

## **Transformational Leadership and its Relationship to Adult 4-H Volunteers' Sense of Empowerment in Youth Development Settings**

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### **Abstract**

This study examined the relationship of adult 4-H volunteers' perceived leadership styles of 4-H Youth Development Educators to the adult 4-H volunteer sense of empowerment. There were 498 Oregon adult 4-H volunteers randomly selected to participate. Participants rated the leadership style of their 4-H Youth Development Educator (YDE) using Bass and Avolio's (1990) Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire and self assessed their sense of empowerment using Spreitzer's (19915) Psychological Empowerment Instrument. In the structural model, transformational leadership style was shown to have a significant positive relationship ( $\beta = 0.031$ ) to adult 4-H volunteer sense of empowerment. The 4-H YDEs who were rated as using transformational leadership were very likely to be empowering adult 4-H volunteers.

### **Introduction**

Cooperative Extension programs are in a state of transition in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Due to the limitations of fiscal resources and rapid shifts in society within the economy and technology areas, Extension programs are asked to address more needs with fewer staff and resources. In order to address these issues, the Land Grant University Presidents and Chancellors stressed the importance of leadership development. They emphasized leadership is of vital importance to empower individuals and communities and that it should embrace characteristics of the transformational style (The Council of 1890 Presidents and Chancellors, 2000).

Transformational leadership is found to be a strong predictor of leadership effectiveness (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996). The relationship between transformational and transactional leadership styles and leadership effectiveness has been explored through research studies focused on Extension Administrators (Ali, 2005; Brown, et. al. 1996; Moore, 2003; Radhakrishna, Yoder & Baggett, 1994; Stumpf, 2003). Yet only four reports to date have tried to assess the transformational leadership styles of 4-H Youth

Development professionals (Sinasky & Bruce, 2006; Stedman & Rudd, 2004; Stedman & Rudd, 2006; Woodrum & Safrit, 2003).

To date studies have not explored the relationship of 4-H Youth Development Educator's (YDE) leadership style to the experience of the volunteer leader. As an organization, the adult 4-H volunteer role is critical to the success of the 4-H program. Therefore, the relationship between the 4-H YDE and the 4-H adult volunteer as well as the leadership of the 4-H YDE to the 4-H adult volunteer would be critical. Is the leadership style utilized by 4-H youth development professionals truly empowering individuals, especially the 4-H volunteer leaders in their programs? No systematic studies have been conducted to substantiate researchers' claims that use of a transformational leadership style by 4-H youth development professionals will correlate to a sense of empowerment of adult 4-H volunteers, especially as perceived by the volunteer leaders in the program. With a growing need for 4-H Youth Development professionals within the Cooperative Extension System to be transformative leaders in their programs and communities, it seems important to conduct research that can help enlighten both the leadership and 4-H youth development field in this arena.

## Theoretical Framework

A comprehensive literature review of leadership theory, particularly transformational and transactional leadership theory and their relationship to empowerment theory formed the framework for this study.

### Leadership Style

Transformational leadership theory has been the most frequently researched leadership theory over the last two decades. Transformational and transactional leadership theory was introduced by James MacGregor Burns (1978) in his seminal book, *Leadership*. Burns stated that transformational leadership occurs when "one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (p. 20). Several modifications to Burns conceptualizations of transformational and transactional theory were made by Bass (1985).

The revised version of Bass' (1990) work is referred to as the Full Range Leadership Model. According to Bass, this model delineates four dimensions of transformational leadership as follows: (a) *Idealized influence* refers to leaders behaving in an admirable manner, which engenders their followers to them and has them hold their leader in high regard; (b) *Inspirational motivation* refers to leaders motivating and inspiring followers through their strong vision, persuasive language, and optimistic enthusiasm; (c) *Intellectual stimulation* refers to leaders challenging assumptions and encouraging divergent thinking and creativity from their follower's efforts; and, (d) *Individualized consideration* refers to leaders attending to the needs of followers.

The three dimensions of transactional leadership are (a) *Contingent reward* refers to the exchange process between leaders and followers. The leader comes to an agreement with the follower over what needs to be done and what rewards will be exchanged for the follower doing it; (b) *Management by exception – active* refers to the active role a leader plays in watching followers closely so that they can quickly take corrective action when the followers make mistakes or violate rules; and, (c) *Management by exception – passive* refers to the passive role a leader takes in penalizing followers after standards have not been made. Each of the management by exception dimensions uses more negative reinforcement patterns.

