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**Leadership Practices of Ohio AmeriCorps Program
Directors and Coordinators**

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Abstract

The authors used a quantitative methodology to investigate the leadership practices of Ohio AmeriCorps program directors and coordinators in five construct areas: (a) Challenging the process; (b) inspiring a shared vision; (c) enabling others to act; (d) modeling the way; and (e) encouraging the heart. Ohio AmeriCorps program directors identified all five leadership practices as utilized at least "fairly often", while Ohio AmeriCorps program coordinators identified all five leadership constructs as practices engaged in "usually". As AmeriCorps program budgets remain stagnant or even decrease, AmeriCorps program directors and coordinators may need to focus even more closely upon their expanded leadership roles in nurturing and managing community volunteer leaders.

Key Words:

leadership, professional development, AmeriCorps, directors, coordinators

Introduction

In the latter part of the 20th century, it became evident that the United States needed a new generation of leaders who had a clear vision and understanding of the concept of service and the role of public service (National Women's Law Center, 1993). Such leaders mobilize citizens to engage in volunteerism, community service, and national service efforts to meet the many needs of the nation's communities. The importance of leadership in community-based service is paramount. According to Kreitner (1995), leadership involves social influence over the voluntary pursuit of a set of collective objectives. Covey (1991) concluded that leadership is based on fundamental principles and processes, while Kotter (1990) described leadership as "a process that helps direct and mobilize people and/or their ideas" (pp. 3-4). Lappe and Dubois (1994) discussed the importance of active citizen leadership in effectively addressing America's social problems.

Numerous authors have advocated new leadership theories and thoughts during the past decade. Kouzes and Posner (1987) believed that successful leadership included five fundamental practices and that mastering these practices allowed leaders to accomplish extraordinary things within organizations. These practices included challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart. Apps (1994) purported that contemporary leadership must create and communicate a shared vision; build bridges between people and ideas; challenge ideas, structure, assumptions, and beliefs; take risks; embrace ambiguity; applaud serendipity; encourage artistry; tolerate discomfort; reflect on activities; and appreciate humor. Apps believed that leadership

practices must transform with the times. "We have reached a time when most traditional approaches to leading simply do not work anymore" (p. 1).

In the volunteer administration profession, several authors have commented upon the critical need to integrate effective leadership with efficient management within volunteer-based community programs. Vineyard (1993) first articulated this need with her concept of "leadership." The *Changing the Paradigm* project of the Points of Light Foundation (1995) further linked management with leadership of volunteer programs, while Merrill (1995) emphasized the role of volunteer managers as focal points for leadership of volunteer programs. Safrit and Merrill (1999) concluded that contemporary volunteer administrators must serve "as leaders in an emerging profession, going beyond designing systems of control and reward by displaying innovation, individual character, and the courage of conviction" (p. 40).

During the last decade of the 20th century, the national federally-sponsored AmeriCorps program was established. AmeriCorps programs focus on nurturing citizen service and building leadership within communities (Bates, 1996). AmeriCorps was envisioned initially as a method of allowing Americans to address serious social needs in their local communities, and a way to reenergize the country's commitment to civic responsibility and service. The National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 (H.R. 2010, 103d Cong., 1st Sess.) significantly modified legislation first passed by Congress in 1990, and created the contemporary Corporation for National and Community Service (Waldman, 1995). The mission of the Corporation for National Service,

including AmeriCorps, is to engage Americans of all ages and backgrounds in community-based service (Ohio's Governor's Community Service Council, 1997). Citizens involved in national service, known as AmeriCorps members, address community needs related to education, human needs, public safety, and the environment.

Through the AmeriCorps national service program, the Corporation hopes to foster civic responsibility, strengthen communities, and provide educational opportunities to those willing to commit to service (Corporation for National Service, 1997a). AmeriCorps Programs are united by four common goals: (a) Getting things done through direct and demonstrable service that helps solve community problems in the areas of education, public safety, environment, and other human needs; (b) strengthening communities by bringing together Americans of all ages and backgrounds in the common effort to improve their communities; (c) encouraging responsibility by enabling members to explore and exercise their responsibilities toward their communities, their families, and themselves; and, (d) expanding opportunity by enhancing members' educational opportunities, job experience, and life skills (p. 4).

