

Forensic Science and Crime Research

The Applicability of Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Practices Inventory in Measuring the Use of Transformational Leadership Practices in Law Enforcement: A Review of the Literature

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Abstract

Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) is a 360-degree assessment, which includes both self and observer assessment tools, that examines a leader's use of transformational leadership techniques. While the LPI has been used extensively in the business and education fields, it has not been widely used within the law enforcement community. This review of the literature examines the research leading to the development of the Leadership Challenge Model's five practices, the development of the LPI, the validity and reliability of the LPI, and the LPI's limited use in the law enforcement profession. This review is intended to clarify the applicability of the LPI to measuring the transformational leadership practices of law enforcement leaders at all levels.

The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership

According to Kouzes and Posner [1], "when making extraordinary things happen in organizations, leaders engage in what [they] call The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership," which include (a) modeling the way, (b) inspiring a shared vision, (c) challenging the process, (d) enabling others to act, and (e) encouraging the heart. When Kouzes and Posner began their research into the leadership practices of middle and senior-managers of organizations, their aim was simple; they hoped to dispel two persistent ideas about leadership. "First, that leadership is an innate quality people are born with, and second, that only a select few can lead successfully" [2]. Over their 30-plus years of research, both quantitative and qualitative in nature [3], Kouzes and Posner developed their Leadership Challenge Model (LCM) and Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) [4,5].

Modeling the way

To be an inspiration to others and motivate them to action, leaders must model the way because "people won't follow [them], or even pay [them] much attention" [6] if they do not have strong values that inform their daily actions. Leaders are expected to have strong and apparent convictions that others see them living and championing each day. "When leaders are clear about what they believe in, they can take strong stands" [6] and avoid ambiguity. Leaders are true to themselves and transparent to their followers. They do not just talk the talk; they walk the walk; that is to say, leaders do what they say they will do [7]. Leaders model the way by leading from the front while remaining humble when praise is given, allowing their subordinates to receive the praise instead. As President Nelson Mandela [8] wrote, "A leader ... is like a shepherd. He stays behind the flock, letting the most nimble go out ahead, whereupon the others follow, not realizing that all along they are being directed from behind." So if followers can perform a task, leaders should let them. Notwithstanding that however, leaders should never ask followers to do something they would not be willing to do themselves. Leaders understand that success is a group effort and that they cannot do it alone [7].

Before leaders can lead, they have to believe they can lead and that confidence is built through thoughtful introspection. "You have to believe that your words can inspire and your actions can move others" [6]. While Kouzes and Posner [1] tell us that "leadership is not about who you are; it's about what you do," leaders have to know themselves before they can lead. "Becoming a leader begins when you come to understand who you are, what you care about, and why you do what you do" [6]. They suggest leaders must take an inner journey that builds self-awareness and confidence; where the leader's inner power is identified and strengthened before it can be employed in leading others [6].

Posner and Kouzes [9] include setting the example and planning small wins as part of modeling the way. They explain leaders must first look inward to discover themselves, to find their own voice as a leader, and to settle upon a set of guiding principles [1,6]. "Leaders reveal their commitment to stakeholders by setting a positive example" [10]. Kouzes and Posner remind leaders they lead and speak for a team, not just themselves, and that "leadership is a dialogue, not a monologue" [1].

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Inspiring a shared vision

"Being forward-looking – envisioning exciting possibilities and enlisting others in a shared view of the future – is the attribute that most distinguishes leaders from nonleaders [*sic*]" [11]. The second of Kouzes and Posner's [1] leadership practices, to inspire a shared vision. Inspiring a shared vision includes envisioning the future and enlisting the support of others [9]. The results of thousands of LPI responses find that the most desired quality in a leader is honesty. "Credibility is the single most important asset a leader has, and it should be protected and nurtured at all costs. If you don't believe in the messenger, you won't believe the message" [12,7]. According to Kouzes and Posner [1], credibility is the cornerstone of leadership and their research shows "subordinates' assessments of their managers' (leaders') credibility are directly related to their perceptions about how this person behaves as a leader" [12].

