

## Leader's Dilemma: The Individual or the Task?

David D. Pyle, Purdue University

**Is an effective 4-H leader task-oriented or people-oriented? This study focuses on the training of youth leaders and the relative importance of the leader's orientation toward the task at hand or the people in the group. Pyle also points out a discrepancy between what leaders feel important in training and what is felt important by other people who relate to the leader. The findings of this study suggest a close examination of leader training need identification and implementation by all Extension professionals.**

---

Is effective leadership task-oriented or people-oriented? Is it possible these tasks rather than the individuals become the focus of attention? Does this make 4-H impersonal and unsatisfying for both the club member and the leader?

Studies in leader behavior suggest that effective leadership is concerned equally with the task facing the individual and the individual himself. A balance of the task and person dimensions of leader behavior is important.

The task dimension of leader behavior used in this article refers to the emphasis a leader puts on things like project requirements, parliamentary procedure, project construction details, and club organiza-

tion details. The person dimension, on the other hand, refers to the emphasis a leader puts on leader-member relationships and involvement of the member in decision making and program planning.

A professional 4-H agent quickly recognizes the importance of a well-trained force of volunteer 4-H leaders . . . for this very group tries to bring the youth and 4-H project together in an educational experience. On the one hand is the experience of 4-H Club membership; on the other, the skills development from the project or related study. A 4-H leader ill-equipped to provide enough task training in a climate of warm personal relationships will only partially succeed.

A leader training program designed to increase the leader's competency in both dimensions of leader behavior could be the first step toward creating 4-H Club programs that reflect an equal concern for the club member and the task.

### **Balanced Orientation Study**

To determine what potential the concept of a balanced orientation might have for approaching 4-H leader training, a study was conducted in East Central Indiana with 4-H leaders, junior leaders, Extension youth agents, and state 4-H staff personnel participating. The study tried to:

1. Identify an orientation for each individual within these four groups toward the two dimensions of leader behavior.
2. Determine the types of training 4-H leaders wanted.
3. Determine if the perceived training needs were synonymous with the orientations of the groups.
4. Compare the orientations of various groups.
5. Compare the training needs as perceived by the various groups.
6. Discuss what implications the findings might have for future leader training activities.

### **Procedure**

A 3-part questionnaire was mailed to 4-H leaders and junior leaders within Extension Area VII,

to all youth agents within that area, as well as all Indiana state staff personnel. Part One consisted of a 35-item, Task-Person questionnaire. Part Two asked the reader to list items he felt were necessary for an effective leader training program. Part Three asked demographic information.

Information from the Task-Person questionnaire resulted in a task score and a person score for each member of the research group. These two scores reflected the emphasis the respondent put on each of the two dimensions.

Statements about desired training in Part Two were presented to a five-member review committee for classification as being either a task statement or a person statement. A ratio of task to person statements was then determined for each individual and for each group studied.

For example, if a leader listed 10 statements as needed in a leader training program of which 5 were classified by the review committee as relating to the task dimension and 5 to the person dimension, a ratio of 1 to 1 was assigned to that leader. Then, group ratios were determined by combining individual ratios.

### **Findings**

Significant differences were noted in the task dimension of leader behavior between junior leaders and state staff personnel, men and women leaders, and adult leaders with 12 years of education or less compared to those with post high school education.

The groups studied had a greater concern for the person dimension than the task dimension of leader behavior as indicated by higher person orientation scores (see Table 1). Based on Andrew Halpin's

work, 9 of the 19 groups studied could be conceived as having orientations conducive to effective leadership, although the task and person scores weren't balanced at a high level.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 1. Median P and T scores and chi-square values of significant differences in person and task dimensions of the groups compared.**