When one examines the community leadership link with AmeriCorps, it is essential to understand the leadership roles that exist within actual AmeriCorps programs. The Corporation for National Service defined an AmeriCorps program as:

A coordinated group of activities linked by common elements such as recruitment, selection and training of participants and staff, regular group activities, and assignments to projects organized for the purpose of achieving the mission and goals of national service, and

carried out with the assistance provided under the Act. (Ohio's Governors Community Service Council, 1997, pp. 8-11)

There are numerous stakeholders within a local AmeriCorps program, including AmeriCorps members, site supervisors, advisory board members, and community volunteers (Corporation for National Service, 1997b). The key leadership role in most AmeriCorps programs, however, belongs to the program director, and in some cases is shared with an AmeriCorps program coordinator. AmeriCorps program directors are directly responsible for the operation of an AmeriCorps program and are comparable to a volunteer program administrator. An AmeriCorps program coordinator serves more as a manager, working under the supervision of an AmeriCorps director and handling the day-to-day operations of an AmeriCorps program.

AmeriCorps program directors and, where applicable, program coordinators are jointly responsible for the ongoing operation of an AmeriCorps program within an agency or community based organization (Corporation for National Service, 1997b). Directors and coordinators are charged with such activities as recruitment, selection, and training of members, as well as overseeing the direct services being provided to the community. These individuals not only serve as the administrators of programs, but also are charged with the task of leading AmeriCorps in addressing local community needs and building volunteer leadership within those communities. AmeriCorps program directors and coordinators are the administrators and visible leaders of AmeriCorps programs in Ohio.

Since a key objective of AmeriCorps is to build volunteer leadership among AmeriCorps members and other community volunteers, the researchers believed it was important to investigate current leadership practices among both program directors and coordinators. The researchers would suggest that AmeriCorps program directors and coordinators who are knowledgeable of leadership theories, trained in leadership skills, and have mastered various leadership practices are more likely to have the greatest impact within their individual community programs. Since the inception of AmeriCorps, however, there have been no valid or reliable studies of leadership practices among Ohio AmeriCorps program directors or coordinators. With ever increasing societal needs and ever changing positions regarding federal AmeriCorps funding, program directors and coordinators must assume even more critical leadership roles within local AmeriCorps programs.

Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate leadership practices of Ohio AmeriCorps program directors and coordinators. The researchers used a census to collect data from the target population of all Ohio AmeriCorps program directors and program coordinators operating AmeriCorps State and National programs as of October 1, 1998. A complete list of all AmeriCorps program directors' and coordinators' names and addresses was obtained from the Ohio Governor's Community Service Council, the administrative unit for AmeriCorps State programs and support for both State and National AmeriCorps programs in Ohio. The census included 34 directors and 28 coordinators.

The researchers utilized the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI, Kouzes & Posner, 1997), a standardized instrument to measure leadership practices among the target population. Kouzes and Posner (1987) first developed the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) for use with corporate and for-profit managers. In later samplings, however, target populations have included professionals and managers from public, private, and nonprofit organizations. Since the instrument is designed to measure leadership practices among managers and executives, and AmeriCorps program directors and coordinators are easily categorized as managers of both programs and people, the researchers held that the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) was a valid research instrument to use with the target audience.

The focus of the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI; Kouzes & Posner, 1997) is to measure leadership practices in five construct areas: (a) Challenging the process (searching out opportunities to change, grow, innovate and improve; and experimenting, taking risks, and learning from the accompanying mistakes); (b) inspiring a shared vision (envisioning an uplifting and ennobling future; and enlisting others in a common vision by appealing to their values, interests, hopes, and dreams); (c) enabling others to act (fostering collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust; and strengthening people by giving *away* power, providing choice, developing competence, assigning critical tasks, and offering visible support); (d) modeling the way (setting the example by behaving in ways that are consistent with shared values, and achieving small wins that promote consistent progress and build commitment); and (e) encouraging the heart (recognizing individual contributions

to the success of every project, and celebrating team accomplishments regularly). Statements that described each of these practices made up the 30-item questionnaire inventory (i.e., six individual statements for each of the five leadership constructs.) The most recent (1997) version of the instrument places each item on a 10-point Likert type scale. The scale utilized is: 1 = almost never, 2 = rarely, 3 = seldom, 4 = once in a while, 5 = occasionally, 6 = sometimes, 7 = fairly often, 8 = usually, 9 = very frequently, 10 = almost always. The researchers calculated Cronbach's Alpha to measure internal consistency and the reliability of each leadership construct specifically for Ohio AmeriCorps program directors and coordinators. Internal reliabilities ranged from .52 to .87, with nine of the ten constructs above .74.

