

Kansas State University Libraries

New Prairie Press

Adult Education Research Conference

2009 Conference Proceedings (Chicago, IL)

Predictors and Program Outcomes of Empowering Practices of FFA Chapter Advisors

Kimberly S. Anderson
University of Georgia

Lorilee R. Sandmann
University of Georgia

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/aerc>



Part of the [Adult and Continuing Education Administration Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License](#)

Recommended Citation

Anderson, Kimberly S. and Sandmann, Lorilee R. (2009). "Predictors and Program Outcomes of Empowering Practices of FFA Chapter Advisors," *Adult Education Research Conference*.
<https://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2009/papers/3>

This is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in Adult Education Research Conference by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.

Predictors and Program Outcomes of Empowering Practices of FFA Chapter Advisors

Kimberly S. Anderson, Ph.D., University of Georgia, USA
Lorilee R. Sandmann, Ph. D., University of Georgia, USA

Abstract: Adults managing youth organizations strive to build partnerships with students in which the shared leadership process results in a sense of empowerment. This research investigates the predictors and programs outcomes of empowering practices used by FFA chapter advisors. Findings provide implications for preservice and continuing education.

Purpose

Youth organizations are a prominent method for equipping young people with the skills necessary for career success. The partnership between youth and adults in these organizations is instrumental to the personal development of the young people as it prepares them for future leadership opportunities. One of the challenges for adults in youth development work is to understand the dynamics of this partnership in order to determine the factors that foster optimal student growth. This challenge resides in the context of empowerment as an element of shared leadership and youth-adult partnerships. The purpose of this study was to understand the predictors and program outcomes of empowering practices of FFA chapter advisors. The results of this study contribute to the preservice and continuing education of youth professionals as they strengthen their abilities and techniques in developing young people.

Theoretical Framework

According to Yukl (2006), empowerment is the influence of leadership behavior, job characteristics, organizational structure, and personal needs and values on motivation and self-efficacy. The review of several theories of empowerment revealed key aspects and themes that overlapped (Arnold, Arad, Rhoades, & Drasgow, 2000; Bowen & Lawler, 1992; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Konczak, Stelly, & Trusty, 2000; Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). All theories had elements that applied to the youth-adult partnership, but no one theory fit perfectly. Therefore, the measurement framework for this study was a composite theory combining the elements of the empowerment theories to best suit the youth-adult partnership context. The five empowering practices constructs (*fostering self efficacy, setting a context for action, structuring the task, creating a sense of ownership, and coaching for performance*) comprised the theory developed through the review of the literature and interactions with key stakeholders, particularly agricultural education practitioners.

Research Design

This quantitative study utilized a 51-item survey instrument to examine the predictors and program outcomes of empowering practices of FFA chapter advisors. With the five empowering practices as its central constructs, the instrument also included items to determine personal characteristics, agricultural education program characteristics, and personal views of the program. For the five construct scales, alphas ranged from a high of .85 to a low of .76. Specifically, coefficient alphas ran in descending order as follows: .85 for fostering self efficacy, .84 for setting a context for action, .82 for structuring the task, .82 for coaching for performance, and .76

for creating a sense of ownership. Additionally, coefficient alphas were calculated for total empowering practices and overall advisor satisfaction. The alphas were .95 and .72 respectively.

The online questionnaire was designed as a self-assessment of the frequency of implementing empowering practices in working with FFA members. Three research questions guided this study: (1) which empowering practices are most commonly used by FFA advisors, (2) to what extent can the use of empowering practices be explained by the personal characteristics and program characteristics of the FFA advisor, and (3) to what extent can program outcomes be attributed to the use of empowering practices? Appropriate statistical analyses were selected using SPSS 14.0 to answer the three research questions. In addition to descriptive statistics, the analysis relied on a variety of statistical procedures, including multiple factor analysis and correlation to determine variable relationships.

The 388 agricultural educators of one southeastern state served as the population for this study. From the population, 227 responses were deemed usable, resulting in a 66% adjusted response rate. The respondents ranged in age from 23 to 63, with a mean age of 38.98. The respondents were 71.4% male and 28.6% female. A majority (92.9%) of the respondents were Caucasian. The number of completed years in teaching ranged from zero to 36, with a mean of 11.00.

