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Leadership Practices of State Associations: Does State President Leadership Style Encourage Membership?

Leslie M. Sizemore

TheraCare, Inc. – USA, leslie@theracareky.com

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Leadership Practices of State Associations: Does State President Leadership Style Encourage Membership?

Abstract

Background: This research addressed the “graying” of the professional state occupational therapy association as new clinicians are more frequently making the decision not to join. It is particularly relevant for boards who are attempting to establish and retain members.

Method: To assess the leadership styles of presidents of state occupational therapy associations and to examine the impact of leadership style on membership status, this research examined the self-perceived leadership styles of state occupational therapy association presidents, as measured by the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), a tool developed by Kouzes and Posner, authors of the Exemplary Leadership Model. It served to answer the following research questions: Is there a statistical difference between the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) score of state occupational therapy association presidents and the normed mean score of the LPI? And, is there a correlation between LPI mean scores of state occupational therapy association presidents and the respective state association’s membership representation of licensed occupational therapists and student therapists? This quantitative study used survey research design.

Results: Sixty percent of state presidents participated. Evidence from this study indicates that state occupational therapy association presidents lead primarily from a transformational leadership style. In addition, those states whose presidents lead from this style demonstrate an overall higher membership status level than those who do not.

Conclusion: The results of this study indicate that transformational leadership is related to increased membership status and is relevant to associations as they choose their leaders.

Keywords

professionalism, volunteerism, service learning, membership

Cover Page Footnote

The author discloses that they serve in a volunteer position as legislative chair for the Kentucky Occupational Therapy Association.

Credentials Display

Leslie M. Sizemore, Ph.D., Ed.S, OTR/L

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A landscape of fast-paced change and uncertainty necessitates the importance of professional association membership for all types of professionals, including occupational therapists. Guidance from state and national occupational therapy associations supports members in a culture of increasing client complexity, evolving technology requirements, expanding intervention modalities, and significant changes to health care reimbursement influenced by political policy. Despite a well-documented decline in organization membership across disciplines, there is evidence of value in professional association affiliation to both the individual member and the profession (Conners-Bowman et al., 2014; Escoffery et al., 2015; Hughes et al., 2016; Ki, 2018).

Trends among entry-level professionals indicate that younger generations have decided to join professional organizations less frequently, an alarming trend for executive boards of professional organizations comprised of previous generations who never considered not joining (Buzz Marketing Group, 2015; Hughes et al., 2016; Ki, 2018; Lipscomb, 2010; Lolley, 2012; Matthys et al., 2019; MemberWise, 2016; Sladek, 2011). The decision not to affiliate encompasses numerous factors that are explored extensively in the literature, with many studies citing the high cost of membership, family responsibilities, time constraints, and lack of awareness related to membership benefits (Escoffery et al., 2015; Esmaeili et al., 2012; Matthys et al., 2019). It appears that old constructs related to professional obligation, social bonds, and devotion to a dedicated group of like-minded peers do not necessarily surpass the value-to-cost ratio considered by entry-level occupational therapists. These new generations of professionals have many free resources and expertly use social connectivity through online options rather than through association membership to meet professional needs.

As occupational therapists from younger generations enter the occupational therapy workforce, fewer are responding to the traditional membership invitation that compelled previous generations to join. New generations of occupational therapists need the support of coaching, encouragement, and learning opportunities, and state occupational therapy associations can help by increasing membership access. By allocating significant resources to leadership development in the profession, a strategic incentive from the American Occupational Therapy Association directs leaders to step forward and guide the future (AOTA, 2007). Despite AOTA leadership promotion, the literature support regarding the exploration of occupational therapists' leadership characteristics has been limited compared to other disciplines (Fleming-Castaldy & Patro, 2012). In theory, influential state association presidents would drive membership by sharing a vision for the organization's future through passionate communication. However, current literature regarding leadership styles of occupational therapists in influential positions is insufficient, especially regarding the effects of leadership characteristics on membership status.

