall, how would you rate your experience while engaged in your leadership role in this organization?" – had seven responses: not that enjoyable, just all right, somewhat enjoyable, enjoyable, very enjoyable, one of the best, and the best experience. The second question – "When I think about my involvement with this organization, I am:" – had five responses: not at all proud, slightly proud, moderately proud, very proud, and extremely proud.

The national office of this organization provided information for each respondent, below the national board of directors, on various measures of participant performance or effectiveness. These included: growth in player count year-over-year, growth in volunteer count year-over-year, volunteer to player ratio, attendance at section meetings, attendance at national meetings, and adoption of additional programs (e.g. participation in an assessment program). No information is available about the competitive performance of the coaches (teams or players) in terms of win-loss records because the national office does not keep track of this data since it considers the organization focussed primarily on youth development and creating an experience that enriches young people's lives; hence such information is not used to measure the performance of organizational leaders by region, division, or area.

Results

The results are presented in two sections. The first looks at the relationship between the leadership practices of volunteer and paid leaders. It also provides information about how various demographic factors impacted the leadership practices of volunteer leaders. The second section examines the relationship between leadership and performance (effectiveness) from an individual as well as organizational perspective.

Section I

The LPI data collected from volunteer leaders in the study were compared to normative LPI data (Posner, 2010). The normative LPI data were reported for 11 functional and 16 industry classifications, none of which include volunteer leaders and is therefore considered to be data for paid leaders only. This reasoning about the normative LPI database being essentially from non-voluntary leaders, or paid leaders, is similar to other studies (e.g. Bowers, 2012). The data in Table I addresses the first research question and shows that the frequency to which volunteer leaders reported engaging in each of the leadership practices is significantly higher ($p < 0.001$) than the frequency reported by paid leaders.

How various demographic factors might impact the behavior of volunteer leaders was investigated. To start, we looked at how organizational level might affect the pattern of leadership behaviors. ANOVA showed no statistically significant differences between respondents on the national board of directors, section directors, area directors, and regional commissioners (results not shown). Accordingly, subsequent analyses did not differentiate by this variable. Just over half of the respondents indicated that they had a spouse or partner currently involved with the organization; about one-in-five indicated they had been involved with the organization as a youngster, and about one-third indicated that they also spent time with another volunteer organization. Generally these factors did not contribute to any significant differences in leadership behaviors among these volunteer leaders (results not shown).

Statistically significant differences in leadership practices were found on the basis of respondent gender, educational level, age, and employment status (Table II). On the basis of gender, males and female leaders did not systematically vary for Model, Inspire, and Challenge; while females indicated using the leadership practices of Enable and Encourage more frequently than their male counterparts. Respondents' educational level also influenced their use of various leadership practices. Generally those with college and graduate degrees engaged in these leadership practices less than did those who did not have college degrees, with differences being statistically significant for the leadership practices of Model, Enable, and Encourage. On the dimension of age, respondents did not systematically vary on the leadership practices

Table I.
Comparisons of leadership practices of volunteer leaders with paid leaders

	Model	Inspire	Challenge	Enable	Encourage
Volunteer leaders	49.9	46.6	46.0	52.2	50.0
Paid leaders	46.3	42.9	44.1	49.4	45.3

Note: *t*-tests were statistically different between these two groups for all five leadership practices ($p < 0.001$)

Table II.
Comparison of leadership practices and demographic factors

	Model	Inspire	Challenge	Enable	Encourage
Gender					
Males ($n = 377$)	49.6	46.3	45.8	51.9	49.2
Females ($n = 192$)	50.4	47.0	46.3	*52.7**	*51.5****
Educational level					
High school/some college ($n = 175$)	*51.0***	47.7	46.7	*52.9**	*51.6***
AA/bachelor degree ($n = 244$)	49.5	46.0	45.5	51.9	49.5
Graduate degree ($n = 145$)	49.1	45.9	45.7	51.8	48.9
Age					
Under 43 years ($n = 143$)	49.4	46.1	45.9	51.5	49.4
43-47 years ($n = 116$)	49.2	45.5	45.6	52.0	49.6
48-54 years ($n = 131$)	49.3	46.8	45.8	51.8	50.0
55 years and older ($n = 115$)	*51.6****	47.7	47.7	*53.6****	51.4
Employment status					
Full-time employed ($n = 418$)	*49.5**	46.2	45.8	52.0	*49.5**
Not full-time employed ($n = 146$)	50.8	47.4	46.3	52.5	51.3

Notes: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$

of Inspire, Challenge, and Encourage. The statistically significant differences on Model and Enable were mostly due to their more frequent use by respondents 55 years and older. Employment status (full time vs not full time) revealed that those not employed full-time engaged in the leadership practices of Model and Encourage more often than those employed full time; while not significant differences were found for the leadership practices of Inspire, Challenge, and Enable.