The model also includes a non-leadership dimension, *laissez-faire* leadership, which refers to the actual avoidance or absence of leadership.

At the heart of the transformational leadership model is the idea that transformational leaders motivate their followers to commit to and to realize performance outcomes beyond their expectations. Bass (1985) argues that three leadership processes are involved in achieving these outcomes: (a) leaders raise followers' levels of consciousness about the importance and value of outcomes and the means to achieve them, (b) leaders induce followers to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the collective team or organization, and (c) leaders stimulate followers' desire to address higher-level needs. Transactional leadership differs from transformational leadership in the fact that transactional leaders do not concern themselves with the individual needs of followers or their personal development. Transformational leadership produces greater effects than transactional leadership. While transactional leadership results in expected outcomes, transformational leadership results in performance that goes well beyond what is expected (Bass, 1985; Northouse, 2004; Yukl, 2006). This *going beyond what is expected* is related to the collaborative, collective action generated by transformational leadership which empowers those who participate in the process. This additive effect is illustrated in Figure 1.

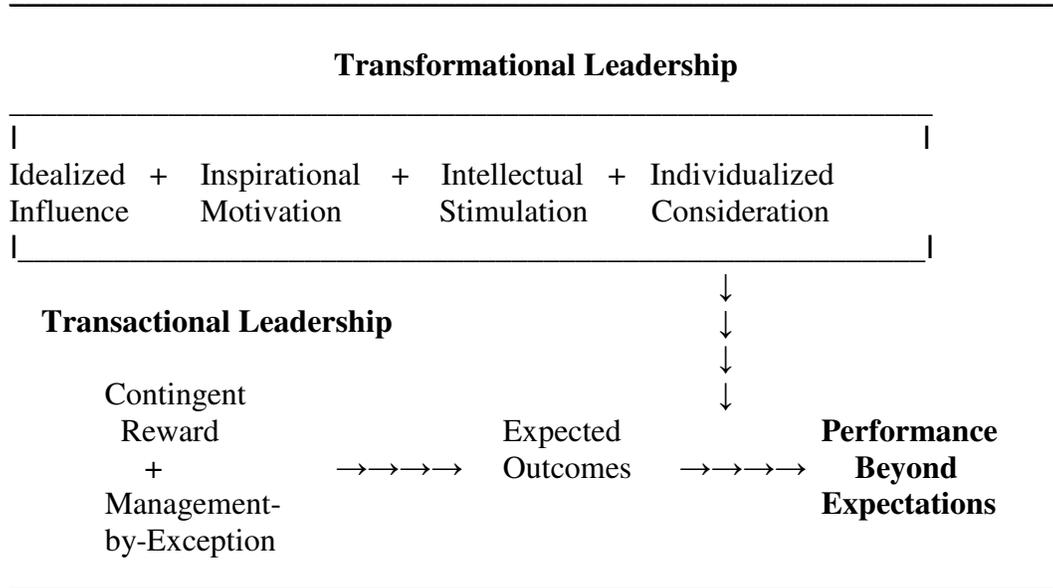
According to Conger and Kanungo (1988) and Jung, Chow, and Wu (2003), transformational leadership clearly provides empowering effects on followers. Transformational leadership style has also been found to be positively related to job satisfaction (Stumpf, 2003), leadership skill competency (Moore, 2003), attainment of funding (Ali, 2005), and volunteer administrative competency (Stedman & Rudd, 2005).

For this study each of the constructs for transformational leadership style, transactional leadership style, and leadership outcomes were included in the model as latent variables. A latent variable is defined as a hypothetical variable formed by combining several related observed variables. According to Bass and Avolio (1990), the latent variable constructs for transformational leadership style include (a) idealized influence-attributed, (b) idealized influence-behavior, (c) inspirational motivation, (d) intellectual stimulation, and (e) individualized

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consideration. The latent variable constructs for transactional leadership style include (a) contingent reward, (b) management by exception – active, (c) management by exception – passive, and (d) laissez-faire leadership.

Figure 1. The additive effect of transformational leadership



Source: Northouse (2004). *Leadership: Theory and Practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, p. 176. Adapted from “The Implications of Transactional and Transformational Leadership for Individual, Team and Organizational Development,” by B.M. Bass and B.J. Avolio, 1990a, *Research in Organizational Change and Development*, 4, 231-272.

