

## ABSTRACT

*This article analyzes results of a 1996 study of AVA members that explored leadership practices of volunteer administrators. Use of a leadership assessment instrument developed by Kouzes and Posner was employed as a means for understanding relationships between respondents and effective leadership practices. Results suggest opportunities for further research to advance the professional practices of volunteer administrators.*

# Leadership Practices of Association for Volunteer Administration Members

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## INTRODUCTION

According to a 1996 national study on volunteerism, more than 100 million Americans volunteer annually, contributing a value of more than \$200 billion to causes in their communities (Independent Sector, 1997). These volunteers represent nearly 50 percent of all adult citizens and almost 60 percent of teenagers engaging in various forms of citizen participation.

The April 1997 Presidents' Summit for America's Future held in Philadelphia acknowledged the value of this citizen engagement and offered a clarion call for individuals to make an even greater effort to engage in volunteerism to solve community problems and improve the nation's quality of life. Lacking in this national conversation, however, seems to be attention paid to those salaried and unsalaried professionals who serve as administrators of volunteer efforts. Among those individuals who administer volunteer services in public and private organizations are more than 1,700 who have chosen to become members of the Association for Volunteer Administration (AVA). As the "international membership organization for people who share a commitment to the effective leadership of volunteer efforts," AVA has a defined mission "to promote professionalism and strengthen leadership in volunteerism"

(Association for Volunteer Administration, 1996).

If volunteer administrators are the professionals charged, in part, with engaging citizens in meaningful service in communities, it is posited that there is value to understanding leadership practices of this important segment of the professional community. As AVA continues to advance its commitment to the "effective leadership of volunteer efforts," it seems appropriate for the organization to encourage an understanding of leadership styles and leadership development approaches to advance the professional practice of volunteer administrators.

If effective leadership is a goal of AVA, what is known about the current leadership practices of AVA members in relation to a widely-used leadership assessment tool? What leadership practices are observed among AVA members? What observations may be made regarding the leadership practices of AVA members versus professionals selected from other industry groups?

To address these research questions, a survey was administered to a sampling of AVA members during 1996. This article presents findings from the study that incorporated the use of a well-known instrument called the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) authored by

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James Kouzes and Barry Posner.

The survey was conducted with the full cooperation of the president of AVA, Mike Newman, members of the organization's national staff, and the researchers. The national office staff of AVA assisted in preparing and sending the mailing to a sampling of AVA members based on the membership database existing at the time the national office was located in Boulder, Colorado. The focus of the initial study was on members who reside within the United States. The sampling strategy assured that respondents were dispersed throughout the United States and reflected the overall distribution of AVA members. The researchers designed the questionnaire with assistance from Newman who consulted with members of the organization's central office staff and executive board.

While the primary intent of this survey was to gather data pertaining to leadership practices of AVA members, information also was obtained regarding demographics and professional backgrounds of members as a means for comparison and contrast to the findings from the AVA Membership Survey conducted in 1992 (Brudney, 1993).

## RESPONSE RATES

The survey was a self-administered questionnaire. Dillman's (1978) total design method was employed to reach the sample of AVA members. To encourage high response rates, Dillman's method is to include with every survey a cover letter explaining the study and a postage-paid return envelope. One week after the initial mailing, a postcard reminder is sent to all respondents. Three weeks following the initial mailing, a second cover letter and replacement questionnaire is sent to non-respondents.

The initial mailing was sent in July 1996 to a sample of 754 out of 1,508 members residing within the United States. Names were selected using a sampling interval of two. As a result, questionnaires were mailed to every other eligible AVA mem-

ber. Responses continued to be received through December 1996. A total of 529 responses were received for a response rate of 70.16%. This was considered a very acceptable rate of return, and an analysis of geographic distribution indicated that members in the 12 AVA regions within the 50 states were adequately represented.

## DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

The vast majority of survey respondents were female (91.5%). In addition, the ethnic distribution showed that most respondents were white (94.5%), followed by black (2.8%), and Hispanic (1.5%). The average age of respondents was just under 46 years of age, with a range reported between 23 and 76 years of age. The majority of respondents obtained four or more years of post-secondary education (80.3%), and almost four out of 10 members had the equivalent of a master's degree or beyond (38.5%).

