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## **The Relationship Between Leadership Style and Group Cohesion in Outdoor Education**

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### **Abstract**

This article reports results of a study that investigated the relationship between leadership style and group cohesion in outdoor education. Two surveys were used with 359 participants, aged 13–15, who participated in a 4-day canoe trip on the Lower Colorado River. Results showed a statistically significant correlation between leadership and group cohesion, suggesting that (a) an understanding of a variety of leadership styles gives leaders the ability to shift their style according to each situation, (b) it is important for leaders to think about when to use different leadership styles, (c) awareness will make for more effective leaders, (d) leaders should avoid relying on a single style and trying to use it in all situations, and (e) an ability to use multiple leadership styles makes leaders more confident in their ability to facilitate group cohesion.

**Keywords:** outdoor education, group cohesion, leadership

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## Introduction

Outdoor education programs are often about building group cohesion. There are ample reasons to pursue that goal, as this article will address. Ropes courses and other discrete task-based programs have certain structures that are designed for team-building experiences. Others, like the 4-day canoe trip examined here, include more unstructured time and variables for group leaders to address. This study set out to better understand the relationship between leadership style and group cohesion. While past research has concluded that participants in outdoor education programs report a perception of greater group cohesion solely as a result of their participation (Glass & Benshoff, 2002), the literature does not address the relationship between leadership style and group cohesion (Shields, Gardner, Bredemeier, & Bostro, 1997). Priest and Gass (2018) argue that development of groups could be enhanced by the use of the correct leadership style. The question is, what is the correct leadership style? Effective group leadership is not entirely about good or bad approaches, but rather the ability to choose an appropriate style for a particular situation (Amanchukwu, Stanley, & Ololube, 2015). But how do leaders choose and refine their leadership styles? One leadership measurement tool is called path-goal theory (House, 1996). It explains how leaders can help others along the path to their goals by selecting specific leadership behaviors. Path-goal theory argues that in order to be effective, leaders must “engage in behaviors that compliment subordinates’ environments and abilities” in an effort to help them through the path toward their goals (House, 1996, p. 323). The leadership styles of path-goal theory are directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented. This study examines the relationship between these four leadership styles and group cohesion among adolescents participating in a 4-day outdoor education program.

## Review of Literature

Groups are an essential part of all outdoor programs and cohesion is a major factor in the development of groups. Outdoor education that involves team building games and low-impact group challenges aim to assist group development and grow feelings of belonging, trust and acceptance. What follows is a brief overview of the literature about why group cohesion matters, leadership, and path-goal theory.

### Justification for a Goal: Human Interconnectedness

One of the goals of education is to address the problems in society of human isolation, alienation, and feelings of unimportance and personal impotence (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Maslow (1954) paid attention to the hierarchy of human needs, believing that a healthy personality was one that did not feel overwhelmed by society, but instead held onto a strong sense of inner security and personal potential. Many people feel like outsiders—alone and lost in a large society (Claypool & Bernstein, 2017). In this context, programs that aim to help build group cohesion and help adolescents feel connected to their peers are justified.

In his book, *I and Thou*, Buber (1958) focused attention on addressing the needs of the whole person and interaction between people. One of the only existential philosophers to write specifically about education, Buber argues that interaction between students will result in learning from each other, learning to respect each other's views, and re-evaluating their own beliefs (Morgan & Guilherme, 2014). Social constructivist theory adds layers to that argument by examining the knowledge and understanding of the world that are developed jointly by individuals. This theory assumes that understanding, significance, and meaning are developed in coordination with other human beings (Amineh & Davatgari, 2015). Social constructivism views learning as an active process where learners discover principles, concepts and facts on their own, hence they encourage and promote the guesswork and intuitive thinking in learners (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). Other constructivist thought emphasizes that individuals make meaning through interactions with each other and with their environment (Amineh & Davatgari, 2015). As a social species, humans rely on safe, secure social surroundings to survive and thrive. Perceptions of social isolation, or loneliness, heighten feelings of vulnerability while also raising the desire to reconnect (Hawkey & Cacioppo, 2010).

The importance of human interconnectedness, therefore, leads to thinking about how the development of group cohesion may help accomplish that goal.