Definitions

The following terms have restricted meaning and are defined for this study:

1. **Professional association:** A voluntary organization that connects and sustains both the individual member and the profession by promoting shared professional identity, defining professionalism, setting parameters for acceptable professional behavior and ethical practice, and increasing disciplinary knowledge base (McGregor & Halls, 2020).
2. **State occupational therapy association:** A professional association dedicated to a membership of licensed occupational therapists and students affiliated by the specific state of residence or practice. Though not formally affiliated with the national occupational therapy association, AOTA provides state occupational therapy association information and contact links for each state.

3. **State occupational therapy association president:** An elected official who leads a state occupational therapy association enforcing the laws and regulations of administration of the association.
4. **Leadership style:** The leader's method or process to influence a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2013, p. 5).
5. **Membership status:** Interaction between a member and the organization in exchange for meaningful value. At the most basic level, member affiliation occurs when a member pays membership dues in exchange for annual membership in the organization (Escoffery et al., 2015).
6. **Transformational leadership:** A leadership method and theory whereby the leader uses emotional appeals and inspirational motivation to convey futuristic possibilities for what the organization can become. These leaders inspire change by disclosing opportunities, arousing courage, and stimulating enthusiasm for the future (Bolea & Atwater, 2016).
7. **Leadership practices inventory (LPI):** A self-assessment/observer tool that measures one's leadership behaviors. It is a 30-item instrument that measures leadership competencies by applying Kouzes and Posner's five exemplary leadership practices (Kouzes & Posner, 2017a).
8. **Exemplary leadership model:** A leadership model set forth by Kouzes and Posner that bases effective leadership on five core practices: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2017b).

Literature Review

According to Kouzes and Posner (2017b), effective leadership employs modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart, all methods embraced in the theory of transformational leadership and specifically linked to the Exemplary Leadership Model. This model results in positive leadership outcomes, including enlarging an organization's membership size through proactively encouraging change so that others will embrace and share a vision for what the organization can achieve in the future. A study of leadership practices of allied health professionals in Scotland indicated that by the very nature of how occupational therapists work with clients, they exhibit consistently higher transformational leadership behaviors than many other allied health professionals (Wylie & Gallagher, 2009). According to Ziviani (2017), this predisposition to leadership may explain why so many occupational therapists have gravitated to leadership positions. Heard (2014) agrees, reporting that transformational leadership's key concepts resonate with the most current occupational theory ideas. Despite these references, there is little clarity in the literature regarding leadership practices in occupational therapy regarding state occupational therapy association presidents' leadership style and the relationship between leadership style and association status. By way of inspiring a shared vision, state occupational therapy association presidents have the opportunity to influence others to become members of their state association, charismatically influencing them to embrace the collective goals and futuristic plans of the association. Professionals cannot discount the importance of collective influence through association membership. The occupational therapy profession needs high membership status levels to maintain viability at a state and national level.

Associations cannot ignore the importance of adequate representation as they depend on an active and engaged membership for sustainability, effectiveness, and general advancement of the profession (Ki & Wang, 2016). For organizations, leadership does not exist in a vacuum. Leaders, including state occupational therapy association presidents, have the potential to inspire success in their organizations by

invoking passion for the benefit of collective efficiency (Bolea & Atwater, 2016). Transformational leadership as a leadership theory is a powerful method for demonstrating empathy, empowering followers, projecting self-assurance, and dramatizing the mission (Bass & Bass, 2008; Hemsworth et al., 2013; Northouse, 2013). This theoretical approach to leadership is highly effective and, in general, promotes positive outcomes.

Association presidents who employ transformational leadership methods, such as building a shared vision and developing a positive organizational culture, may encourage membership participation in state occupational therapy associations compared to those who use a more transactional leadership style (Tsai, 2011). This factor leads to exploring a specific transformational leadership model, the Exemplary Leadership Model, which is the construct guiding this study (Kouzes & Posner, 2017b). The factors that make up the Exemplary Leadership Model include modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart (see Figure 1). These factors contribute to organizational success by modeling behaviors they want others to demonstrate and persuading followers to see their vision for the organization in the future.

