

Leading Effective and Economically-Viable Congregations

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© Reginald Bruce, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), presented at the 2011 meeting of the International Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Aix en Provence, France. For details on the U.S. Congregational Life Survey: www.USCongregations.org

Abstract

This study assesses the impact of different styles of leadership for organizational vitality. This research looks at how pastors view their leadership style along a number of dimensions. Next, the analyses compare the pastors' perceptions with the way congregation members view their pastor's leadership. Finally, leadership style and the match of leader's style to the congregation is assessed in terms of members beliefs, perceptions, and behaviors. Does leadership matter when it comes to several measures of congregational effectiveness?

Introduction

- Leading has been defined as “getting others to do what you want them to do, because they want to do it.”
 - Often contrasted with what we call managing people: “getting others to do what you want them to do, because you influence them to do it.”
- Simply put: *Doing something because you want to do it, or doing something because you have to do it.*

- A wide range of factors has been found to affect organizational performance. Of these factors, the leadership style of those at the top of the organization has been identified as one of the most important.

Research Question

- Rather than distinguishing congregation leaders on the basis of their score on a single leadership dimension, is it helpful to differentiate leaders on the basis of their scores across a number of different dimensions?
- Can what we learn from this inform us in both future research and practice?

Sample

- U.S. Congregational Life Survey (Wave II)
- National random survey of congregations
- Leaders from these congregations and an extended sample

www.uscongregations.org

Data Collection

- Three types of surveys were completed in each participating congregation
 - An Attender Survey
 - A Congregational Profile
 - A Leader Survey

Clustering Leaders

- Cluster analysis (k-means) was conducted to differentiate congregation leaders into separate groupings.
- Variables used to differentiate leaders:
 - Organizational stewardship (Situational Leadership)
 - Wisdom (SL)
 - Altruistic calling (SL)
 - Emotional healing (SL)
 - Persuasive mapping (SL)
 - Transformational leadership (Multi Factor Leadership Questionnaire)
 - Transactional management (MFLQ)

Cluster Determination

- 2, 3, 4, and 5 cluster solutions were evaluated on the basis of meaningful theoretical interpretation and sub-group sizes
- While both 2 and 3 cluster solutions were meaningful, the present study presents findings from the 2-cluster solution as a start to this line of research

Leader Clusters

	Cluster 1 n=314	Cluster 2 n=366
Organizational Stewardship	1.94	1.46
Wisdom	2.34	1.84
Altruistic Calling	2.49	2.04
Persuasive Mapping	2.88	1.99
Emotional Healing	2.73	2.01
Transformational Leadership	2.47	2.02
Transactional Management	3.02	2.97