Results of the demographic portion of the survey are similar to the 1992 findings. For example, AVA members were once again found to be predominantly female, white, and reporting a relatively high level of education. Some differences between this study and the 1992 findings are reflected in small changes in ethnicity (a slightly higher percentage of Hispanic members and slightly lower percentage of black members), and the average age of respondents is slightly younger by a full year. These changes are relatively small and should not be interpreted as a general trend in AVA membership demographics.

## PRESENT POSITION IN VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATION

The majority of respondents indicated they are volunteer administrators (78.6%); 9.2% were CEO's or organization heads; 5.5% were trainers/consultants; and 6.8% represented other positions. (This analysis considers responses to a variety of demographic questions. Within each category total responses may be slightly more or less than 100 percent due to a rounding

of percentages to the nearest tenth of a percent.) The majority of respondents worked full-time (82.9%). Of these, 87.7% were salaried employees of their organizations. Of those not salaried, 5.5% represented hourly, contract, or other types of employment arrangements, and 3.4% were self-employed.

Of those respondents who were employees of organizations, almost 4 out of 10 respondents were full-time volunteer administrators (37.7%). Almost 8 out of 10 respondents spent at least 50 percent of their time or more in volunteer administration duties (77.7%). Respondents had held their positions on an average of just over six years (mean = 6.13 years).

The majority of respondents work for not-for-profit organizations (73.2%). The remaining members work for local/municipal government (10.4%), state government (7.2%), and the federal government (4.0%). A relatively small percentage of respondents work within a for-profit setting (3.2%). The remaining 2% checked "other."

Respondents were asked to identify the one organizational category that most closely identified their current work place. Categories were determined by using the taxonomy used by Independent Sector. The majority of respondents reported they work in health-related organizations (29.8%) and human services (28.9%), followed by education (8.9%); arts, culture and humanities (5.8%); public/society benefit (5.8%); environment (5.4%); religious organizations (4.8%); and youth development agencies (3.3%). The remaining percentages were spread over six categories: other (3.3%); recreation for adults (1.4%); work related (1.2%); political (.8%); international/foreign (.4%); and private/community education (.2%).

Respondents also were asked about their salary range for their currently held position. The largest cohort of respondents revealed a salary range of between \$25,000 - \$29,999 (19.5%). The next largest number of respondents reported a range of between \$30,000 - \$34,999 (16.2%), fol-

lowed by those reporting \$20,000 - \$24,999 (13.1%) and those reporting a range between \$35,000 - \$39,999 (12.1%). Slightly more than 15 percent reported salaries of less than \$20,000 (15.2%). Interestingly, almost one out of four respondents reported salaries of more than \$40,000 (24%). This included those reporting salaries between \$40,000 - \$44,999 (9.4%); \$45,000 - \$49,999 (4.3%); \$50,000 - \$54,999 (3.7%); \$55,000 - \$59,999 (2.7%). A total of 3.9% reported salaries of more than \$60,000.

As with the 1992 study, the typical respondent to this survey is a salaried, professional, female volunteer administrator. She serves full-time in a not-for-profit organization, engages most of her time in volunteer administration duties, and has been in her current position for at least six years. Her typical salary range is between \$25,000 and \$35,000.

## RESEARCH ON LEADERSHIP

Providing a common definition of the term leadership is a difficult task, as is any attempt to review the many approaches to the subject found in the literature. Compounding this difficulty is confusion that surrounds the differences between "leadership" and "management." To dissect the many definitions of leadership and to review the variety of leadership approaches is beyond the scope of this paper. However, a brief summary of some of the thinking that has driven discussions about this important topic may help to place leadership within the context of this study of AVA members.