The second most looked for quality is that the leader be forward looking [11]. Leaders must lead in the present, but keep an eye on tomorrow. Leadership is not just about the decisions made today, but how those decisions will affect the future of the organization. This is particularly important for executive leaders who are charged with strategic planning and setting the long-term vision and goals for an organization. "As counterintuitive as it might seem ... the best way to lead people into the future is to connect with them deeply in the present" [11].

Leaders often become so engrossed in looking to the future that they become a kind of soothsayer, telling others what the future will be. Leaders must remember they are inspiring a shared vision that reflects their constituents' aspirations [11]. While it is important for leaders to share their vision for the future, Kouzes and Posner [1] remind them their vision for the future is "insufficient for generating organized movement" on its own. They need to include others in setting the vision for the organization to truly get others excited about future possibilities. "Constituents are committed to achieving the objectives of an organization when the vision is created collectively" [10].

Challenging the process

The third practice of the LCM is challenging the process. According to Posner and Kouzes [9], challenging the process includes (a) searching for opportunities, (b) taking risks, and (c) experimenting. "Only challenge provides the opportunity for greatness" [7] so leaders do not wait for things to happen, they make things happen. Leaders are "the foot soldiers in the campaigns for change" [13]. Often times burgeoning leaders fail to act out of a fear of failure. Leaders not only challenge the status quo when the opportunity arises, they make those opportunities happen. They do so in the face of failure because as Kouzes [13] wrote, "failure is to be expected, even encouraged, if progress is to be made."

Leaders learn to lead through trial and error [7]. Challenge creates opportunities for positive change and exemplary leaders take advantage of such opportunities. Nevertheless, leaders are reminded they are not leading in a vacuum. "Most innovations do not come from leaders – they come from the people closest to the work" [1]. Innovation and evolution come from a healthy combination of insight and oversight. "Challenging the status quo allows the stakeholders to test their skills, learn new effective ... strategies or procedures, and turn ideas into action" [10].

Enabling others to act

The fourth of Kouzes and Posner's identified exemplary leadership practices is enabling others to act. Posner and Kouzes [9] describe it as fostering collaboration and strengthening others. The most frequently used of the leadership practices [3], it speaks to empowering subordinates to make decisions in the moment, decisions that are often critical life and death decisions in the law enforcement profession. Exemplary leaders "know they can't do it alone" so they "invest in creating trustworthy relationships," and

work to build strong teams and cultivate a family-like atmosphere [1] "Transformational leaders motivate their ... [subordinate] leaders to initiate reform efforts and develop new approaches to improve ... performance" [10]. Beyond that, however, is the follow through required of the delegation of authority. Leaders must support their subordinate leaders, both in the decisions those leaders make, when in the right, but also in driving decision-making back down to those subordinate leaders when it improperly bypasses them.

Encouraging the heart

The fifth and final leadership practice, identified by Kouzes and Posner, is encouraging the heart. "Leadership is more than an affair of the head, but fundamentally also one of the heart" [14]. Encouraging the heart is the second most often used leadership practice of the five according to Harvey [3] and it recognizes that accomplishing goals takes hard work and dedication. How does one know that someone is a leader? Bass [15] gave the simplest answer; because "this person has followers."

Encouraging the heart requires recognizing contributions and celebrating accomplishments [9]. Leaders encourage the heart by touching others with their courage, drive, sincerity, and by both publicly and privately recognizing the accomplishments and contributions of others [1]. "Leaders possess the genuine desire to make heroes and heroines of others" [7]. According to Quin et al. [10], "transformational leaders influence job performance ... by utilizing incentives, celebrations, and recognition," which often times cost the organization nothing and mean everything to the employees.

The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)

To measure the use of the LCM's five practices of leaders, Kouzes and Posner developed the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) survey instruments. The instruments include a self-assessment survey designed to be used, as the title implies, by leaders to conduct a self-assessment of their use of Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices. The other survey instrument is an observer-assessment. The observer assessment is designed to be completed by the leader's superiors and subordinates as part of a 360-degree assessment of the leader's leadership style and use of the five practices. Both versions of the instrument include 30 questions, with six questions dedicated to each of the five leadership practices. The forced-choice questions were designed to be answered using a ten-point Likert Scale where one is "Almost Never" and ten is "Almost Always" [4,16-18].