Findings, Conclusions, Implications

Overall, the study revealed that FFA advisors believe they are regularly implementing practices within each of the five empowering practices constructs. The responses revealed that practices associated with *fostering self efficacy* were implemented the most frequently. While those associated with *creating a sense of ownership* demonstrated the lowest frequency. The single most important finding in the study is that *years of teaching experience* and *level of school administration support* can be used to predict 9.1% of the implementation of *total empowering practices* which in turn can be used to explain 15.4% of *overall advisor satisfaction*. Based on the strongest explanatory predictor and outcome variables for empowering practices, an explanatory model is presented in Figure 1.

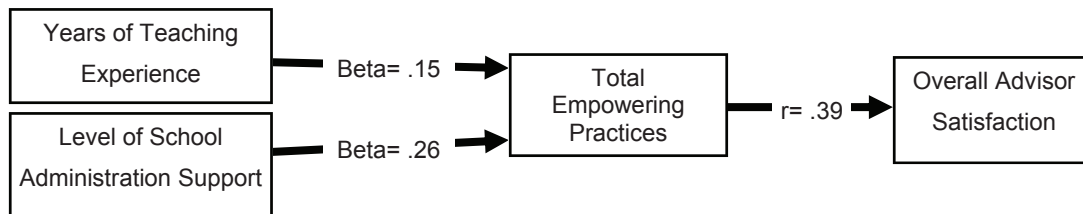


Figure 1. *Explanatory Model for the Predictors and Program Outcomes of Empowering Practices*

Most Common Empowering Practices

Rank ordering of the 34 empowering practices item means was used to answer the question: “Which empowering practices are most commonly used by FFA advisors?” The means reflected the self-assessed frequency of implementation of each empowering practice on a scale of 1 (never) to 6 (always). The ten highest ranked practices included four of the eight measures for *fostering self efficacy* and three of the six measures for *setting a context for action*. The two highest ranking items were measures for *coaching for performance*. At the other end of the order, five of the six measures for *creating a sense of ownership* were displayed in the ten lowest

ranking items. When the items were grouped by construct, *fostering self efficacy* exhibited the highest mean item mean while *creating a sense of ownership* demonstrated the lowest frequency.

Overall, the study revealed that FFA advisors believe they are regularly implementing practices within each of the five empowering practices constructs. This is not surprising given that the practices are behaviors one would expect for the human development role of a teacher and FFA advisor. The frequency should also be viewed in the context that this study used a self assessment instrument. Therefore, the ratings depend solely on the teacher's personal awareness of their practices and may be influenced by social desirability. Regardless, it is positive to find that advisors are using practices within the various constructs that foster an environment for empowerment to occur.

Theories of empowerment clearly point out enhancing feelings of self efficacy as an integral element of empowerment. Conger and Kanungo (1988) specifically describe empowerment as the process of enhancing feelings of self efficacy. To this end, this study revealed that, of the empowering practices constructs, agricultural educators are most frequently implementing practices that foster self efficacy. This finding is positive feedback for the current methods of training and development for agricultural educators.

On the other hand, the practices within the *creating a sense of ownership* construct were consistently the lowest ranking items. This is an important finding to the study as we consider both the empowerment theories and the purpose of youth-adult partnerships. A common thread between the theories of empowerment (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; and Spreitzer, 1995) is the need to create an environment where individuals have control and ownership in decisions and outcomes. This ownership fuels the motivation toward the task which results in empowerment. Interestingly, the ability to share decision making to create a sense of ownership is a critical challenge for implementing youth-adult partnerships (Camino, 2000). Primarily, the challenge in youth-adult partnerships is with adults not viewing youth as partners which limits young people's ability to influence and control outcomes. This limit in shared decision making results in a lower sense of ownership and ultimately, empowerment. The results from this study signal that FFA advisors align with other youth workers in their need to include youth as partners in managing the youth organization. Given that creating a sense of ownership is central to fostering empowerment, this is an important finding to establish a starting point for training and development of agricultural educators.