**Empowerment**

The psychological dimensions of empowerment form the context of this research study. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) operationalized empowerment in terms of intrinsic task motivation which has four cognitive components including (a) meaningfulness, (b) competence, (c) choice (self-determination), and (d) impact. Building on the theoretical framework of Thomas and Velthouse, research by Spreitzer (1995) proved that each of the four cognitions of empowerment are multi-faceted and cannot be separated. According to Spreitzer, the latent variable of empowerment as included in this study is measured by examining (a) meaning, (b) competence, (c) self-determination, and (d) impact. Meaning refers to the fit between work role requirements and a person’s beliefs and values. Competence refers to one’s capability and self-efficacy to perform work activities. Self-determination is a sense of choice in initiating one’s actions. Impact is the degree to which one can influence outcomes.

## **Purpose**

This study was designed to fill a gap in the literature by looking at the relationship of 4-H YDEs leadership style to the experience of the adult 4-H volunteer leader. Informed by the literature review on transformational and transactional leadership theory, this study investigated the following research questions:

- What is the relationship between perceived 4-H YDE transformational leadership style and the adult 4-H volunteer sense of empowerment?
- What is the relationship between perceived 4-H YDE transactional leadership style and the adult 4-H volunteer sense of empowerment?

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

The target population for this study was the Oregon 4-H club adult volunteer enrolled in each respective county in the state as identified on the 2007-2008 database. Names were provided from 33 of the 36 counties and from the 4-H program on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation. A total of 3,517 volunteer names were provided. A simple random sampling method resulted in 498 Oregon adult 4-H volunteers being selected for the study. The data collection process utilized procedures outlined by Dillman (2000) for conducting research through mail questionnaires. There were 209 responses received for a 42% response rate. An extrapolation method (Armstrong and Overton, 1977) was used for estimating the response of non-respondents. An analysis of the first 30 respondents with the final 30 respondents indicated no significant differences between early and late respondents.

### **Instruments**

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass and Avolio (1990) was utilized to measure transformational/ transactional leadership style. The MLQ 5X instrument contains 45 statements that respondents must answer using a 5-level Likert scale. The scale options include: 0 (not at all); 1 (once in a while); 2 (sometimes); 3 (fairly often); and 4 (frequently, if not always). There are four individual statements for each of the nine leadership construct scales and an additional nine statements related to three outcome variable scales for a total of 12 measurement scales. The MLQ 5X has two forms: a leader form and a rater form. The leader form was designed to be completed by an individual to measure self-perceived leadership styles. The rater form was developed to be completed by individuals who are asked to measure the perception of the leadership styles of a designated leader. In this study adult 4-H volunteers completed the rater form on their respective 4-H YDE.

For this research study the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient report reliabilities for each of the leadership constructs ranged from 0.56 to 0.86 and for each of the

outcome variables of leadership ranging from 0.85 to 0.90. The construct with the lowest Cronbach's Alpha were "Management-by-Exception – Active (MBEA),"  $\alpha=0.56$  and "Idealized Influence – Behavior (IIB),"  $\alpha=0.60$ .

Due to its strength in convergent and discriminant validity testing of the four dimensions of empowerment, the Psychological Empowerment Instrument (PEI) developed by Spreitzer (1995) was utilized to measure empowerment. In the current study, the Cronbach Alpha reliabilities for the four empowerment scales are adequate (meaning=0.92; competence=0.91; self-determination=0.82, and impact=0.86).

### **Statistical Analysis and Reliability Measurements**

The research used both descriptive and inferential statistical methods in answering the research questions. A combination of *Statistical Package for Social Science SPSS 15.0* and *Mplus 5.1* was used to run the structural equation modeling, including the necessary confirmatory and exploratory factor analysis. Structural equation modeling (SEM) examined the complex relationship among the latent variables of transformational leadership style, transactional leadership style, and empowerment.

Preliminary analysis reported adequate Cronbach Alpha reliabilities as well as appropriate convergent and discriminant validity. The confirmatory factor analysis with the two leadership style factors revealed a modest fit (CFI=0.85) and the confirmatory factor analysis with the empowerment factors revealed an excellent fit (CFI=0.99).

## **Results**

### **Transformational Leadership Style – Research Question 1**

The first research question of this study was: What is the relationship between perceived 4-H YDE transformational leadership style and the adult 4-H volunteer sense of empowerment? The analysis found a significant and positive relationship ( $\beta=0.287$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between perceived 4-HYDE transformational leadership and adult 4-H volunteer sense of empowerment. 4-H YDEs who are rated as using transformational leadership are very likely to be empowering adult 4-H volunteers.