Points of Largest Differentiation

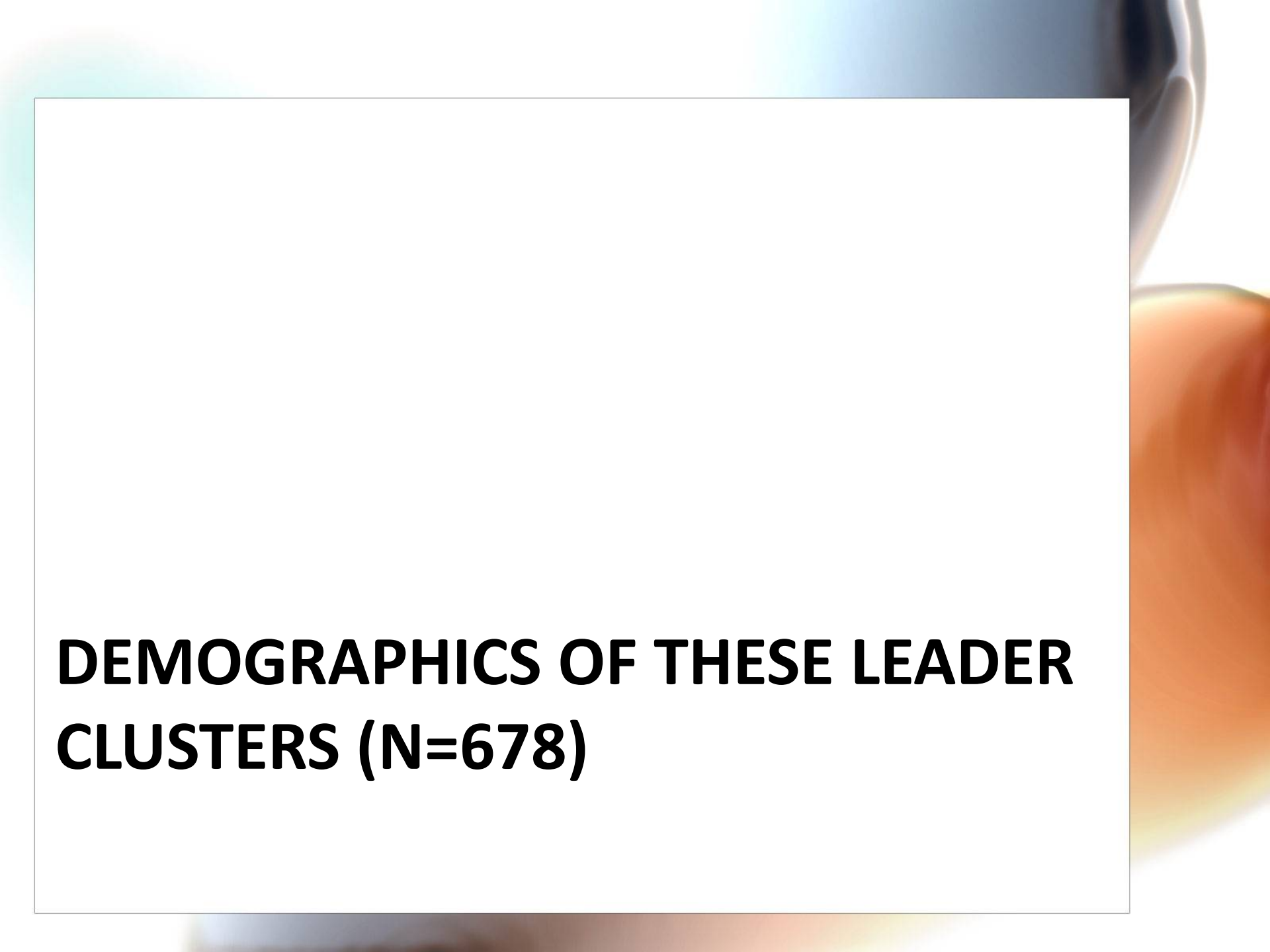
- **Persuasive Mapping** ($F=578.99$)
 - I am good at convincing others to do things here
 - I am gifted when it comes to persuading others
- **Emotional Healing** ($F=258.76$)
 - I am good at helping others with their emotional issues
 - I am talented at helping others to heal emotionally
- **Transformational Leadership** ($F=286.22$)
 - I help people here to think about old problems in new ways
 - I provide appealing ideas about what we can do here

Cluster Interpretation

- Cluster 2 ranks highest in all leadership categories
- Cluster 1, while highest in Transactional Management, does not score low on leadership items
- Cluster 1 and 2 are statistically significantly different on all leadership measures with one exception: Transactional Management

Cluster Naming

- For sake of discussion, let's refer to Cluster 2 as **Gifted leaders**, and to Cluster 1 as **Capable leaders**.
- Remember, the rankings that these clusters are based upon are all provided by the leaders themselves. Perhaps self-serving bias could be in operation.



**DEMOGRAPHICS OF THESE LEADER
CLUSTERS (N=678)**

Denominational Family

	Capable	Gifted
Catholic	36%	64%
Mainline	55%	45%
Conservative	44%	56%

p<.001

Bruce (2005b)

	Catholic (1)	Mainline Protestant (2)	Conservative Protestant (3)	F	Scheffe Post Hoc
Individual-level					
Transformational Leadership	3.12	3.26	3.38	10.85***	3>1
Transactional Leadership	3.00	3.03	3.16	4.07**	3>1
Laissez Faire Leadership	2.63	2.35	2.53	6.91***	1>2
Congregation- level					
Empowering Leadership (Climate)	36.42	47.88	50.75	234.11***	3>2>1