Figure 1
Exemplary Leadership Model

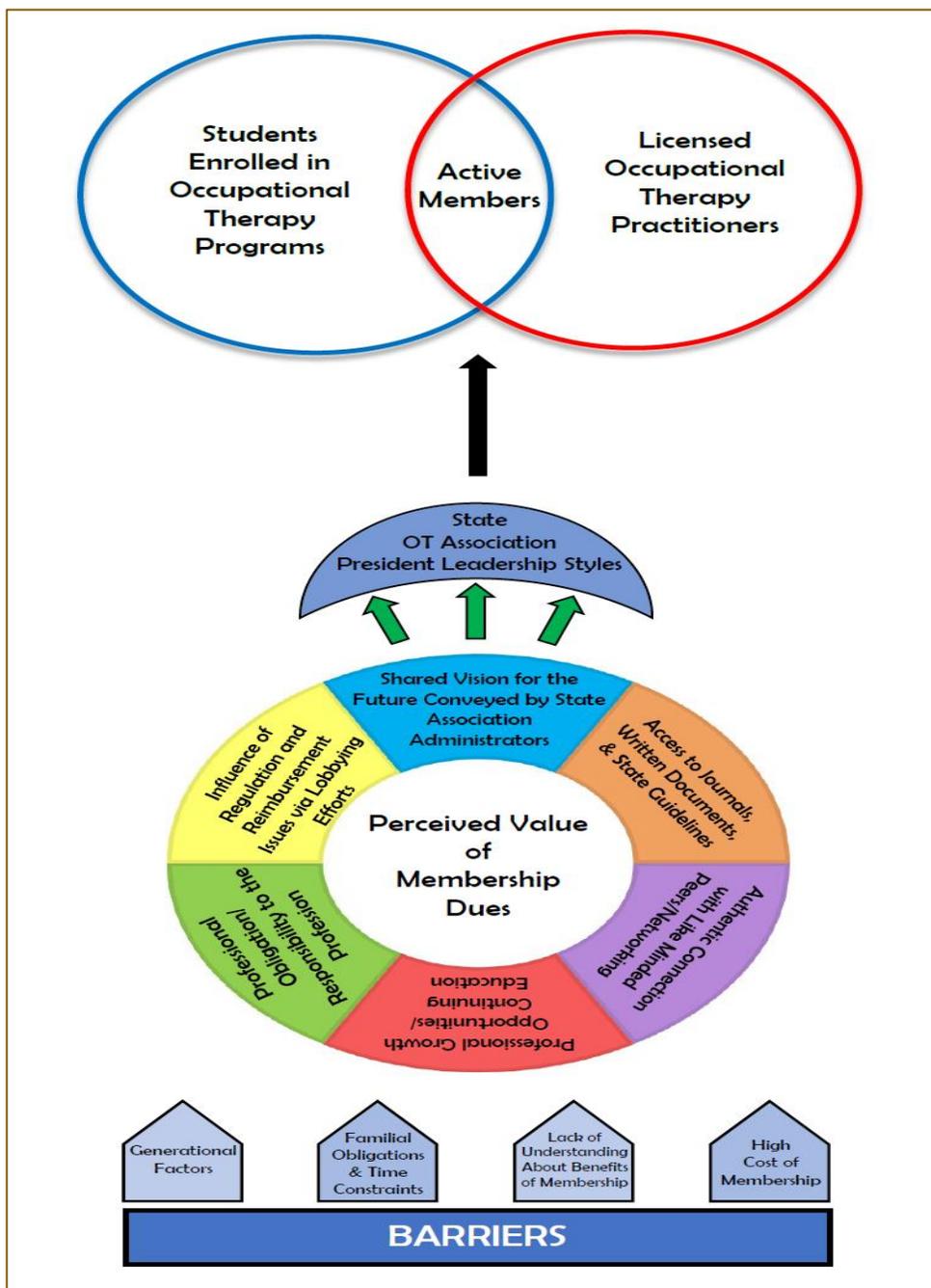


This study investigated the self-perceived leadership styles of state occupational therapy association presidents, as measured by the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), a tool developed by Kouzes and Posner (2017a), authors of the Exemplary Leadership Model (2017b). The project clarified whether the state occupational therapy association presidents lead their associations by using the core

factors of exemplary leadership. In doing so, it served to investigate whether association presidents lead primarily through transformational leadership methods. This research lends much-needed information to literature related to occupational therapists' leadership styles responsible for facilitating the occupational therapy profession's growth at the state level.

The research also explored the relationship between leadership style and membership status, as determined by membership representation from state-licensed occupational therapists and student therapists. Figure 2 illustrates the model for this project to enable the reader to understand potential barriers to membership, membership benefits, and the effect of leadership style on membership status.

Figure 2
Model



In recent years, transformational leadership theory (once applied only to traditional management and social psychology fields) has been touted as a helpful guidance model for health care professionals who wish to motivate followers effectively (Antonakis, 2012; Jambawo, 2018). The basic tenets of transformational leadership (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation) characterize the transformational leader and influence followers' awareness of the organization's issues and challenges, which is critical for membership status in professional organizations (Bass & Bass, 2008). The charismatic nature of transformational leadership motivates followers to embrace a collective vision for the future, influencing collective action and boosting emotional commitment to the organization, a critical point of connection needed for encouraging affiliation (Abu-Tineh et al., 2009; Hemsworth et al., 2013; Kouzes & Posner, 2009; Peng et al., 2020; Tsai, 2011). Because it develops a strong sense of inclusiveness and encourages team members to work collaboratively with others toward achieving shared goals, the transformational leadership style is now perceived as possibly the most effective leadership style for adapting to rapidly changing environments (Ziviani, 2017).

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there a statistical difference between the LPI score of state occupational therapy association presidents and the normed mean score of the LPI?