The researchers collected data for this study at an Ohio AmeriCorps program directors' and coordinators quarterly meeting in Worthington, Ohio, on October 14, 1998.

All directors and coordinators who were present completed a written research questionnaire within the 30 minutes allotted for the activity. Those directors and coordinators not scheduled to attend the meeting were mailed a written questionnaire on October 12, 1998, so as to ensure that these directors and coordinators would complete the instrument in the same two or three day period as their colleagues.

Out of the 62 AmeriCorps directors and coordinators in Ohio, 45 (24 directors and 21 coordinators) completed the research questionnaire on-site. Surveys were mailed to the remaining ten directors and seven coordinators. Each questionnaire contained an identification number to assist in follow-up with non-

respondents. Nine of the 17 mail-survey participants (53%) returned the questionnaire by October 22, 1998. On October 23, 1998, the researchers conducted follow-up phone calls to remind the remaining eight non-respondents to please return questionnaires. This resulted in the return of four additional surveys. A final response rate of 94% was obtained. Thirty-two (55.2%) respondents were Ohio AmeriCorps program directors and 26 (44.8%) were Ohio AmeriCorps program coordinators. No further follow-up was done with the remaining four non-respondents (two directors and two coordinators).

All research data was entered and analyzed utilizing the SPSS 8.0 statistical program (SPSS, 1997). The researchers calculated descriptive statistics to meet the research objectives. Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) summative scores were calculated using the following ranges for each leadership construct: 0-6 almost never, 7-12 rarely, 13-18 seldom, 19-24 once in a while, 25-30 occasionally, 31-36 sometimes, 37-42 fairly often, 43-48 usually, 49-54 very frequently, and 55-60 almost always.

Findings

Ohio AmeriCorps program directors identified all five leadership practices as utilized at least "fairly often" (Table 1). One leadership construct (enabling others to act) was identified as being practiced "very frequently."

Ohio AmeriCorps program coordinators identified all five leadership constructs as practices engaged in "usually" (Table 1). Three leadership constructs (enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart) were identified as being practiced "very frequently."

Table 1

Mean and median scores describing leadership practices of Ohio AmeriCorps program directors and coordinators

Leadership Practice	Program Directors (n = 32)			Program Coordinators (n = 26)		
	Mean	(SD)	Median	Mean	(SD)	Median
Challenging the process	45.75	(6.64)	45.50	48.80	(6.35)	50.00
Inspiring a shared	44.56	(7.40)	44.50	45.30	(8.30)	46.00
Enabling others to act	50.80	(3.89)	51.00	52.20	(4.29)	52.00
Modeling the way	47.70	(6.16)	48.00	49.80	(5.24)	50.00
Encouraging the heart	38.10	(5.92)	39.00	50.50	(5.23)	49.00

Conclusions and Implications

The study findings support the researchers' initial theory that Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) scores for Ohio AmeriCorps program directors and coordinators are above average for each leadership construct. The researchers also suspected that Ohio AmeriCorps program directors and coordinators, because of the nature of AmeriCorps and the national service movement, would score significantly higher in the following two areas: challenging the process and encouraging the heart. This observation only held true for Ohio AmeriCorps program coordinators in the area of encouraging the heart.

Neither program directors nor coordinators were identified as challenging the process "very frequently." As previously stated, this was surprising to the researchers in that their observations were that both AmeriCorps program directors and coordinators are quite often engaged in professional behavioral roles that are linked to "challenging the process" through volunteer efforts. AmeriCorps program directors and coordinators must challenge the process through a variety of ways, including working within the service field (i.e., traditional volunteerism); assisting communities to understand both

AmeriCorps and the concept of national service; facing uncertain outcomes on the local, state, and federal levels; experimenting with new ideas and theories of service, leadership, and community; and searching outside the boundaries of their work organizations for support, both financially and personally.

Although Ohio AmeriCorps coordinators indicated encouraging the heart "very frequently," Ohio AmeriCorps program directors reported encouraging the heart only fairly often, which is two levels below "very frequently." In addition, the mean score for Ohio AmeriCorps program directors in the area of encouraging the heart was the lowest mean score for the five constructs of both groups. One reason for the significant difference in the area of encouraging the heart between program directors and coordinators could be the fact that, in many cases, AmeriCorps program coordinators work more closely with AmeriCorps members, service recipients, and host-sites or partners on a day-to-day basis. It is generally understood in the AmeriCorps model that a program coordinator would engage in more frequent practice of praising members, expressing confidence in their abilities, recognizing member accomplishments and services, motivating the corps, and working to instill

an overall ethic of service. The assumption of these duties by program coordinators leaves AmeriCorps program directors the more bureaucratic tasks of program operation and administration, which can require less usage of the leadership practice of encouraging the heart. In the case that a program does not have a program coordinator, the AmeriCorps program director would be expected to engage in these behaviors as well.