Section II

Performance or effectiveness was measured from both an individual and organizational perspective. From the individuals' perspective the quality of their volunteer leadership experience was assessed by combining their responses to questions about: how proud they were to be associated with this organization, and how positive their experience with the organization had been. Four approximately equal sized groups on this variable were created for purposes of this analysis, even though the original distribution was positively skewed (low, moderate, high, and very high). ANOVA results (Table III) revealed a clear positive relationship between the quality of their volunteer leadership experience and how frequently they engaged in each of the five leadership practices ($p < 0.001$). The more respondents reported using the five leadership practices the more favorably they felt about their organizational experience and pride in being involved with the organization. These results were even clearer when the sample was divided into just a low and high category, with those in the high group engaged in the five leadership practices significantly ($p < 0.001$) more than those in the low group (who were not very favorable about the quality of their volunteer leadership experience with this organization).

A number of inputs and various processes were examined to provide an organizational perspective on the performance or effectiveness of the volunteer leaders. Data were supplied by the national office for each respondent on: growth in player count year-over-year, growth in volunteer count year-over-year, volunteer to player ratio, attendance at sectional meetings; attendance at national meetings, and adoption of optional activities (e.g. participation in an assessment program). However, no statistically significant differences in leadership practices were found between respondents on any of these six factors separately or collectively (results not shown).

Discussion

Both volunteer leaders themselves, and those who help prepare them for volunteer leadership, need to understand how leading in a volunteer capacity may differ from leading in a paid capacity. The current research indicates that volunteer leaders report

	Leadership practices				
Quality of experience	Model	Inspire	Challenge	Enable	Encourage
Low ($n = 160$)	48.2	44.4	43.2	51.7	49.1
Moderate ($n = 126$)	48.8	46.0	43.7	51.4	48.2
High ($n = 130$)	50.3	50.4	50.2	54.0	51.4
Very high ($n = 151$)	52.2	52.2	50.9	56.2	56.2
Low ($n = 286$)	48.5	45.0	44.3	51.2	48.5
High ($n = 281$)	51.3	48.3	47.8	53.1	51.6

Notes: ANOVA tests between the four quality categories were statistically different for all five leadership practices ($p < 0.001$); *t*-tests between the low- and high-quality categories were statistically different for all five leadership practices ($p < 0.001$)

Table III. Relationship between leadership practices and reported quality of the volunteer leadership experience

leading differently than do their paid leader counterparts; indeed, reporting that they use more "leadership behaviors" in this organization than typically reported by leaders in non-voluntary organizational settings. Volunteer leaders scored higher on the leadership practices of Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart as compared with a normative database of paid leaders. While a more qualitative study would be necessary to further substantiate this claim, as well as gathering perspectives from those they are leading, it is nonetheless intriguing to speculate about why people working with volunteers may find it more essential or necessary to engage in leadership than those working with people who are being paid to do their jobs. Alternatively, it might be argued that some of these differences might be attributed to the fact that the organization is focussed on working with youth and how the organization's mission therefore might account for some of these modifications in leadership behavior. Keeping in mind that nearly three-quarters of the respondents were employed full time it would also be interesting to know whether they would report their leadership behaviors to be similar or not in this volunteer context with how they behave in their paid positions.

Another plausible explanation for the differences measured between those in volunteer leadership practices and those in paid leadership practices is that individuals who join an organization focussed on youth development through sports are themselves in some way unique. That is, the context of sports (vs education, drunk driving, poverty, gangs, obesity, human trafficking, and so on) may foster an environment more focussed on actions that build relationships, promote trust, and recognize others than the situations or settings of those who lead in a paid capacity. People who volunteer as leaders may have different attitudes and personality characteristics which further differentiate them from the normative database of leaders in paid organizational positions. Furthermore, the leaders in this study were volunteering their time and energy to this organization, without monetary compensation, and this was not a full-time commitment in comparison to those leading in organizations for which monetary compensation is received and they are expected to devote their full-time energies and commitment to the demands of their workplaces. Future research comparing volunteer and paid leaders should follow up these speculations for the differences between leaders in these two different contexts.

The leadership behaviors of respondents differed on the basis of their reported quality about their volunteer leadership experience with the organization. The more favorably they rated their experience and reported being proud to be associated with the organization, the more frequently they engaged in each of the five leadership practices. While cause-and-effect cannot be determined from the data it is important to note that these two variables move in the same direction. Indeed, would it be logically possible to imagine that people in leadership positions could feel positively about their experience without feeling fully engaged as leaders? Perhaps one way to make sure that people feel positive about being a volunteer leader is that they actually get the chance to engage in leadership behaviors. And, for many, we could speculate that this opportunity is more readily available to them in a volunteer organization than might be possible in a paid ("corporate") setting. Not surprising, the reported quality of the volunteer leadership experience increased at each hierarchical level of the organization, even as leadership behaviors did not statistically differ between levels.