2. Is there a correlation between LPI mean scores of state occupational therapy association presidents and the respective state association's membership representation of licensed occupational therapists and student therapists?

Method

This study's paradigm was quantitative as it emphasizes objective measurement of the leadership style of state occupational therapy association presidents and corresponding state membership status. The leadership style was represented as an average numerical score on the self-administered version of the LPI. A measurable factor also represented membership status and is compiled by the percentage of association members from the population of eligible members (occupational therapists and certified occupational therapy assistants and occupational therapy students) in each state. These data were collected through several steps. First, the membership enrollment for each state for 2020 was provided by AOTA (A. Ricci, personal communication, January 20, 2021). The next step included determining the potential number of members for each state, including therapists and students. The eligible therapist membership number was found by searching occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants by state from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020). Following this step, AOTA provided total enrolled occupational therapy and occupational therapy assistant students by state in 2020 (N. Harvison, personal communication, March 22, 2021). A numerical percentage for membership status was then finalized for each state. The electronic link for the survey was included with each email contact. Thirty-two presidents responded by filling out the LPI Self, but one declined to reveal the state of affiliation, making that response unusable and decreasing the sample population to 31. Three presidents sought additional information regarding assurance of their anonymity before completing the survey. Anonymity appeared to be a frequent concern as presidents articulated their trepidation about declining membership numbers related to their leadership styles.

The research design for this study used survey research to obtain data regarding the research questions. It implemented both comparative and correlational research design methods as the research questions required different approaches. Whereas the first research question used a comparative research

design to compare the LPI mean score to the normed average, the second research question dictated the use of correlational research to explore the relationship between LPI score and membership representation.