### Group Cohesion

Salas, Vessey, and Estrada (2015) conceptualized cohesiveness as composed of three components: interpersonal, normative, and functional. Interpersonal cohesiveness reflects affective relations to other group members. Normative cohesion means group pride, loyalty, and bonds. And functional cohesiveness is defined as coordinated behavior and commitment to the task or

goals of the team. According to Jones (1973), there are four stages of group development: dependency, conflict, cohesion, and interdependence. The key stage is conflict. The awareness of a conflict stage through which groups have to work reduces apprehension and tension. Having gone through the conflict stage, cohesion and interdependence will be more attainable (Phipps & Claxton, 1997). Trust level theory argues that trust is not a part of the American, global, or political way of life, rather, that trust begets trust; it overcomes fear, and provides a flowing, growing, creative, sharing, and supportive format for any relationship or any group (Gibb, 1978). If we understand that we must do better at this, we must find our inner potential for trust, tolerance, sharing, caring, supporting, enriching, and loving (Smith, 1992). Part of the process of group development is the reflection of the individual against the group. Adolescents, in general, spend far more time with friends and classmates than with their families (Csikszentmihali & Larson, 1984). In adolescence, a “sense of belonging is an easily understood reason for seeking and succeeding in peer relations” (Sprinthall & Collins, 1994, p. 285). People need interaction with peers for their normal and psychological development (Sullivan, 1953).

In that light, outdoor education programs are developed to allow members of the group to become aware of the perspective of others by working as a team on a common goal (Glass & Benschhoff, 2002). Outdoor education “must provide the context within which one can re-experience one’s dependency and come to terms with it as a good thing, rather than a thing to be denied and defended against” (Fox & McAvoy, 1995, p. 71). In a study about spirituality and outdoor programs, Stringer and McAvoy (1992) found that participants in a weeklong canoe trip listed feeling close to fellow participants and the overall camaraderie of the group as high points. Outdoor challenge programs are effective in building group cohesion regardless of the sequence of activities (Bisson, 1997). It can thus be concluded that outdoor education programs have significant power to affect groups and group cohesion.

Finally, a study that looked to understand groups in outdoor education through social network analysis found that relationship patterns among different course compositions with students receiving and not receiving scholarships had some variations (Jostad, Sibthorp, & Paisley, 2013). This is an interesting variable that this study does not take into account.

Given the literature on human interconnectedness and group cohesion, the importance of the leader’s impact should be examined. In outdoor education, leadership style can be a factor in achieving the goal of group cohesion.

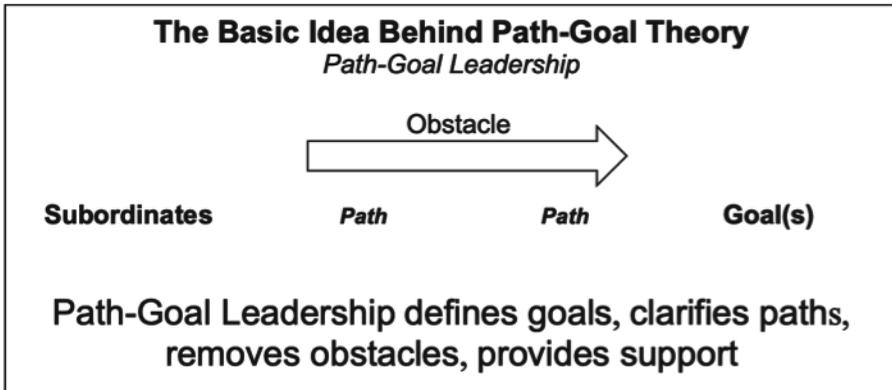
## Leadership

Leaders have to understand group behaviors when thinking about leadership style. Groups often make better decisions than individuals when there are varying opinions in a group (Clement, 1997). In *Groupthink*, Janis (1982) claimed that in-group pressures cause a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment, and thus, educators who facilitate groups are actively engaged in a complex psychological process. Sunstein and Hastie (2015) sought to go beyond the idea of groupthink in an attempt to more precisely understand the problems of group failure and identify potential solutions. They argue that groups ultimately do well when they have more anxious leaders because the group is better able to obtain and aggregate information. They also identify social pressures as a factor that tends to silence group members who are concerned about social penalties. Likewise, a group member who is perceived as not giving as much effort as others can lead groups to fracture (Singh, Wang, & Zhu, 2018). The natural development of the group can be enhanced by the use of any number of particular leadership styles (Phipps & Claxton, 1997). Some, for example, describe a feminist ethic in outdoor education as one based on a relationship of caring (Mitten & Woodruff, 2010). “Caring involves stepping out of one’s own personal frame of reference into the other’s, and it is characterized by a move away from self” (Mitten, 1996, p. 166). No matter the particular style of a given leader, adaptability is important. Leaders can do this by embracing change, being aware of context when using situational leadership, incorporating group member feedback, and appealing to different types of learners (Roy, 2015).