Development of the Five Practices and LPI

Initial development

Posner and Kouzes [9] began the development of their LCM and LPI by conducting a qualitative research study designed to "develop a conceptual framework for understanding leadership" in the 1980s. Their research was divided into two stages. In stage one, they aimed to identify what successful leaders do. They fielded a 12-page survey instrument comprised of 37 open-ended questions at various management-development seminars. The questions asked managers about a time where they felt they had been at their personal best as a leader and were successful beyond expectations; a time where "they felt they had lead, not managed," where "everything had come together" [9].

More than 650 of the full-length survey instruments and 450 copies of a shorter 2-page version of the survey were collected. In addition, Kouzes and Posner conducted 38 in-depth interviews with managers, at varying levels of leadership, in both the public and private sectors. It was during that qualitative research that Kouzes and Posner identified their Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership after finding the five practices were present in more than 80 percent of their survey and interview responses.

Stage two focused on the development of what was to become the LPI. From the information garnered through their qualitative research, Kouzes and Posner drafted the first version of the LPI.

According to Posner and Kouzes [9], “the [first] Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) was designed on the basis of lengthy and repeated feedback from respondents, and factor analyses of various sets of behaviorally-based statements.”

The first version was pilot tested through administration to 120 part-time MBA students who were employed full-time and nearly half of which had prior supervisory experience [9]. Upon completion, the instruments were reviewed with the students item-by-item and those determined to be “difficult, ambiguous, or inconsistent were either replaced or revised” [9,19]. Posner and Kouzes [9] also reviewed the LPI with “nine professionals in psychology, organizational behavior, and human resource management who were familiar with psychometric issues, the conceptual framework, and management development.”

A Reexamination of the LPI for Validity and Reliability

The underlying factor structure of the LPI was tested for internal reliability and construct validity through the administration of both forms of the LPI (i.e., the self and observer-assessment forms) to more than 2,100 respondents [9,19]. Again, items considered by respondents to be either difficult or ambiguous were replaced or revised and discussions with respondents led to even more revisions. The final product is the LPI in its current form. It should be noted that in its original form, the survey instrument utilized a 5-point Likert rating scale ranging from “(1) rarely or seldom does what the statement describes” to “(5) very frequently or almost always does what is described in the statement” [9,19,20]. In its final form, the LPI has been administered to over 3 million respondents [21].

The LPI adapted to Assess Non-Formal Leaders

Initially, the intended population for the LPI was managerial leaders or, in other words, those leaders who had been placed in a position of authority and who were, therefore, imbued with formal or legitimate authority by their organizations. However, as time passed and research into leadership continued, the academy began to understand that formal authority and leadership were not interdependent. Leadership can rise from both formal and informal authority because “constituents choose leaders” [7] based upon their perceived ability to lead. According to Posner and Kouzes [7] “the trappings of power and position may give someone the right to exercise authority, but we should never, ever mistake position and authority for leadership.” With this in mind, they investigated the adaptability of the LPI to non-formal leaders, what would come to be known as the LPI-Individual Contributor (LPI-IC).

The development of the LPI-IC followed much the same process as the original development of the LPI as described above. “Managers and scholars, both individually and within focus groups, provided behaviors, actions, and activities in which nonmanagers [sic] engaged that were equivalent with the leadership practices identified for those in managerial positions” [20]. Much akin to the final design of the LPI, the LPI-IC that emerged from the aforementioned quantitative and qualitative research process was a 30-question survey that includes both a self and observer-assessment form. The LPI-IC was pilot tested with a convenience sample population of more than 8,700 respondents ($n=8,724$). The LPI-IC self-assessment was administered to 1,651 respondents and the observer-assessment form was given to 7,073 respondents [20]. Statistical tests, similar to those discussed earlier, were employed with similar findings.