The participants demonstrated consent by active participation in the survey through an electronic link for survey access following an email that provided specifics regarding the study. Informed consent was ensured through a preliminary statement of consent read by the participant before engaging in the online survey. Potential participants were represented by state occupational therapy association presidents' total population, making the information generalizable to all state occupational therapy associations. It was also necessary to survey the entire population to obtain an adequate sample size.

The study was approved and conducted within the University of the Cumberland's Institutional Review Board guidelines. The survey tool used was the LPI, authored by Kouzes and Posner (2017a). The LPI Self is a 30-item questionnaire containing five subscales for each of the five exemplary leadership practices. Each subscale includes six questions. The LPI online version provided the respondents with an opportunity to respond to various attitudes and sentiments regarding their leadership style. The tool measures statements on a 5-point Likert scale with these anchors: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 4 = *agree*, and 5 = *strongly agree*.

Results from a comprehensive review of the LPI indicate that the tool has sound psychometric properties with consistently strong reliability, demonstrating consistent results across various sample populations and situations. Findings from a multitude of studies that examined the validity of the LPI consistently show that the LPI measures high for face validity, empirical validity, and predictive validity (Posner, 2016).

Data Analysis

The study was guided by research questions, which investigated differences in LPI mean score compared to a normed mean score attained from LPI 360 Normative Data (2011). This question suggested the use of a one sample *t*-test which was used to compare participant data to a single variable of the normative mean. Question two prompted an inquiry of the relationship between two factors, the LPI mean score of the state occupational therapy association president and the association's membership representation, a percentage derived from the ratio of association members compared to the therapists and student therapists eligible for membership. Initially, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient test measured the second question to examine the association between leadership style and membership and the relationship's direction. Using this analysis, no significance was found as there was no linear relationship between the variables. However, a scatterplot of the data (see Figure 3) demonstrated that there was indeed a monotonic relationship between styles of leadership and membership status. Because of the monotonic relationship between the factors, the Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient was used as it is a nonparametric measure of the strength and direction of the monotonic relationship between two variables. All statistical analyses were completed through JASP statistical software.

Figure 3*Scatterplot Representing Monotonic Data*

Results

The population surveyed for this research study were current presidents of state occupational therapy associations. It was a total sample as each state's association president was invited to participate in the survey. There were 52 state associations, comprised of the 50 states plus Puerto Rico and Washington D.C. There were three invitations to participate: one initial email, one reminder email, and one president's encouraging support email, which detailed the importance of the study and prompted peers to participate. The survey was transposed verbatim to Google Forms with the expressed permission of the publisher, with one demographic question about the state of representation added to the survey. The response rate for the survey was 60%.

Question 1 asked: Is there a statistical difference between the LPI score of state occupational therapy association presidents and the normed mean score of the LPI? According to the results of the *t*-test conducted, the null hypothesis was rejected as results showed a significant difference between the two groups, presidents of state occupational therapy associations ($M = 48.82$) and the normed group ($M = 46.21$). The difference between the state president's score and the normed score was significant at the 0.01 level ($t [30] = 2.56, p = 0.01$).

Question 2 asked: Is there a correlation between the LPI mean scores of state occupational therapy association presidents and the respective state association's membership representation of licensed occupational therapists and student therapists? Initial results using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient were not significant for indication of a linear relationship between the variables ($r [30] = .018, p = 0.95$); however, a scatterplot illustrated a pattern indicating that there was a monotonic relationship between the variables examined demonstrating that as the LPI Self mean scores increased, membership status in the respective state occupational therapy association increased. To clarify, in a monotonic relationship, the variables tend to move in the same relative direction but not necessarily at a constant rate. In a linear relationship, the variables move in the same direction at a constant rate (Minitab

Express Support, 2019). To determine the strength of a relationship between the data and what direction this relationship is, a Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient was conducted for each of the five core areas of exemplary leadership and indicated a statistically significant positive relationship between the variables (leadership factor and membership). All factors were examined into order for format pairs for examination. The factor results indicated 30 pairs with its state ranking for membership status: model the way ($r_s [30] = 0.87, p < 0.001$), inspire a shared vision ($r_s [30] = 0.91, p < 0.001$), challenge the process ($r_s [30] = 0.88, p < 0.001$), enable others to act ($r_s [30] = 0.79, p < 0.001$), and encourage the heart ($r_s [30] = 0.81, p < 0.001$). Therefore, the null hypothesis two was rejected as a statistically significant relationship between measured variables was found at the 0.01 level, indicating that as one variable increases (LPI mean score), the other variable (membership status) increases as well.