The term leadership seems to have evolved from several general interpretations (Rost, 1991). The first suggests an excellence theory of leadership. That is, leadership is about producing excellence and being "number one." The second definition generally describes a position of influence held by one or more individuals. In this way, a leader is defined by the office or position s/he holds. A third popular definition views leadership as centering on a person who directs others. This

view suggests the individual exerts himself or herself on behalf of others and on the organization s/he serves. Each of these definitions of leadership seems too simplistic to be universally accepted by those who truly desire to understand how leadership can best be practiced in organizations.

A definition of leadership that seems more appropriate when describing effective volunteer administrators is one which acknowledges an influence relationship among leaders and followers toward the accomplishment of certain mutual purposes. In this definition, relationships between leaders and followers are multi-directional, non-coercive and involve real changes. In this context "leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes" (Rost, 1991). It would seem that most AVA members, as administrators of volunteer programs, can relate to this relationship-oriented approach given their work to involve volunteers in service by providing the sort of direction necessary for the goals of their organization to be met.

Three dominant approaches have evolved throughout the approximately 80 years of research on the subject of leadership in the United States. One approach emerged from research that sought to understand the general underlying personalities or physical characteristics which contribute to the presence of leadership. In general, this body of work suggests that individuals are born with inherent personal qualities essential for success as leaders. Leadership training would, in this context, be appropriate only for those who possess such innate traits.

Another approach emerged from examining leadership behavior itself to determine the common methods and forms used to identify leaders. The kinds of activities or efforts in which leaders engaged were studied to determine the basis of leadership behaviors. Here leadership was seen as identifiable actions

that could be emulated by others who desire to be leaders.

With the limitations inherent in viewing leadership only as a matter of "trait-based" or "behavior-based" approaches, a third approach emerged in research. Situational, or contingency, leadership describes the view that the effectiveness of leadership traits and behaviors are contingent on factors external to the leader. Here external factors such as the followers, the group structure, and general organizational characteristics, among other factors, come into play within the context of specific situations. Within the context of specific situations, however, traits and behaviors also play a role.

Variations on prior themes have continued to be developed and an emerging paradigm from the 1980s involved a new concept called transformational leadership (Burns, 1978; Downton, 1973). This concept involves leadership asking followers to transcend their own self-interest for the good of the organization. In this way, the follower is ultimately converted into a leader as well. Transformational leadership is observed when leaders broaden and elevate the interests of their followers, generating awareness and acceptance of the purposes and mission of the group (Seltzer and Bass, 1990). Transformational leaders inspire their followers, deal individually with their developmental needs, and encourage new ways to approach problem solving.

Transformational leadership seemingly falls into the contingency approach to leadership as the most widely accepted form of leadership today. Kouzes and Posner (1995) found that transformational leaders may challenge the process, inspire a shared vision, enable others to act, model the way, and encourage the heart.

## LEADERSHIP PRACTICES INVENTORY

The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) is a widely used leadership assessment tool developed from research authored by Kouzes and Posner (1995).

The LPI resulted from their research project which began in 1983. It was chosen for this study of AVA members because it is from the best of current research about leadership.

The most frequent use of the LPI has been within business and industry. Well known companies such as IBM, Motorola, and Levi Strauss have incorporated the instrument into their human resource development programs. The LPI has met the rigors associated with psychometric concerns. It is considered a valid and reliable instrument. Its use with AVA members, most of whom are volunteer administrators working in not-for-profit and governmental organizations, is believed appropriate; its results represent a unique contribution to the field of volunteer administration.

The LPI advances a leadership model that identifies specific behaviors and actions that individuals report when they are at "their personal best" as leaders.

As reflected in the LPI, these actions are categorized into five leadership practices, each of which is identified with related strategies or behaviors exhibited by the committed leader. These five practices, described briefly below, are: Challenging the Process, Inspiring a Shared Vision, Enabling Others to Act, Modeling the Way, and Encouraging the Heart (Kouzes and Posner, 1995).

Each of these practices was developed following extensive qualitative and quantitative research by Kouzes and Posner in which managers were asked to reflect on a "personal best leadership experience" described as "an experience in which that person led a group to achieve some extraordinary accomplishments" (Kouzes and Posner, 1995).

