

Leadership Style and Listening Practices of IMB Team Leaders: A Correlational Study

Abstract:

To ensure the success of an organization, a leader is responsible for creating a cadre of leaders for the future. Both profit and non-profit agencies seek to identify, assess, and develop potential leaders to increase their effectiveness as these leaders mature and grow in responsibilities. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) is the industry standard in assessing leadership styles. Since good communication is a key element in leading, the Listening Practices Feedback Report (LPFR-360) creates a deeper awareness of the essential nature of listening as leaders guide their organizations into the future.

With mid-level leadership aging and average longevity of IMB field personnel between 8-12 years, how will the International Mission Board (IMB) identify, assess, develop, and retain potential leaders for future service? Based on sound research, this study provides an impetus to develop a structured, developmental plan for field leaders. This research can assist the IMB to create an objective structured plan to develop effective servant-leaders in accordance with the IMB's cultural statement.

Research Purpose:

The purpose of this correlational research was to determine that a relationship exists between team leader's leadership style and listening practices as perceived by the team leader and team members.

Description of research:

Listening is a critical skill for those who lead. Research indicates leaders significantly influence followers through their listening practices; however the relationship between leadership styles and listening is assumed but not conclusively proven (Kouzes and Posner 2002). The purpose of this current study was to determine if a relationship exists between leadership style and listening practices of IMB team leaders (Burns 1978, Bass 2004).

The research population was IMB field personnel serving in the team leader role for greater than six months with a team of at least four team members. A total of 145 of 391 team leaders participated in this study giving a response rate of 37%. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) was used to measure transformational, transactional, and passive/avoidant leadership style and the Listening Practices Feedback Report-360 (LPFR) assessed the listening practices of attention, empathy, memory, open mind, respect, and response.

A correlational analysis using Pearson's r was conducted between leadership styles and listening practices. Further analysis conducted determined which leadership style was most significantly correlated with each of the six listening practice subscales. The open mind subscale was not significantly correlated with any leadership style.

Findings:

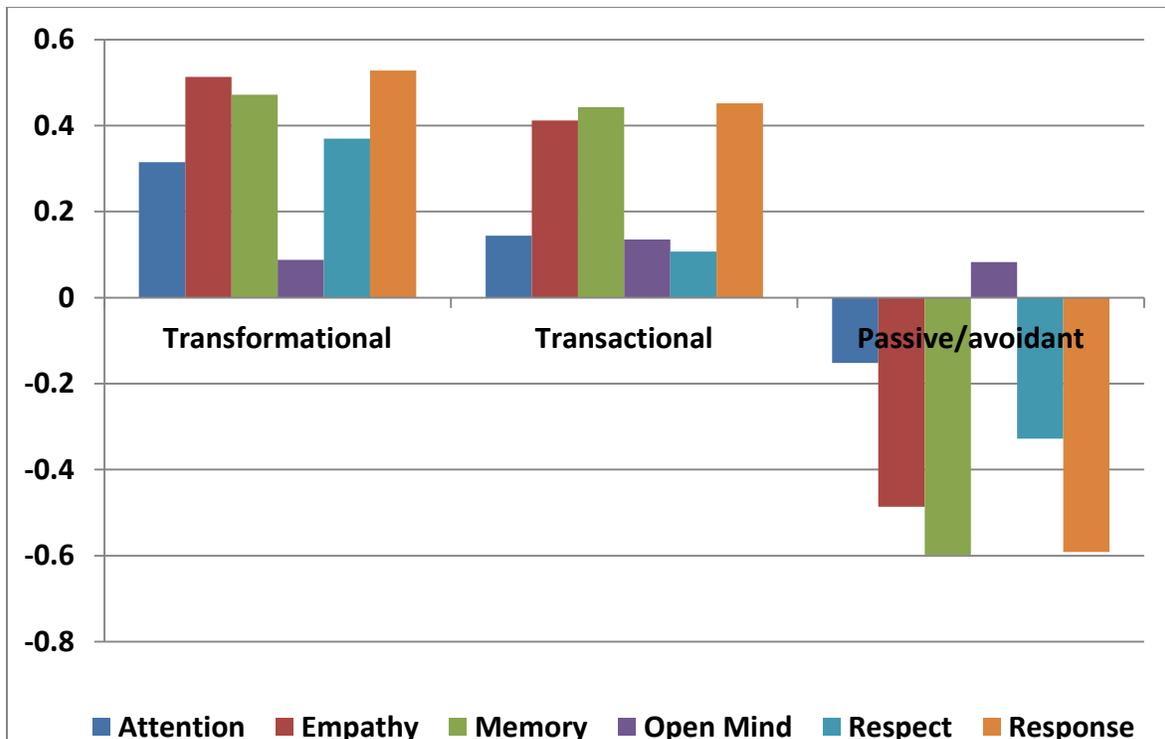
The findings indicated **transformational leadership** was statistically significant and moderately positive correlated with the total LPFR score and five of the six listening practices subscales. **Transactional leaders** also had a moderately positive correlation with total LPFR score with significant correlations on empathy, memory, and response subscales. **Passive/avoidant leadership** style had a significantly moderate negative correlation with LPFR and on empathy, memory, respect, and response subscales.