Some supplemental information not specific to the research questions was revealed in examining the data provided by administering the LPI Self to presidents of state occupational therapy associations. As reported earlier, state presidents of occupational therapy associations demonstrated higher than average scores in transformational leadership. When an analysis of mean scores by category was conducted, three out of the five leadership factors were discovered as the primary cause for the elevated mean score. The significantly elevated factor scores were those in the categories of challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. These scores were elevated compared to normative scores (LPI 360 Normative Data, 2011). A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analysis for these three specific leadership factors indicated a strong positive relationship between these leadership factors and membership status, and all were statistically significant at the 0.01 level. The results indicated ($r [30] = 0.97, p < .001$) for the factor described as challenge the process, ($r [30] = 0.97, p < .001$) for the factor described as enable others to act, and ($r [30] = 1.00, p < .001$) for the factor labeled encourage the heart.

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analysis for these three specific leadership factors indicated a strong positive relationship between these leadership factors and membership status and all were statistically significant at the 0.01 level. The results indicated ($r [30] = 0.97, p < .001$) for the factor described as challenge the process, ($r [30] = 0.97, p < .001$) for the factor described as enable others to act, and ($r [30] = 1.00, p < .001$) for the factor labeled encourage the heart. Table 1 shows a significant difference between the mean scores of each of these factors and the published normative score found when interviewing other leaders. This score compared to a difference of slightly above one point for the other factors of leadership measured, the factor described as model the way, and the factor described as inspire a shared vision.

Table 1
Comparison of Factor Scores of State Presidents to Normative Data

Leadership Factor	M Score of State Presidents	Normative M Score	Point Difference
Model the Way	47.65	46.89	0.76
Inspire a Shared Vision	44.74	43.83	0.91
Challenge the Process	47.68	44.90	2.78
Enable Others to Act	52.45	49.39	3.06
Encourage the Heart	50.10	46.02	4.10

Discussion

As occupational therapy associations across the nation see a “graying” of the membership and experience lower numbers of members of younger generations of therapists, the focus on membership status becomes more critical as associations attempt to build a membership that is representative of the profession (Mahoney et al., 2017). Professional association membership is critical to the professional development of the individual therapist as well as the viability of the profession (Cline et al., 2019; Ki & Wang, 2016; Wang & Ki, 2017). This project revealed a statistically significant use of transformational leadership practices compared to those used by the normed population of leaders. This result would indicate that occupational therapists as state presidents of associations employ Kouzes and Posner’s five factors of exemplary leadership more frequently than most other leaders when guiding their teams. Three factors (challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart) were most influential in the relationship between leadership style and membership status. The research found a strong positive relationship between these leadership factors and membership status. Supplemental findings related to the study question found that three out of the five leadership factors were discovered as the primary cause for the elevated mean score. The significantly elevated factor scores were those in the categories of challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart, which suggest that occupational therapists, by nature of their professional training, assume an advocacy role with those who benefit from their leadership. The skills of occupational therapists rely heavily on the professional’s ability to nurture, coach, challenge, and encourage. It would seem possible that these clinical skills would naturally transfer into the leader/follower relationship, particularly strengthening leadership scores in the affected areas.