One notable difference between Kouzes and Posner’s statistical findings of the 1993 reexamination of the LPI and the LPI-IC were that informal leaders rated themselves significantly lower on the inspiring a shared vision and modeling the way practices than their observer raters did. This difference could stem from the effect an informal leader’s lack of legitimate authority has on their view of their own impact. While, on the other hand, the observers are not influenced by the leader’s lack of formal authority because “constituents determine whether someone is fit to lead” [7] regardless of whether or not they are invested with formal authority. This assumption is bolstered by

the fact, managerial respondents to the LPI, those who are imbued with formal authority, were highly rated on both practices in both the self and observer-assessment forms. Further, gender comparison findings mirrored those of the standard LPI. While Posner and Kouzes [20] believed “the internal consistency along with test-retest reliabilities for the five leadership practices, as measured by the LPI-IC, are adequate,” they suggested that efforts should be made to further refine the wording of the item in the LPI-IC self-assessment.

Use of the LPI in law enforcement

Harvey [3] examined the use of Kouzes and Posner’s LPI to gauge the leadership practices of municipal police chiefs in Los Angeles County, California. Harvey [3] surveyed 33 police chiefs using the self-assessment version of the LPI ($RR=72\%$). Interestingly, while Vito and Higgins’s [22] research found the enabling others to act leadership practice was found to be most significant amongst the middle-managers, they surveyed with the self-assessment LPI, Harvey [3] found the police chiefs he surveyed listed modeling the way as their most frequently used leadership practice. It should be noted that Kouzes and Posner’s database of finding lists enabling others to act as the most frequently cited practice [3]. Such differences highlight the need for conducting survey research that targets all levels within law enforcement agencies’ leadership strata. Harvey’s [3] research included a significant statistical review of his research findings, lending even more credibility to the use of Kouzes and Posner’s LPI to assess the law enforcement transformational leadership practices.

In his survey of 52 chiefs of police and 92 of their closest assistants, Stamper [23] found that while police chiefs said they valued and followed transformational leadership techniques, such as those measured by the LPI, their closest assistants said that in reality, the chiefs followed a bureaucratic model of leadership. This may pose a problem because according Archambeault and Weirman [24], the use of a bureaucratic leadership model in law enforcement discourages productivity and inhibits initiative and commitment from officers. “It also promotes the pursuit of individual self-interest and adversarial relationships between police managers and their employees” [22], which may be exacerbated by the emergence of generational conflicts between Millennial officers and their Generation X and Baby Boomer managers.

Further Examinations of the Validity and Reliability of the LPI

An “investigation of the reliability and validity of the LPI involved an additional 2,876 managers and their subordinates representing a wide array of disciplines and organizations from both the public and private sectors” [19]. In 1993, Kouzes and Posner reassessed the psychometric properties of the LPI by conducting statistical analyses of a sampling ($n=36,211$) LPI responses. They examined LPIs from 5,298 self-respondents and 30,913 observer respondents [19]. The statistical tests employed included pairwise t-tests, ANOVA, and a test-retest of a convenience sampling of MBA students ($n=157$). Also, “responses to the 30 leadership behavior items were subjected to a principle factoring method with iteration and varimax rotation” [19].

Posner and Kouzes [19] found the rank ordering of both the self and observer-assessment forms of the LPI were identical. They also found no statistically significant differences in the scores related to the modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, and encouraging the heart practices. However, they did note significantly higher scores for the challenging the process and enabling others to act practices in the self-assessment instruments when compared to the observer-assessment instruments. They also compared gender-specific response data from both forms of the instrument. They found that the responses were not significantly different between males and females for the challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, and enabling others to act practices, while the differences for the modeling the way and encouraging the heart practices were found to be statistically significant for both forms of the LPI [19]. “Female

subordinates reported their managers, whether male or female, to engage in more Challenging and Modeling behaviors than did male subordinates" [20].

Kouzes and Posner also compared LPI response results between functional areas (e.g., information technology, finance, customer service, etc.) and found few significant differences. They examined the differences between nationalities (i.e., the United States to United Kingdom and the United States to Pacific Rim nations) and found some statistically-significant differences that were determined to be due to ethnic and cultural differences; however, the rank order of the practices was found to be identical regardless of the ethnic background of the respondents [19]. They found the internal reliability of the LPI remained strong and discussed how other researchers had found a continuing strong relationship between the five practices measured by the LPI and "organizational effectiveness, work group vitality, and individual levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment" [19].