Originally, the researchers believed that Ohio AmeriCorps program directors would report higher mean scores in all five leadership construct areas when compared to Ohio AmeriCorps program coordinators. Generally, Ohio AmeriCorps directors have more professional experience, greater knowledge of national and community service, are serving in other leadership roles within the larger organization, and have obtained higher levels of education. Naturally, assumptions could be made that program directors should indicate higher or greater use of effective leadership practices, if only based on the fact that these individuals were serving as AmeriCorps program directors.

Study results indicate a definite contrast. Ohio AmeriCorps program coordinators indicated utilization of each leadership practice at a higher frequency than Ohio AmeriCorps program directors. The researchers suggest several possible connections. First, the possibility that the professional duties of program coordinators allow for more frequent development of leadership practices should be considered. The professional duties of program coordinators entail more frequent contact with AmeriCorps members. Program coordinators' prior life experience, both personal and professional, where they learned effective leadership, is also a possibility (although in the study, program directors reported more

professional experience in every area than program coordinators).

Ohio AmeriCorps program directors reported "enabling others to act" as their highest construct and as a leadership practice it is used "very frequently." It is highly likely that successful mastery of this effective leadership practice has had some influence on the leadership development growth of program coordinators. Program directors who successfully delegate responsibilities, especially day-to-day management of members, could be assisting program coordinators to grow in the leadership construct areas of challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, and encouraging the heart. A strong correlation could exist with program coordinators' higher use of effective leadership practices and program directors' competency level in "enabling others to act."

It is important to recognize that Ohio AmeriCorps program coordinators reported significantly above average results with three constructs: enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart. These three areas could be expected for program coordinators since they interact on a more frequent basis with AmeriCorps members, program volunteers and service recipients. It should be considered, however, that several AmeriCorps program directors do not have program coordinators assisting them with program operations. In these scenarios, program directors perform all program-related management functions. This fact does not, however, seem to have affected the overall leadership mean scores for program directors.

Even though the overall leadership mean scores for both Ohio AmeriCorps program directors and coordinators are positive, the researchers expected higher scores to surface in each construct area.

Although the Corporation for National Service offers national leadership development training to AmeriCorps professional staff, this opportunity has not been promoted effectively in Ohio and participation by Ohio AmeriCorps directors and coordinators has been limited. Time management concerns with Ohio AmeriCorps program directors specifically seems to be an issue shared commonly with the staff of the Ohio Governors Community Service Council. Many times, program directors have additional responsibilities within their agency or organization in addition to managing the AmeriCorps program, and do not feel *they* have sufficient time for in-service training beyond what is absolutely required from the Governors Community Service Council (only 34.4% of AmeriCorps directors reported participation in any leadership-related training in the 24 months immediately preceding data collection).

As AmeriCorps program budgets remain stagnant or even decrease, and the current debate over program funding continues (Joseph, 2003), AmeriCorps program directors and coordinators may need to focus even more closely upon their expanded leadership roles in nurturing and managing community volunteer leaders. These expanded roles may involve not only the five leadership competencies described by Kouzes and Posner (1995) but also the leadership capacities for volunteer administrators described by Safrit and Merrill (2000). Such expanded leadership roles must include creating and communicating a shared vision for volunteer programs; embracing diversity while nurturing pluralism among program staff, volunteers and clientele; acting with values shared by all program stakeholders and championing ethical behavior;

accepting change while managing the ambiguity that results from our rapidly changing society; linking effective program management to personal visionary leadership; and, reflecting upon program purposes, processes, and products (i.e., goals and impacts.)

Finally, the researchers might question that although Ohio AmeriCorps program directors and coordinators reported above average scores on the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), is "above average" sufficient? The researchers believe that for the spirit of national service to blossom and to become an integral part of the nation's commitment to volunteerism, committed and effective national service leaders must be present in the field. This discussion is pertinent for all proponents of the national service movement. After all, how can AmeriCorps program directors and coordinators support and model effective leadership practices to AmeriCorps members, community volunteers, and the clientele they serve if they struggle with these concepts personally?

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