Findings from this study are consistent with Fleming-Castaldy and Patro’s (2012) research that reported that significant relationships were found between LPI mean scores for each of the five leadership areas measured, indicating that the respondents believed they possessed distinct qualities that contributed to their success as leaders in the field of occupational therapy. These scores indicated that occupational therapy leaders possessed transformational leadership abilities that were represented by the Leadership Challenge Model developed by Kouzes and Posner (2017b).

The survey results indicate that the respondents believe they are self-aware. They model the way for followers by clarifying values and affirming a dedication to the mission through their actions as an example to others. They know that others are observing what they do, and they use this as a powerful opportunity to embrace and display the organization’s mission. The respondents feel that they inspire a shared vision as a visible target for their goals. They envision the future by imagining exciting possibilities and passionately believe that together the team can make a difference. They enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared goals and targets and speak with genuine conviction about the work the association is doing. The respondents realize that change is the key to transformation and search for opportunities to seek innovative ways to grow and improve. They are not blocked by challenges of the status quo or restricted previous policies. Instead, they challenge the process through experimentation and risk-taking and learning from their mistakes. They are not afraid of “going against the grain” to make a difference and test their skills and abilities by seeking ways to challenge themselves professionally. They also enable others to act by fostering collaboration and promotion of collective goals. They build trust by assigning authority along with responsibility and strengthen others by sharing power and trust. Finally, the occupational therapy association presidents surveyed encourage the heart by recognizing individual contributions and showing awareness of the excellence in others. These leaders celebrate values and

victories and create a sense of community in their teams. In short, state occupational therapy association presidents believe they practice transformational leadership.

Although this study investigated a specific sample group that has not yet been reported in the literature in the past, studies related to components of the relationship between transformational leadership style and increased membership status have previously been conducted. Tsai (2011) found that association leaders who demonstrate transformational leadership methods, such as building a shared vision, distributing leadership, and building a positive organizational culture, may encourage membership participation in occupational therapy associations compared to those who use a more transactional or managerial style of leadership.

Limitations

Although the sample group surveyed was a complete sample, the sample size was relatively small, limiting the generalization of resulting information beyond similar state professional associations. In addition, there were varying experiential and tenure levels of the presidents, which potentially complicates the relationship between the current president's leadership style and current membership representation. Thus, the connection cannot be validated as causal, only correlational, and does not specify the relationship's nature. A potential limitation also exists regarding non-respondent bias. The association presidents who were dissatisfied with their perceived leader characteristics may have chosen not to respond to the survey, limiting the findings' generalizability. In addition, though transformational leadership has been found to encourage membership, it is likely not the only relevant factor as membership continues to decline.

Conclusion

The research data indicates that occupational therapy association presidents believe they lead through a transformational leadership style. It also indicates a strong positive correlation between transformational leadership and the membership status of the respective state organization. Practical implications for state occupational therapy associations indicate the critical need for executive boards to be aware of the leadership style of association leaders and its potential impact on the decision for therapists and students to affiliate with the organization. Research supports that these leadership characteristics are necessary for transformation, a pressing challenge for today's associations (Kouzes & Posner, 2017b; Northouse, 2013).

The study is significant to occupational therapists in leadership positions and executive boards serving professional volunteer organizations who strategically analyze factors related to the recruitment and retention of members. Specifically, this study is significant because it provides information for potential presidents, executive boards, and membership of state occupational therapy associations regarding successful leadership styles when choosing and grooming presidential nominees. It also serves as a potential basis for training professional association board members in leadership development as well as potential training for student therapists who are considering affiliation and those who may eventually assume leadership positions in their associations. The results contribute to the body of knowledge regarding the benefits of using transformational leadership and encourages the next generation of occupational therapy leaders to embrace the factors of transformational leadership.

Leslie M. Sizemore, Ph.D., Ed.S., OTR/L, is the president of TheraCare, Inc., a therapy services staffing company serving Southeastern Kentucky. She provides clinical services as a school-based therapist for the Clay County Public School District and is the Legislative Chair for the Kentucky Occupational Therapy Association.

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