The leadership practices of Inspire and Challenge did not vary very much on the basis of demographic factors (i.e. gender, age, and employment status). Those with the lowest level of education (measured by years of school) however found themselves needing to use these two leadership practices more than those with college and post-

graduate educational degrees. Perhaps this is (because they could not expect others to follow them simply due to their educational status) and hence they felt it necessary to appeal more to common interests and engage in more experimentation. Another plausible explanation is the inverse relationship found between educational level and employment status. Those with limited formal education were less likely to be employed full time and simply may have had more time (non-work time) available to contribute to the organization. Other studies (van Ingen and Dekker, 2011; Baggetta *et al.*, 2013) have found an inverse relationship between educational levels and the amount of time people volunteer. It may be that people with higher levels of education experience higher opportunity costs (alternative uses of their time); or see voluntary work as either lower status or using less of their own skill sets as it relates to the time required.

Model the Way was not influenced by gender or educational level, but the oldest respondents and those not employed full time used this leadership practice most frequently. Other studies have shown that with age (and presumably years of work experience) that leaders find themselves engaging in this leadership practice more than their younger counterparts (Posner, 2010). Setting an example and affirming shared values may also have proven to be more necessary by those not employed full time because they could not count on any sources of positional power or occupational (connoting expertise) status to warrant more cooperative behavior from their constituents.

Enable Others to Act and Encourage the Heart were both engaged in more frequently by female leaders than by their male counterparts, and this difference has been noted in other settings. The oldest leaders also reported engaging more in Enable but not Encourage, while those employed full-time engaged the least in Encourage. The latter might simply be a matter of not having sufficient time for sharing appreciation and celebrating accomplishments (or perceiving that it would take "extra" time that they either did not have or did not feel was necessary at an individual level because this was often done already at a national office level). Both of these two leadership practices were utilized in similar fashions by respondents irrespective of their educational background.

From an organizational perspective no statistically significant relationships were found between the five leadership behaviors and any of the (objective) effectiveness or performance measures provided by the national office of the organization. In business organizational terms, neither growing the enterprise nor retention (e.g. changes in player count and changes in volunteer count) were related with leadership. Furthermore, attendance at section and national meetings (mostly associated with participating in training and educational sessions) failed to show any relationship with leadership. Either leadership may simply not be a significant factor in assessing the leaders' effectiveness from an organizational perspective or the organization's measures of organizational performance are not particularly robust or valid. *Post-hoc* analyses of the organization's performance measures revealed little ability to differentiate between volunteers at any level or in any capacity, and raises questions about the reliability of these measures. These findings are particularly challenging for the organization in this study as their inability to identify factors that differentiate between the most and least effective leaders leaves them without much substance or foundation upon which to determine how to develop the leadership capabilities of their leaders or hold them accountable for engaging in various activities designed to enhance their leadership abilities and presumably their effectiveness. Of course, the same would apply for any organization but is especially problematic for organizations that rely upon volunteers, as one of their motivations is being able to know that they are making a meaningful difference. And, financial support for volunteer organizations is often predicated upon demonstrating to potential donors that the organization is achieving its objectives.

What does seem clear, however, is that the more these volunteers reported being able to engage in leadership behaviors the more strongly attached they were to the organization. This finding itself has clear implications for organizations wishing to retain their volunteer leaders – let them lead. Indeed, it is easy to imagine how frustrating it can be for volunteers to feel much value in their leadership experience if they are not given the opportunity to exercise leadership; alternatively, that they feel so constrained by the organization's hierarchy, structure, rules, and routine that they feel more like followers than they do leaders, in spite of what they might be told otherwise as their responsibility.

It would be beneficial to know more about how the leadership behaviors of volunteer leaders subsequently impact the behaviors and sentiments of other volunteers and the people they are serving. For instance, the leadership behaviors identified in this study are consistent with "autonomy-supportive leadership" (e.g. Oostlander *et al.*, 2013) and "transformational leadership" (Dwyer *et al.*, 2013) which have been found to have beneficial impacts (like motivation and satisfaction) for the constituents of volunteers.

As with all research that relies on responses supplied by the participants, there is the possibility of reporting bias. Volunteer leaders who completed the leadership assessment may have rated their level of leadership behavior as higher, or lower, than it is in actual practice. Future studies would benefit from having assessments provided by observers; in this case, other volunteers and possibly even parents and the young people involved on their teams. Research in a different organization type would also indicate whether there is something inherently unique in the individuals who accept leadership positions in a volunteer organization, and whether leadership practices among volunteer leaders from different organizations are similar or vary in some systematic fashion with context.

All in all, it may not be altogether that surprizing that leadership with volunteers appears to require more energy and effort than it does in other settings. After all, the motivations of staff/employees in volunteer organizations would seem to have some differences with that of people who are being financially compensated for their involvement; volunteers are presumably compensated through intrinsic mechanisms and extrinsic motivations (financial) are generally unavailable. However, we also know that money is not the only thing that makes work worthwhile, and that the most effective leaders will strive to tap into the intrinsic motivations of their workforce because there are limits on what people will do simply for a buck. Previous studies have indicated that regardless of setting and demographic factors that what mostly matters to people in terms of how they feel about their workplace is how frequently they experience their leaders leading (Posner, 2013, 2014). Strengthening the capability of people to lead others, especially in volunteer organizations, would benefit not just the people directly involved, but also those who benefit from their services and ultimately society at large.

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