Gender

	Capable	Gifted
Male	44%	56%
Female	63%	37%

$p < .005$

Marital Status

	Capable	Gifted
Never Married	38% (75)	62% (124)
In First Marriage	50% (183)	50% (182)
Divorced/Separated	65%	35%
Widowed	67%	33%
Remarried after Death of Spouse	11% (32)	89% (33)
In a Committed Relationship	43%	57%

$p < .005$

Education Level

	Capable	Gifted
No Formal Schooling	67%	33%
Some High School	100%	0%
High School Diploma	51%	49%
Trade Certificate	75%	25%
Associates Degree	53%	47%
Bachelors Degree	50%	50%
Graduate Degree	39%	61%
	(185)	(188)
	(95)	(150)

$p=ns$

excluding all but Bachelors degree and higher: $p<.005$

Generation of Leader

	Capable	Gifted
Traditionalist (1900-1945)	36%	64%
Baby Boomer (1946-1964)	49%	51%
Generation Xer (1965-1982)	49%	51%

$p < .05$



**HOW DO WORSHIPERS EXPERIENCE
THEIR CONGREGATIONS? (N=246)**

Bottom Line Outcomes

	Capable n=124	Gifted n=122
5 Year Growth (ns)	-.04	-.01
Percent who give 10% or more (ns)	22%	20%
Percent of worshipers who everyday or most days spend time in private devotional activities (ns)	47%	46%

Strengths of the Congregation

	Capable	Gifted
Growing Spiritually	42%	42%
Meaningful Worship ($p<.01$)	58%	61%
Participating in the Congregation ($p<.01$)	55%	51%
Sense of Belonging	28%	28%
Caring for Children and Youth	54%	54%
Focusing on the Community	41%	41%
Sharing Faith	25%	24%
Welcoming New People	27%	28%
Empowering Leadership ($p<.01$)	41%	45%
Looking to the Future ($p<.01$)	35%	39%

Involvement in Group Activities

	Capable	Gifted
Sunday school, church school, or Sabbath school ($p<.05$)	32%	25%
Prayer, discussion, or Bible study groups	26%	23%
Fellowships, clubs, or other social groups ($p<.05$)	39%	35%

Experiences During Worship

	Capable	Gifted
My spiritual needs are being met ($p < .001$)	30%	34%
Always experience God's presence ($p < .05$)	40%	44%
Always experience inspiration ($p < .01$)	28%	32%
Always experience awe or mystery ($p < .05$)	5%	7%
Always experience joy ($p < .01$)	27%	31%
Always experience a sense of fulfilling my obligation ($p < .01$)	20%	25%

Worshippers' Assessment of Leader's Approach

	Capable	Gifted
In general, there is a good match between our congregation and our minister, pastor, priest, or rabbi ($p < .05$)	46%	52%
Style of leadership: Leadership that tends to take charge	16%	17%
Style of leadership: Leadership that inspires people to take action ($p < .001$)	45%	51%
Style of leadership: Leadership that acts on goals that people here have been involved in setting ($p < .001$)	20%	17%
Style of leadership: Leadership where the people start most things ($p < .05$)	5%	3%

Summary and Conclusions

- The clustering analyses resulted in two separate but equally compelling groups—rather than the “good leader” / “bad leader” often seen in the literature.
- While management was included in the clustering, it was not a differentiator of the two groups.
- The current study was limited in the measures used to cluster leaders. Future studies would be wise to include other individual-level style and temperament measures.

Summary and Conclusions

- The current study supported prior work demonstrating limited influence of the congregation leader on such factors as financial giving and private devotional time.
- However, worshipers in congregations led by Capable leaders are more likely to be involved in activities in the congregation, when compared to those in congregations led by Gifted leaders.

Summary and Conclusions

- The findings of differences across gender and denominational family were somewhat unexpected from prior studies. Are Catholic priests and men really more gifted leaders?
- One explanation for the contrary findings is the use of self-reported leadership style data, rather than being based on the perceptions of others. Future studies should investigate the overlap/difference between such rating approaches.

Summary and Conclusions

- Finally, can an “over the top” leader actually hinder the progress of a congregation—by inhibiting the involvement and leadership of others? The pattern results suggest that such might be likely.

Thank you!

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