The first practice, Challenging the Process, involves searching for opportunities to change and grow, to innovate and improve. To Challenge the Process also means to take risks and experiment and learn from the mistakes that happen when such behavior is exhibited.

The second practice, Inspiring a Shared

Vision, means the leader gives inspired direction and purpose to the organization. S/he looks to the future with dreams about what is possible and offers a vision for others in the organization to follow.

Enabling Others to Act is the third practice. Here leaders recognize they alone cannot reach goals and that partnerships are necessary in order to accomplish extraordinary things. Fostering cooperative relationships and promoting collaboration are hallmarks of this leadership practice. The sharing of information and power to enable others to become leaders is seen as an important value requiring trust and the willingness to let others be visible and succeed in their work.

Modeling the Way is the fourth practice advanced by Kouzes and Posner. Being a role model to others in the organization is about setting examples of behavior that are consistent with the leader's expressed values. Often this is described as "walking the talk" and speaks to the consistency exhibited between what is said and what is practiced. In addition, Modeling the Way suggests an approach to problem-solving where manageable parts of a problem are identified and worked on so that small "wins" are possible to promote consistent progress toward goals and encourage organizational commitment by individuals.

The final practice, Encouraging the Heart, implies an approach to recognition of accomplishments by all individuals who have contributed to the success of a project. The leader encourages everyone to be a winner by rewarding those who contribute to the common vision. Team accomplishments are celebrated regularly.

AVA study participants were asked to respond to questions related to these five leadership practices. A total of six questions related to each of the five leadership practices described above resulted in a total of 30 questions. Responses were defined to allow the participant an opportunity to note how frequently participants exhibit the behavior through a Likert-type scale including 1) rarely, 2) once in a while,

3) sometimes, 4) fairly often, and 5) very frequently.

Standards provided by publishers of the LPI were used to evaluate data. Each respondent's rating was placed into a leadership practices grid and tabulated to determine a total rating score for each of the defined leadership behaviors. For any one question the highest response could be a 5 (very frequently exhibits the behavior). The score for each leadership practice represents a summation of responses for the six questions relating to each of the behaviors. Using these standards, a maximum score of 30 could be obtained for each leadership practice. This would indicate that a respondent engages in the practice very frequently. Conversely, the minimum score possible for any practice could be 0, indicating that a respondent rarely demonstrates behavior which comprises that practice. As with most assessment scales, it is recognized that individuals report a range of behavior frequencies that typically fall between maximum and minimum extremes. However, the higher the value of the score for each practice, the greater the use of a leadership behavior.

#### AVA RESPONSES TO THE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES INVENTORY

Table I compares overall mean scores of AVA respondents in each of the five lead-

ership practices with findings represented by other industry groups who have administered the LPI. In Kouzes and Posner's (1995) appendix, *Theory and Evidence Behind the Practice*, comparisons of mean scores were made across functional fields: customer service, manufacturing/development, information services, finance, and marketing.

Their research reveals differences between finance professionals and the other professional categories for Inspiring a Shared Vision and Encouraging the Heart. Comparisons with the industry-group data indicate differences primarily were due to the lower scores noted by finance professionals explained, perhaps, by the type of work and nature of interaction in which these individuals engage versus other professional categories.

It is interesting to note that mean scores for AVA respondents were found to be higher for each of the leadership practices factors when compared to the other functional fields as shown in Table I. Two of the leadership practices, Challenging the Process and Enabling Others to Act, appear to be similar to the LPI published results, yet do represent higher average scores.