Explaining Empowering Practices

Simple correlation and multivariate analysis were implemented to answer the second research question: "To what extent can the use of empowering practices be explained by the personal characteristics and program characteristics of the FFA advisor?" Of the twelve predictor variables, only *age*, *years of teaching experience*, and *level of school administration support* exhibited significant correlations with any of the five empowering practices scales and *total empowering practices*. The strongest explanatory variable across the five construct scales and *total empowering practices* was *level of school administration support*. A summary of the significant correlation coefficients across the six dependent variables is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Summary of Significant Predictor Variable Correlation Coefficients (and Percent of Variance Explained)*

Predictor Variable	Dependent Variable					
	Self Efficacy	Context	Task	Ownership	Coaching	Total Empowering Practices
Age	.14 (1.8%)	--	--	--	--	.15 (2.4%)
Years of Teaching	.13 (1.8%)	.15 (2.2%)	--	--	--	.15 (2.4%)
Lev. of School Admin. Support	.21 (4.5%)	.18 (3.2%)	.23 (5.1%)	.20 (4.2%)	.23 (5.3%)	.26 (6.6%)

The variables yielding statistical significance at the individual level (*age, years of teaching experience, and level of school administration support*) were then entered into multivariate analysis to gain further explanation of the variance. In this analysis, useful models were produced for *fostering self efficacy, setting a context for action, and total empowering practices*. When variables were grouped to determine the best model for simultaneous influence, the two-variable model including *years of teaching experience and level of school administration support* demonstrated the greatest influence by explaining 9.1% of the observed variance in the dependent variable of *total empowering practices*. While statistically significant, this explanation of the observed variance is still quite small.

Even though the shared variance is small, one can still use the findings to consider the influence on the agricultural education program and its ability to create an environment that fosters empowerment. Specifically, *years of teaching experience and level of school administration support* are consistent with the literature in terms of challenges for the agricultural education profession. Fuller, Parsons, and Watkins (1974) outline three stages of teaching which highlight the influence of years of experience on the ability to release control in order to create a more student-centered environment. Additionally, Thobega and Miller (2003) noted that poor administrative support was a major factor in teachers leaving the profession. This study revealed that empowering practices increased with years of experience and supportive administration. This poses a trial for agricultural education given the issue of teacher retention. The number of qualified teachers leaving the profession early in their career limits the years of experience of teachers in the field therefore limiting the pool of teachers exhibiting empowering practices.

Furthermore, the level of school administration support ties directly to Yukl's (2006) explanation that empowerment is influenced by three categories: the organization, the work, and the people. The support of the FFA advisor by the school administration can be viewed as a major influence on the organizational context. So the agricultural educator's sense of support may foster individual empowerment which in turn leads to creating a more empowering environment for students.

Empowering Practices and Program Outcomes

Simple correlation and multivariate analysis were implemented to answer the question "To what extent can program outcomes be attributed to the use of empowering practices?" All of the five empowering practices scales and *total empowering practices* displayed significant correlations among the four outcomes variables and *overall advisor satisfaction*. The composite

scale of *total empowering practices* exhibited the strongest predictive power by explaining 15.4% of the observed variance in *overall advisor satisfaction*. In the multivariate analysis, no models of statistical significance were produced.

The studies of teacher retention in agricultural education reveal the concern for job satisfaction as a key element to teachers staying in the profession. In the empowerment literature, Mundt and Conners (1999) note that the struggle to motivate students is a major test which leads to departure from the profession. Thomas and Velthouse's (1990) definition of empowerment notes that building motivation toward the task as one of the key elements. Linked together with this research study, one would assume motivated, empowered students contribute to overall satisfaction of the teacher which in turn could result in extended years in the profession.

The literature also revealed that an empowering environment yields a stronger commitment to tasks, greater initiative for responsibilities, higher job satisfaction resulting in less turnover, stronger commitment to the organization, and great outlook for success (Block, 1987; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). The findings of this study support those notions as the factors within *overall advisor satisfaction* (job satisfaction, sense of reward, impact on students, commitment of students) were positively correlated with an increase in empowering practices.