Group studied	Median score		Chi-square values	
	P	T	P	T
Junior leaders and youth agents	11	7	.59	.001
Leaders and youth agents	11	8	.98	.65
Youth agents and state staff members	12	8	1.8	2.81
Leaders and junior leaders	11	7	.49	.17
Junior leader boys and girls	11	7	.011	.057
Leaders men and women	11	8	.43	4.88 *
Leaders 1-5 years' experience and leaders 6-10 years' experience	11	7	.19	1.4
Leaders education 13 or more and 12 or less	11	8	2.2	4.076*
Leaders age 20-39 and 40 or more	11	8	1.36	.089
Junior leaders 4-7 and 6-10 years 4-H	11	7	.16	1.03
State staff members and all leaders	11	8	2.38	1.83
State staff members and junior leaders	11	7	.24	4.12 *
Leaders no 4-H and leaders 1-5 years 4-H	11	8	1.63	.20
Leaders no 4-H and leaders 6-10 years 4-H	10	8	.076	.49
Leaders 1-5 years' experience and leaders 6 or more years' experience	11	8	1.62	.039

\*Significant differences.

Here are other findings associated with the task and person scores from Part One of the research instrument:

1. Leaders with only a few years' experience differed little in task or person orientations from those who had been leaders six or more years.

2. Leaders in the age span of 40 years and older appeared to be higher in person and task orientations when compared to leaders ages 20-39.
3. Leaders who had no formal education past high school exhibited higher person and task orientations than did their

counterparts with education past high school.

4. Leaders who had been 4-H members themselves for a period of 6-10 years exhibited a lower concern for task and person dimensions than did either those leaders with 1 to 5 years' 4-H membership or those who hadn't been 4-H members. Leaders who had been 4-H members for 1 to 5 years scored highest of the 3 groups in person orientation.
5. Teenage 4-H boys and girls had little difference between them in their orientations.
6. Orientations of 4-H'ers toward both dimensions were raised with increased years of 4-H membership. Those who had remained in and were currently in their 8th to 10th year of membership had higher task and person orientations than did those who were in their 4th to 7th year of club work.
7. The state 4-H staff had the highest scores recorded in the study in both dimensions.
8. Youth agents scored high on the person dimension while scoring relatively low on the task dimension. In fact, the difference between their mean person and task scores was 4.2—which represented a greater difference than noted in any other group.
9. Women exhibited higher person orientation and lower task orientation scores than did men.

Findings associated with Part Two of the research instrument suggested that adult leader groups felt training in the task dimension of leader behavior was desirable as noted by the ratios in Table 2. State staff personnel, Extension youth agents, and junior leader girls felt training in the person dimension was desirable. Junior leader boys expressed near equal training in the two areas.

As a result, adult leaders suggested training completely opposite their orientation while all other groups, except junior leader boys, requested training for leaders synonymous with their orientation.

Other findings from Part Two suggest that:

1. Men favored task training more than women did.
2. Leaders 40 years of age and over felt a greater need for task training than did the younger leaders.
3. Leaders who hadn't gone past high school requested task training at a ratio higher than any other group studied.
4. Leaders who themselves had been 4-H members for a period of 1 to 5 years requested less task training than did leaders who had been 4-H'ers for 6 or more years.
5. Older junior leaders in the study requested more leader training along the person dimension than did the younger junior leaders.
6. State staff personnel suggested that for each element of task

**Table 2. Ratio of person to task training statements offered by groups.**

Group studied	Ratio of P to T	
	P	T
State staff	2	1
Youth agent	1.38	1
Junior leaders	1.39	1
Adult leaders	1	2.13
Men leaders	1	2.23
Women leaders	1	2.08
Leaders 1-5 years of 4-H membership	1	1.55
Leaders 6-10 years of 4-H membership	1	2.75
Leaders no 4-H membership	1	2.38
Leaders 1-5 years' leadership experience	1	2.33
Leaders 6 or more years' leadership experience	1	2.28
Leaders education 12 years or less	1	3.27
Leaders education 13 or more years	1	1.75
Leaders age 20-39 years	1	1.70
Leaders age 40 and over	1	2.89
Junior leader girls	1.71	1
Junior leader boys	1	1.06
Junior leaders 4-7 years' 4-H membership	1.15	1
Junior leaders 8-10 years' 4-H membership	1.75	1

training planned two elements of training in the person dimension were desirable. Youth agents established the same pattern in a ratio of 1.38 person to 1 task.