In two other practices, Inspiring a Shared Vision and Modeling the Way, AVA members' responses were substantially higher than the other functional

**TABLE I**

Comparison of Mean Scores between Leaders by Functional Field on the Leadership Practices Inventory

Leadership Practices	Functional Fields						
	A. AVA Respondents	B. Business [C+D+E+F+G]	C. Customer Service	D. Manufacturing/ Development	E. Information Services	F. Finance	G. Marketing
Challenging the Process	23.70	22.30	22.31	22.49	22.24	22.14	22.32
Inspiring a Shared Vision	22.84	19.77	20.17	20.47	20.09	18.33	19.79
Enabling Others to Act	26.38	24.61	24.89	24.58	24.77	24.09	24.74
Modeling the Way	24.29	21.38	21.24	21.62	21.61	20.98	21.44
Encouraging the Heart	25.69	21.17	21.15	21.57	21.43	19.86	21.84



fields. This is not entirely surprising because effective volunteer administrators are called upon to believe passionately in their work and strive to work with and through volunteers to achieve organizational goals. An ability to persuasively guide others toward a common vision and support a future of achievable possibilities is necessary if volunteers are to be attracted and retained in a program. Similarly, the effective volunteer administrator can be seen as a role model whose standards reflect the organization and who helps volunteers and staff find ways to succeed in their work.

The final practice in which AVA respondents demonstrated a substantially higher mean score is with the practice of Encouraging the Heart. As noted by Kouzes and Posner, "getting extraordinary things done in organizations is hard work ... leaders encourage others ... [they make] people feel like heroes by telling the rest of the organization about what individual members ... have accomplished" (Kouzes and Posner, 1995). It is not surprising that effective volunteer administrators demonstrate substantially higher mean scores than other functional fields as they strive to enable volunteers and staff to carry on by the encouragement they provide. They recognize how volunteers and staff accomplishments add to the success of projects, and they celebrate team accomplishments regularly.

In Table II, five selected AVA member variables (age, salary, number of years in the job, percent of time spent in volunteer administration, and program budget) are compared with the five leadership practices. The correlations are moderate.

For example, the AVA member characteristics of age, salary, and number of years in the job seem to have a positive relationship to four of the practices (Challenging the Process, Inspiring a Shared Vision, Modeling the Way, and Encouraging the Heart). Results suggest that as volunteer administrators gain experience in their profession, they tend to exhibit several of the leadership behaviors that have been identified by Kouzes and Posner as practices of effective leaders.

Conversely, the percent of time spent in volunteer administration and size of the volunteer program budget was negatively related to three of the practices (Challenging the Process, Inspiring a Shared Vision, and Encouraging the Heart). Results suggest that as respondents spend less time in volunteer administration and deal with smaller program budgets, they are less likely to exhibit these three leadership practices.

## SUMMARY

Based on this study, AVA members were shown to report higher mean scores for each of the five leadership practices identified through the LPI. The fact that a

**TABLE II**  
Correlations among Selected AVA Member Characteristics and the LPI Factors

AVA Member Characteristics	Leadership Practices				
	Challenging the Process	Inspiring a Shared Vision	Enabling Others to Act	Modeling the Way	Encouraging the Heart
Age	.076	.069	.059	.124**	.186**
Salary	.170**	.119**	.059	.123**	-.058
Number of Years in the Job	.045	.011	.028	.121**	.058
Percent of Time Spent in Volunteer Administration	-.131**	-.109*	-.077	-.010	-.002
Program Budget	-.094	.064	-.003	.015	-.102

\*\*Indicates statistical significance at <.01 level, or 99 times out of 100.

\*Indicates statistical significance at <.05 level, or 95 times out of 100.

higher value was noted for each practice suggests that these volunteer administrators, in general, demonstrate a greater use of effective leadership behaviors than managers representing other functional fields.

Differences observed through the comparison with the other functional job fields to AVA respondents, particularly with Inspiring a Shared Vision, Modeling the Way, and Encouraging the Heart, seem to relate to the career motivation of helping others. It is supposed that volunteer administrators choose their careers, in part, because of a strong motivation to help others, and it would seem reasonable that as a result they would excel in these practices. Effective volunteer administrators may, therefore, be those individuals who can integrate personal vision with organizational values that encourage volunteers and staff to engage in activities that help organizations reach goals.

As behaviors that distinguish effective volunteer administrators are further understood, it is anticipated that professional practice can be advanced. Future research may involve investigating the impact of gender, ethnic or cultural background, and the further clarification of the comparisons across functional fields with the various leadership practices.

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE

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