

busy 4-Hers make better leaders

James M. Meyers

Does participation in 4-H projects and programs help develop leadership ability? Yes, say 4-H participants and supporters. 4-H staff are confident of the value of 4-H participation and suggest that vagueness of personality and other factors related to leadership make a practical measure difficult.

No experimental or quantitative data exist to show how effective 4-H programs are in increasing leadership ability. Many 4-H alumni are successful leaders, but a critical observer might say that perhaps 4-H appeals to and recruits youth who have high leadership potential and ability. Until recently, there weren't many critical observers, so educational agencies didn't have to show program effectiveness or efficiency beyond the faith and testimonials of their participants.

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Now, education is facing a demand for program evaluation and demonstrations of effective and efficient use of public funds. 4-H isn't immune and has been asked some tough questions in some counties and states. The need for "hard" evaluation measures is increasing. We're also morally obligated to provide our participants and the public with proof of our practical effectiveness.

Additionally, we stand to learn much about complex concepts like leadership, and how best to help youth develop, by closely studying our efforts. The following method of demonstrating the degree of 4-H project effectiveness in increasing leadership ability will help meet these needs and overcome our reliance on subjective personality judgments in leadership assessment.

Defining Leadership

Much of the difficulty in developing any measure of effective leadership education is related to specifically defining

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Great Man Concept leadership. During 4-H's early years, leadership was felt to be the active expression of fully developed personality traits that enabled "leaders" to completely dominate any group or situation. Under this "Great Man" concept, leadership was developed by providing opportunities to assume responsibilities that would help evolve (or at least identify) "Great Man" personalities. With such a vague definition, effectiveness was judged by differences in leadership behavior between 4-H members and non-member peers. Thus, selected individual "success stories" were acceptable evidence of program effectiveness.

Many 4-H activities, originally designed under the "Great Man" concept of leadership, have not only remained largely unchanged, but served as models for newer programs.

**Personality/
Situational
Theories**

More recent research on leadership has identified alternative ways to define leadership. They fall into two categories: (1) personality theories that focus on a leader's behaviors that influence groups and (2) situational theories that focus on how task and group make-up determine who will be an appropriate leader. These two lines of analysis were combined to form contingency theories of leadership where specific leader behaviors are associated with different situations.

For evaluation purposes I define leadership as the performance of specifically defined leadership behaviors—behaviors designed to influence group behavior and task organization. This definition relies heavily on personality theory and emphasizes the individual's activity instead of group task success. I believe that contingency theories, such as Fiedler's work, hold the most potential for improving leadership teaching.

Leadership behaviors were defined with a condensed version of a scale developed by Hemphill:

1. Initiation-Communication: Actions of providing or seeking information, new ideas, strategies, or of facilitating information exchange.
2. Membership-Recognition: Informal interactions with group members, expressions of approval or disapproval of others.
3. Integration-Domination: Actions promoting individual adjustment to the group, reducing conflict; restricting individual or group behavior, decision making, or expressions.
4. Production-Organization: Setting and/or encouraging accomplishment of levels of effort or achievement; defining or structuring work, worker relations, or task assignment.

The Model

The young people under evaluation are organized into task groups to participate in group work during which individual behaviors are recorded according to this scale. Leadership behavior of project participants in relation to the nonparticipants are shown by the performance on this scale.

This basic model is complicated by the criticism raised earlier that we can't be sure that youth already possessing leadership ability haven't singled themselves out for participation in 4-H. To ensure that youngsters with highly developed capabilities for, and interest in, leadership weren't unknowingly compared to others with lesser ability and interest, a short CMS IV personality test was used to match individuals.¹

High scorers on this test are usually emergent leaders, especially in less-structured situations. Low scorers are less likely to exhibit behaviors that influence others. To assure the test situation represented real social situations faced by aspiring leaders, high and low scorers were paired together. This way, the performances of the low scorers (on CMS IV) becomes a critical measure of leadership education effectiveness.

To show an increased leadership capacity, the low scoring 4-H participant must assert a higher proportion of leadership behaviors than a non-4-H, project-prepared low scorer to compete with a non-4-H participant identified as having high leadership potential. Thus, we're able to measure an increase in knowledge about leadership and the willingness and ability to express it in a real group situation.

This model is practical for field use. It requires little staff input to sample measures of selected programs and compare them. One of this design's strongest points is that it measures leadership behavior performed in a real task situation.

Pilot Test

Four test groups were formed, two male and two female, with four members in each. Each group consisted of one (CMS IV) high scorer, one low scorer, and two mid-scale scorers. Two groups (one male and one female) did a selected task with no preparation. The other two groups began it after the low CMS IV scoring members had participated in a condensed version of the 4-H project under evaluation. The task itself consisted of one segment of a new California 4-H project entitled *Exploring Our Community*. Members faced a group problem of arranging a visit to a local fire station to get some specific questions answered.

The CMS IV was given to 77 young people. The results were close to the test's historical findings—the proportion of high leadership potential youth in the 4-H test group was about the same as in any population of young people (that is, 4-H doesn't appeal only nor especially to youth with high leadership potential).

The results clearly show that participation in the 4-H project increased leadership performance. As seen in Table 1, the low CMS IV scorers who had the advantage of 4-H project participation showed over a 20% increase in leadership action, in a situation that favored a competitor with an identified high leadership potential.

Implications

Remember, this pilot test was small and more studies are needed before we declare that all 4-H projects increase leadership capacity. However, these results suggest that participation in task-related competence training programs, as 4-H projects are designed to be, significantly increases leadership ability.

The way the results are obtained allows us to compare the effectiveness of different projects and activities and the impact of changes in projects or activities. Identifying specific leadership skills and behaviors affects how we design projects and programs for junior leaders, adult leaders, and staff.

This study shows we don't need to rely on subjective judgments of personality to evaluate how effective youth programs are in developing leadership. Using this method,

Table 1. Comparison of leadership actions started.

Behaviors	Group			
	Control (no 4-H training)		Test (4-H trained Low CMS IV scorer)	
	1. Males	2. Females	3. Males	4. Females
Total no. of leadership actions per group	20 (100%)	20 (100%)	16 (100%)	59 (100%)
No. of leadership actions initiated by High CMS IV member	10 (50%)	3 (15%)	7 (43.7%)	28 (47.4%)
No. of leadership actions initiated by Low CMS IV member	3 (15%)	1 (5%)	6 (37.5%)	20 (34%)

NOTE: Vertical percentages do not total 100% because the number of leadership actions for mid-range participants isn't indicated.

we can provide quantifiable (and thus comparable), objective demonstrations of program effectiveness, and explore ways to improve selected programs.

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Footnote

1. D. Braginsky, "Machiavellianism and Manipulative Interpersonal Behavior in Children," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, VI (1970), 77-99.