For this study, one particular leadership theory was used as a tool to examine the impact of different styles on group cohesion: the path-goal theory of leadership.

## Path-Goal Theory of Leadership

The path-goal theory of leadership claims that a leader must attend to the needs of subordinates by helping them define their goals and choose the paths they wish to take in getting there (Northouse, 2018). The origins of path-goal theory are found in the work of the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan (Evans, 1996). According to its author, Robert House (1971), leaders are supposed to help subordinates work toward their goals by making the path they take to get there easier “by clarifying it, reducing roadblocks and pitfalls, and increasing the opportunities for personal satisfaction en route” (p. 324). It is a tool designed for leaders to



**Figure 1.** Path-goal theory. Reprinted from *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (p. 90), by P. Northouse, 2018, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Copyright 2018 by Sage Publications. Reprinted with permission.

decide which style they should use in particular situations (Jermier, 1996). Until its advent, the literature on leadership was dominated by concern with task and person orientation. Path-Goal changed that focus (House, 1996).

Path-goal theory distinguishes four distinct styles of leadership: directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented (Jermier, 1996). Path-goal theory is firmly established as a robust, comprehensive leadership model (Phillips & Phillips, 2016). Although the goals of this study do not perfectly match up with the stated goals of path-goal, it is precisely this incongruence between existing literature and the goal of this study that makes this study necessary. As Northouse (2018) stated, “it is the leader’s responsibility to help subordinates to reach their goals by directing, guiding, and coaching them along the way” (p. 108).

Directive leadership is aimed at clarifying role expectations, assigning tasks, and laying out procedures to be followed. A directive leader “gives subordinates instructions about their task, including what is expected of them, how it is to be done, p. 98). Path-goal theory predicts that directive leadership is effective with ambiguous tasks (Northouse, 2018).

Supportive leadership is characterized as attending to group members’ needs and preferences by providing a supportive environment considerate of subordinate needs (Hirt, 2016). Supportive leadership is “being friendly and approachable as a leader and includes attending to the well-being and human needs of subordinates. Leaders using supportive behaviors go out of their way to make work pleasant for subordinates” (Northouse, 2018,

p. 92). The supportive style of leadership is similar to Mitten's personal affirming (Mitten, 1995) and feminist (Mitten, 1996) styles of leadership.

Participative leaders encourage the influence of all members on decision-making and are more effective at promoting member discussion of all available information than more autocratic leaders (Hirt, 2016). Increased opportunities to participate in decision-making increases member involvement and satisfaction, which leads to increased commitment and effectiveness (Knoke & Wood, 1981). "Participative leadership refers to leaders who invite subordinates to share in the decision-making" (Northouse, 2018, p. 92). Path-goal theory predicts that a participative leadership style is effective when tasks are unclear and subordinates are autonomous.

Achievement-oriented leaders show a high degree of confidence that subordinates are capable of accomplishing challenging goals. The achievement-oriented leader establishes challenging goals, expresses confidence, and expects high performance levels (House & Mitchell, 1974). Achievement-oriented leadership is characterized by a leader who challenges subordinates to perform work at the highest level possible (Northouse, 2018). The leader sets difficult but achievable goals, expects followers to perform at their highest level, and rewards them when goals are met (Hirt, 2016). Path-goal theory predicts that an achievement-oriented style is effective for challenging tasks (Northouse, 2018).

Using path-goal theory, this study focused on one main question: What is the relationship between different leadership styles and group cohesion among adolescents in outdoor challenge education? The assumption was that certain styles of leadership would relate to the resulting degree of group cohesion. The more specific research questions include:

1. How is the leadership style of a group leader related to group cohesion?
2. What do program participants feel were the most effective things their leader did for building group cohesion?
3. How does the leadership style of outdoor educators help or hurt group cohesion?
4. Do any of the leadership styles have a negative impact on group cohesion?