This research study contributes to the literature by examining, for what appears to be the first time in research literature, the relationship of transformation leadership style and empowerment of volunteers. Most of the prior research on transformational leadership and/or empowerment has been conducted with top level or mid-level managers within an organization, particularly with paid staff. The current study demonstrates the role transformational leadership has for empowering followers within an organization who are volunteers. This research

study indicates that there is a positive relationship between 4-H YDE staff who utilize transformational leadership and adult 4-H volunteer sense of empowerment. Empowerment of followers is one of the most important aspects of transformational leadership. If leaders have empowered their staff (paid or unpaid) to set goals and determine the strategies to achieve those goals towards the realization of the shared vision, this shows they have taken on the vision for themselves. The followers have made a commitment to and acted upon a shared vision. Empowered staff (paid or unpaid) feel valued by the organization.

### **Transactional Leadership Style – Research Question 2**

The second research question studied was: What is the relationship between perceived 4-H YDE transactional leadership style and the adult 4-H volunteer sense of empowerment? In the analysis there was no significant relationship ( $\beta=0.759, p > 0.05$ ) found, either positive or negative, between perceived 4-H YDE transactional leadership style and the sense of empowerment of adult 4-H volunteer leaders. The monitoring, reward-based, status quo behaviors of the transactional leadership style did not relate to whether or not adult 4-H volunteers felt empowered. One reason for this may be that many of the monitoring behaviors used within the 4-H program may be seen as formalized institutional systems within the organization itself, such as rules and guidelines, enrollment processes, awards and recognition systems, and volunteer leader screening and training. These formalized systems may encourage and reinforce transactional behavior, but they may be perceived as separate from the 4-H YDEs' personal leadership style.

In part, because of this finding, the researcher also looked at the relationship between transformational leadership style and transactional leadership. In comparing transformational leadership style and transactional leadership style, a significant negative correlation was found ( $\beta= -0.693, p > 0.001$ ). This means that 4-H YDEs who were rated as using transformational leadership were also very likely not to use transactional leadership or vice versa such that 4-H YDEs who were rated as using transactional leadership were very likely not to use transformational leadership.

A statistically significant, negative relationship between transformational and transactional leadership style is divergent from the findings supported in the literature. Bass (1985) asserts that transformational and transactional leadership styles are not mutually exclusive and that the best of leaders use behaviors of both styles. The findings by Spreitzer et al. (1999) lend support to Bass's assertions adding that empowered leaders may be playing multiple or paradoxical roles reflecting both change orientated (transformational) and status quo orientated (transactional) behaviors. Studies by Sinasky and Bruce (2006) and Woodrum and Safrit (2003) reported that participants rated themselves as using both transformational and transactional leadership style.

The findings in this research study suggest that adult 4-H volunteer perceive that 4-H YDEs using transformational leadership were likely not to use transactional leadership as well as those 4-H YDEs using transactional leadership were likely not to use transformational leadership. This study would put 4-H YDEs transformational and transactional leadership at different ends of the leadership style behavior spectrum supporting Burn's (1978) claims about these leadership styles. This relationship can be referred to in Figure 2 where the path regressions coefficients are presented in the full model.

**Full Model**

The last step of the analysis was to test the final model with all variables included. The study included seven continuous latent variables, with 57 constructs used to measure the latent variables. The results yielded by the final model that was tested are presented in a graphic form in Figure 2 and in numeric form in Table 1. The results are also analyzed within the following paragraphs.

Figure 2. Path regression coefficients for the full model of adult 4-H volunteer sense of empowerment