A breakdown of the type training desired by the leader group showed that 31 percent of the total statements offered concerned such ideas as project requirements and technical skills in project areas. An additional five percent of the statements expressed a desire to "know what judges look for in a finished product."

Leader responsibility was suggested by 13 percent of the statements; program planning, 11 percent; how to conduct a meeting, 7 percent; 4-H objectives, awards, demonstrations, and judging each 4 percent; parent cooperation, club organization, and record book-keeping, 3 percent each; communications and discipline, 2 percent each; and recreation and public relations, 1 percent each.

### Conclusions

One question investigated in this study was whether a 4-H leader

would request training to support his basic orientation, or would he seek new types of training? *I found the 4-H leaders, in all cases, didn't request training to enhance their basic orientation. The professionals involved in this study who planned leader training activities emphasized training that parallels their basic orientation.*

In other words, the professionals emphasized the human relations aspects of leadership and suggested training for leaders along that dimension. The group to be trained, however, wanted task-related training. As a result, a training program for 4-H leaders without their involvement in the planning phase might fall short of their training need.

One additional analysis that perhaps should be investigated by all those who spend time training 4-H leaders is the difference between junior leaders and leaders concerning the type of training needed by 4-H leaders. Halpin has suggested that there is a

. . . tendency for superiors and subordinates to evaluate oppositely the contribution of the leader behavior dimensions to the effectiveness of leadership. . . . Superiors are more concerned with initiating structure aspects of the leader's behavior, whereas subordinates are more concerned (or interested in) the consideration the leader extends to them as group members.<sup>2</sup>

All junior leaders suggested training in human relations, while

adult leaders expressed a need for task-related training. As a result, these findings would support Halpin's opinion.

Although this reaction of junior leaders appears to be typical, there also might be the possibility of underlying discontent, at least among teenagers, of leader behavior.

This study supports other research done in the area of 4-H leadership. Leaders with a high school education or less had a significantly different orientation toward task dimensions of club leadership than did leaders with more than high school education.

A Washington State study suggests that leaders with less than a high school education be trained separately from leaders with higher levels of education.<sup>3</sup> Rhonemus also concluded that a leader with a high school education had the best chance of continuing as a leader when compared with other formal education levels if challenging training was provided.<sup>4</sup>

This suggests a different training program for each group. Based on significant findings, perhaps training needs of both men and women could be satisfied more effectively if they, too, were trained separately.

Finally, the contrast between leader orientation and desired training ratio posed some interesting thoughts. Perhaps, the greatest demands placed on the leader are for project- and activity-related information. Even though the leader was oriented toward human relations or

the person dimension, the "things he needed to know the most in the here and now" pertained to those tasks youth were pursuing.

In approaching the "balance" between the two dimensions, perhaps the desire for task training, coupled with a higher person orientation score, suggests that people who actually lead 4-H Clubs recognize the need to further the task dimension and create a balance between the two.

#### Footnotes

1. Andrew W. Halpin, *Theory and Research in Administration* (New York, New York: Macmillan Company, 1967), p. 104.
2. Andrew W. Halpin, *The Leadership Behavior of School Superintendents* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University, College of Education, 1956), p. 24.
3. Mason E. Miller, ed., "Research in Brief," *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, V (Spring, 1967), 62.
4. Larry L. Rhonemus, "Factors Associated with Termination of Services of 4-H Leaders in Champaign Co., Ohio" (thesis summary mimeograph prepared for the National Association of 4-H Agents' Annual Meeting, October, 1970), p. 4.