Carless [25] tested the validity of three different multidimensional leadership models, one of which was Kouzes and Posner's LPI. She obtained data from 1,440 subordinates in an Australian banking organization. A chi-square test of her data revealed the LPI was a "better fit" for testing transformational leadership practices, like those tested by the LPI, than the other two models she tested [25]. Carless [25] "concluded that the LPI assesses an over-arching transformational leadership factor." However, she does suggest the LPI is weak in the area of discriminant validity because subordinates may mistake the leader's charisma, above and beyond the leader's transactional leadership tendencies, for the actual traits of transformational leadership. Consequently, she cautions against the use of the LPI to study the "differences among transformational leader behaviours" [25].

Validity and Reliability Testing in a Law Enforcement Context

In their study, Vito and Higgins [22] examined the application of Kouzes and Posner's [12] LPI as a leadership assessment tool within the law enforcement profession. Furthermore, they examined the LPI's validity and reliability for use within a law enforcement context. They explained that not only are law enforcement leaders expected to be competent managers, but also, inspiring leaders who achieve organizational goals [22]. They briefly discussed the existing literature relating to leadership in law enforcement organizations. According to Baker [22], "Effective leadership is exercised by police managers in different ways, depending upon their rank in the department. Senior leadership should spend its time developing and sharing the vision for the organisation, charting the journey by establishing strategic objectives and practising collaboration and delegation of tasks. Police middle managers coordinate and plan, mentor and coach, build teams and empower and reward their subordinates. First-line supervisors provide leadership by example, supervising and training teams while evaluating performance."

Further, Vito and Higgins [22] cite Girodo, who fielded a survey of high-level law enforcement managers from North American, European, and Pacific countries, asking them to characterize their management style. Girodo [26] found the managers' espoused management styles fit into four distinct categories, transformational, bureaucratic, social contract, and Machiavellian. The survey results showed the Machiavellian style was most often cited by administrators, those typically found in executive-level law enforcement positions. Conversely, the transformational style was cited as the most desirable approach by managers who directly led officers, such as watch commanders and training managers [26].

Vito and Higgins [22] go on to explain the current literature describes a leadership vacuum, where Stamper said, "leadership ha[s] been 'structured out' of police administration" because police chiefs, all too often, devote "too much attention to management concerns ... [causing them] to lose credibility as leaders of their organisations." They go on to cite Mayo who asserted that this occurs because police

chiefs do not have faith in their subordinate leaders and question their loyalty. Vito and Higgins [22] discuss more recent studies that found law enforcement leaders need to have been there and done that in order to be considered legitimate by followers and that followers want leaders who employ the platinum rule, that being where leaders see and treat their subordinates as the subordinates wish to be seen and treated.

To study the validity and reliability of the LPI's applicability to law enforcement leaders, Vito and Higgins [22] surveyed 83 attendees, primarily middle-managers (the sample mean rank was Captain), of the Administrative Officers Course at the University of Louisville's Southern Police Institute using the self-assessment form of the LPI. They then surveyed 493 observers of the attendees, those whom the attendees work with at their home agencies, using the observer-assessment form of the LPI, thereby maintaining the observer to self-assessment 5:1 ratio suggested by Kouzes and Posner. Vito and Higgins [22] examined the internal consistency of the cross-sectional reliability of the LPI and found it to be reliable; however, they explained that while the observer-assessment was internally consistent, the self-assessment showed some internal consistency issues, which may have been related psychometric problems. They also performed a confirmatory factor analysis that showed "good model fit and large statistically significant factor loadings, suggesting that convergent and discriminant validity were present in [the] data" [22]. They went on to explain they felt the results of their validity testing outweighed the identified shortcomings regarding internal consistency and that the use of larger sample sizes may help to overcome those consistency issues. In summation, Vito and Higgins [22] believe Kouzes and Posner's LCM and LPI are "valid for understanding leadership capabilities among law enforcement officers."

Conclusion

Even though there is a limited amount of research relating to the use of Kouzes and Posner's LCM and LPI in the criminal justice field, it appears to be well suited for use in law enforcement leadership assessment. When one considers the plethora of research into the use of the LCM and LPI in other fields, not reviewed in-depth here, side-by-side with the law enforcement-centered research examined in this review, it seems the LPI can be used to measure the transformational leadership practices of law enforcement leaders.

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