Based on the findings, three key considerations for teacher preservice and inservice training are: improving the sense of ownership among students, retention of teachers to gain years of experience, and building support from school administration. The literature clearly points out the importance of sense of ownership to foster empowerment and to build youth-adult partnerships. However, the study revealed that practices which create a sense of ownership were among the least frequently used empowering practices. One implication of the findings for agricultural education is the need to provide teacher training specifically addressing the implementation of empowering practices, especially those that foster ownership. These skills lie outside the realm on agricultural content in the array of skills relating to managing the agricultural education program and FFA chapter. The study highlights the importance of intentionally focusing on this skill development that might otherwise be overlooked in teacher training.

This study revealed years of teaching experience as an antecedent to implementing empowering practices. Additionally, satisfaction of the FFA advisor was confirmed as an outcome of implementing empowering practices. Therefore, the study could suggest that the agricultural education profession use teachers with more years of experience to mentor newer teachers explicitly focused on developing empowering practices. Furthermore, developing empowering skills early in the career may lead to more years in the program as teachers are more satisfied in their positions, have a greater sense of reward, and witness students committed to the program.

The third major area with implications for agricultural education is building support from school administration. While the findings are statistically significant but not substantial, there is evidence that the perception that the school administration is supportive of the FFA advisor has an impact on the use of empowering practices. Given this finding, agricultural educators can work to determine methods for engaging the school administrators in an effort to build more support. Associations of agricultural educators might consider offering in-service opportunities to school administrators in an effort to educate them about the program, share best practices between school administrators, and to build the teacher-administrator relationship. Teachers who have a strong sense of support may be able to identify best practices for gaining support and mentor other teachers in building support. These strategies could lead to tools and resources being

developed to educate school administrators in youth-adult partnerships to increase their knowledge and support of shared leadership in youth programming.

In addition to these three key considerations, the framework for this study could be utilized in teacher education and teacher in-service to frame training in empowering practices. The constructs and items could be used as a curriculum framework to provide practical and concrete guidance on practices that foster empowerment in students. Additionally, the instrument items could be used as a self assessment tool for individuals to gauge their practices over the course of the year and their careers. The items on the instrument would provide concrete examples to create awareness in the teacher's reflection.

Finally, this study raises further questions in the study of adult education. Do these findings hold true in other organizations that rely on youth-adult partnerships? How are the empowerment practices of adults perceived by the youth? What further insight could be gained by qualitative study of exemplar and non-exemplar teachers and administrators? The answers to these questions could yield information for training adults in youth-adult partnerships.

References

- Arnold, J. A., Arad, S., Rhoades, J.A., & Drasgow, F. (2000). The empowering leadership questionnaire: The construction and validation of a new scale for measuring leader behaviors [Electronic version]. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 21, 249-269.
- Block, P. (1987). *The empowered manager*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Bowen, D. E., & Lawler, E. E., III. (1992). The empowerment of service workers: What, why, how and when. *Sloan Management Review*, 33(3), 31-39.
- Camino, L. (2000). Youth-adult partnerships: Entering new territory in community work and research. *Applied Developmental Science*, 4(Suppl. 1), 11-20.
- Conger, J. A., & Kanungo, R. N. (1988). The empowerment process: Integrating theory and practice. *The Academy of Management Review*, 13(3), 471-482.
- Fuller, F. F., Parsons, J. S., & Watkins, J. E. (1974, April). *Concerns of teachers: Research and reconceptualization*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL. (ERIC Doc. Reproduction Service No. ED091439)
- Konczak, L. J., Stelly, D. J., & Trusty, M. L. (2000). Determining and measuring empowering leader behaviors: Development of an upward feedback instrument [Electronic version]. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 60(2), 301-313.
- Mundt, J. P., & Connors, J. J. (1999). Problems and challenges associated with the first years of teaching agriculture: A framework for preservice and inservice education [Electronic version]. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 40(1), 38-48.
- Spreitzer, G. M. (1995). Psychological empowerment in the workplace: Dimensions, measurement, and validation. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 38(5), 1442-1465.
- Thobega, M., & Miller, G. (2003). Relationship of instructional supervision with agriculture teachers' job satisfaction and their intention to remain in the teaching profession [Electronic version]. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 44(4), 57-66.
- Thomas, K. W., & Velthouse, B. A. (1990). Cognitive elements of empowerment: An "interpretive" model of intrinsic task motivation. *The Academy of Management Review*, 15(4), 666-681.
- Yukl, G. A. (2006). *Leadership in organizations*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.