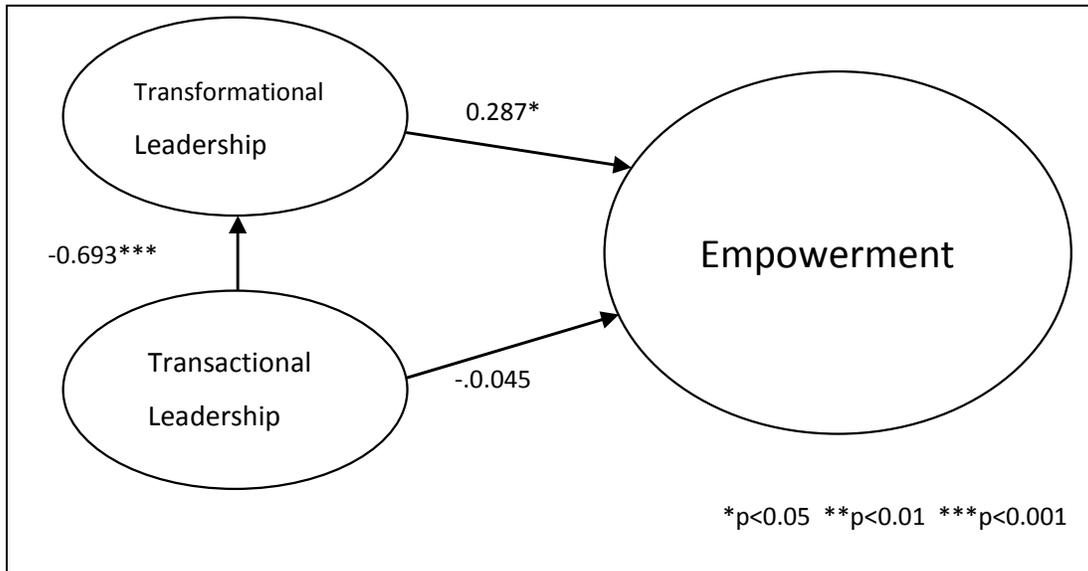


Table 1. 4-H Volunteer empowerment structural model coefficients, standard errors and p-values

<b>Structural Model</b>	<b>Estimate (coefficient)</b>	<b>S.E.</b>	<b>Standardized Estimate/S.E.</b>	<b>p-value</b>
Empowerment on Transactional leadership	-0.045	0.146	-0.307	0.759
Empowerment on Transformational leadership	0.287	0.133	2.151	0.031*
Transformational on Transactional leadership	-0.693	0.045	-15.516	0.000***

\* p<0.05 \*\*p<0.01 \*\*\*p<0.001

### Limitations

As with any scholarly study, there are limitations to the generalizability of this study's results. The first limitation that must be considered relates to the organization being studied. As this study was conducted within the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension System, which is a unique organization in terms of its structure and function, the findings are not generalizable to other organizations. The Extension organization is unique as it is connected to the Land Grant University in each state across the country, but is also embedded in local communities where staff (both paid and unpaid) work in partnerships with businesses, community members, families, and young people to provide both educational programs and materials as well as conduct empirical and applied research. The second limitation which needs to be recognized is that this is not an experimental design research study so the results can not reflect causality, but it can illuminate the predictive power of the tested variables and their relationship.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are applicable to 4-H YDEs in Oregon, the broader Oregon State University Extension System, and those responsible for professional development opportunities for Extension Service faculty. The most appropriate recommendation is to implement strategies for assisting 4-H YDEs in becoming transformational leaders. A range of possible strategies include (a) building transformational leadership into the core competencies needed for 4-H YDE professionals, (b) creating on-line training modules to assist 4-H YDEs gather the knowledge, skills and practices of transformational behavior, and (c) shifting our paradigm of preparation of 4-H YDE professionals to include leadership development as something that can be learned and needs to be provided to all professionals not just those in administrative roles. Lastly, it is also recommended that the Extension organization fully embrace the empowerment and transformational leadership constructs. A fuller understanding of these constructs and the dimensions which bring them to life could strengthen the 4-H

program and organization when put into practice. Enhanced competencies in these areas can only contribute to the empowerment of volunteers who contribute and expand the efforts of the 4-H program.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

Due to the limited fiscal resources and rapid shifts in society within the economy and technology, Cooperative Extension programs, and 4-H programs are in a state of transition. Now, more than ever, transformational leaders are needed to keep 4-H youth development educational programs and systems more engaging, relevant, responsive, and moving forward. This study extends previous research on the empowering effect of transformation leadership (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Jung, Chow, & Wu, 2003) by illuminating the role of transformational leadership and its influence on adult 4-H volunteer empowerment.

This study found that 4-H volunteers feel a sense of empowerment in their role within the 4-H program. When adult 4-H volunteers perceived their 4-H YDEs using a transformational leadership style it significantly related to their sense of empowerment. Due to the significant connection found in this study between transformational leadership style and empowerment of volunteers, the implications for the Extension system is to assist 4-H YDEs in becoming adept at using the transformational leadership style or in essence becoming transformational leaders.

The study attempted to bridge the gap of knowledge known about the relationship between the 4-H YDE and the 4-H adult volunteer as well as the leadership of the 4-H YDE to the 4-H adult volunteer. An increased understanding of the factors that contribute to adult 4-H volunteer sense of empowerment can enhance 4-H youth development programs when these factors are put into practice.

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