

**TITLE** An Exploration of the Leadership Behavior of Volunteer Leaders

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**OBJECTIVE** The purpose of this study was to investigate any differences in the leadership behavior of volunteer leaders as compared to the leadership behavior of paid leaders.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Participants in this study were members of Kiwanis clubs who served as club president during the 2009-2010, 2010-2011, and 2011-2012 administrative years. Participants were selected from club presidents with usable addresses (N=339) who served in clubs within the Indiana District of Kiwanis, an administrative unit comprised of 199 clubs located throughout the state. Of the 109 who agreed to participate, 75 completed the Leadership Practices Inventory. These leaders, in turn, each asked two people to complete the LPI-Observer, and 105 of these were returned. Following the quantitative analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight volunteer leaders.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

Comparisons were made between respondent scores on the LPI, as volunteer leaders, with those from the Kouzes and Posner normative data base, representing paid leaders. The LPI scores from volunteer leaders were not statistically different from those of paid leaders with the exception of Encourage (on which volunteers reported engaging in this more frequently). However, from their constituents' perspective, scores on the LPI Observer showed that volunteer leaders were viewed as engaging more frequently than their paid counterparts on the leadership practices of Model, Inspire, Enable, and Encourage.

The process of identifying and coding interview data using nVivo required the researcher to review each interview transcript and search for instances when volunteer leaders described specific actions or behaviors they engaged in while leading their clubs. Identifying, highlighting, and attaching each of the responses to a specific leadership practice then provided the ability to review all the behaviors associated with each leadership practice together as one narrative. Summary data provided by nVivo identified the number of volunteer leaders providing responses specific to each leadership practice, as well as a total number of responses that were categorized by the researcher as being associated with each practice. All five leadership practices were prominently mentioned by all eight volunteer leaders interviewed. A total of 47 references to Model the Way practices were evident, 54 total references to Inspire a Shared Vision practices, 27 references to Challenge the Process behaviors, 97 total references to Enable Others to Act, and 30 references to Encourage the Heart leadership behaviors were identified.

This research finds that there are differences in the way volunteer leaders practice leadership as compared to paid leaders, especially in the eyes of their constituents. The author “suggests that perhaps there is a variable that impacts leadership practice as measured by the LPI, and that variable may be the volunteer versus paid status of the leader” (p. 128). However, she also notes that an “alternate explanation is that the differences found in this study have less to do with the volunteer leaders themselves, and more to do with differences in volunteer followers versus paid followers. Volunteer followers who join civic organizations may be so committed to the organization and its goals that they respond to all leadership, effective and ineffective, in an effort to accomplish their goals. Perhaps followership is so strong, that effective leadership practices are assumed where they do not actually exist” (p. 140).