Stephen K. McCord	1948 Castle Glen Drive, Richmond, VA 23236
smccord@pobox.com	Phone: 804-714-4896

Transformational leadership scored highest on the LPFR total listening score. Passive/avoidant leaders' showed the lowest total listening scores and were rated ineffective listeners.

This study shows that transformational and transactional leadership styles have a statistically significant and moderately positive relationship with listening dimension scores as measured by the LPFR and supports the Full Range Leadership Model of Avolio and Bass (Avolio, Bruce J., and Bernard M. Bass. 2004. *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire*. 3rd ed. Manual and Sampler Set. Lincoln, NE: Mind Garden).

	TF	TA	PA
Attention	0.315* P=0.000	0.144 P=0.084	-0.152 P=0.067
Empathy	0.513* P=0.000	0.412* P=0.000	-0.486* P=0.000
Memory	0.472* P=0.000	0.443* P=0.000	-0.598* P=0.000
Open mind	0.088 P=0.293	0.135 P=0.105	0.083 P=0.319
Respect	0.370* P=0.000	0.107 P=0.200	-0.328* P=0.000
Response	0.528* P=0.000	0.452* P=0.000	-0.591* P=0.000



Implications and Thoughts: What are the implications of this research for IMB leadership?

- **Age and gender** are not significant factors in determining leadership style. Transformational and passive/avoidant leaders exist across the age and gender divide. Research indicates women tend to be more transformational than men. Due to the small number of women respondents, this conclusion is not supported.
- **Leadership Style**
 - **Transformational leaders** behave in ways that motivate and inspire those around them by providing meaning and challenge. IMB team leaders who behave transformationally engage their followers in ways that followers willingly go the second mile, see their leaders as more organizationally effective, and are more satisfied with their leaders. Transformational leaders motivate and inspire as they hear and really listen to follower's thoughts, ideas, and feelings.
 - **Transactional leaders** behave ways which reward defined processes and results. They address deviations from established standards, protocols, and methodology and this creates a level of expectancy and consistency with leadership. Followers seek to please or accommodate the leader's desires, goals, or direction. IMB leaders scored slightly lower than the MLQ norms meaning they acted more transactionally than transformationally.
 - **Passive/avoidant leaders** are typically identified as non-leaders. These leaders act only when they are driven to action or decisions. These leaders do not listen to the needs, desires, or thoughts of followers as their behavior is negatively correlated with listening. Characterized by inaction and indecision, these "leaders" frustrate their subordinates. Passive/avoidant leaders should be identified and relocated to another job which does not lead people as their behavior leads to frustration and ineffectiveness.
- **Teams that function well** tend to have transformational leaders. Bass, Avolio, and Riggio suggest listen as a means to becoming more transformational. However, after listening, action reflecting the conversation is required. Listening to know and learn about team members which results in action reflecting their thoughts and desires builds transformational leadership.
- Of the **145 leaders surveyed**, 85 (58.6%) were identified as transformational leaders and these leaders scored as highly effective listeners. The remaining 60 individuals (41.3%) were transactional in their leadership style. This percentage reflects the intentional focus of IMB Senior Leadership to develop more transformational leadership and is reflected in the IMB's statement of leadership values.

Applications:

1. **Team Building** - Use listening skill exercises as a team building exercise where effective listening is essential to understand and complete a team task. Leadership, listening, and problems are inevitably linked together. When leadership challenges occur, listening is one of the first casualties. Listening can be used as a diagnostic tool for assisting leaders to "hear" what is being said and examine their response in light of MLQ leadership styles.
2. **Personnel Retention** - Brownell indicated that workers do not quit a company; they quit because of their supervisor (Brownell 1990, 401-16). What does it cost to replace a team member? MLQ is predictive of leader behavior so using MLQ and listening training together to restore and retain leaders is an avenue to "rebuild" potential by strong leaders.
3. **Multi-Disciplinary or Cross Office/Agency Teams** - Listening is a critical component of working together as an effective, productive team. British researchers Wilson and Pirrie suggest listening as a key approach to a smooth functioning team. Transformational leadership tied with effective listening practices develops greater understanding and lessen conflict while attaining common goals.

Stephen K. McCord	1948 Castle Glen Drive, Richmond, VA 23236
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