## Methods

Data were collected from 359 participants in 31 different groups. Each group had between nine and 14 participants on a 4-day canoe trip on

the Lower Colorado River. The participants were all in ninth grade, ages 13–15. Naturalists at Large, an outdoor education company in California that provides programs for over 8,000 students per year, ran the trip.

There were two distinct units of analysis collected, the self-perceived group cohesion of program participants, and program participants' perceptions of their leaders. The data were collected when the program participants completed their 4 days on the river. The first was measured through the administration of the Group Cohesion Evaluation Questionnaire. It is an adapted form of a questionnaire that was developed to look at the impact of low ropes challenge courses on group cohesion among children ages 11–14 (Glass & Benshoff, 2002). The questionnaire asked participants to rank their feelings on statements such as, "We feel good about our group," "We enjoy helping each other," and "I feel like I fit in my group." At the end of the program, each participant filled out the survey and individual scores were used to create group averages. The second unit of analysis was the program participants' perceptions of their leaders. This was measured by administering the Post-Program Leadership Questionnaire for Program Participants, a slightly modified version of the path-goal theory measurement tool. Each participant filled out this questionnaire, giving scores on four leadership styles for their leader. Individual scores were used to find group averages. The relationship between leadership and group cohesion was then measured by running correlation analyses between the group cohesion scores and the leadership scores for each group. The correlation analysis used a two-tailed significance test in order to determine in each case if the correlation was significant at the 0.05 level.

## Results

Using the Group Cohesion Evaluation Questionnaire, individual scores for group cohesion were averaged, arriving at a group cohesion score for each group. Group scores had a possible range of 1–4. A score of 1 translated into feeling "not" cohesive, a score of 2 translated into feeling "a little" cohesive, a score of 3 translated into feeling "a lot" cohesive, and a score of 4 translated into feeling "exactly" cohesive. The scores of the 31 groups had a range of 1.49 at the lowest and 3.32 at the highest. Of the 31 groups, 5 had cohesion scores of 3 or above (16%), 24 groups had scores between 2 and 3 (77%), and 2 had scores below 2 (6%). For the purposes of this study, it was assumed that scores halfway between "a little" and "a lot" of cohesion (a score of 2.5 or higher) is a good cohesion. 21 groups had scores between 2.5 and 3 (68%).

**Table 1.** Group Cohesion Scores

<i>Group Cohesion Score</i>	<i>Number of Groups (%)</i>
Above 3 (a lot cohesive)	5 (16%)
Between 2.5–3 (good cohesion)	21 (68%)
Between 2–2.5 (a little cohesive)	3 (10%)
Below 2 (not cohesive)	2 (6%)

*Note.* Total number of groups was 31.

Similarly, results from the Post-Program Leadership Questionnaire for Program Participants were used to determine the relationship between leadership style and group cohesion. Each individual set of leadership scores was averaged in each group, resulting in group leadership scores for each of the four leadership styles. The data were examined to determine correlation coefficients between group cohesion scores and each of the leadership style scores. The correlation significance standard was 0.05 (2-tailed test). In other words, a correlation coefficient was found for each of the leadership styles and in each case, there was a report of the statistical significance based on the possibility of randomness. A correlation coefficient was conclusively significant if the chance of random occurrence was less than 5 out of 100 (0.05). In this way, it was possible to know if the relationship between the group cohesion scores and each leadership style score was significantly different from zero.

### Directive Style Results

The directive style was computed by adding the scores on questions 1, 5, 9, 14, and 18 (reversed). Participant responses on the following statements were used to measure the qualities of directive leadership:

1. The leader let our group know what is expected of us.
5. The leader informed the group about what needed to be done and how it needed to be done.
9. The leader asked us to follow standard rules and regulations.
14. The leader explained the level of performance that was expected of group members.
18. The leader gave vague explanations of what was expected of us during the program.

Score averages in the 31 groups on the directive style ranged from 22.5 to 32. The average group score for directive leadership was 28.03. According to the interpretation rubric, there were no directive leadership scores that were considered “low.” There were 16 scores that are considered “common.” Finally, there were 15 scores that are considered “high.”

### Supportive Style Results

The supportive style is computed by adding the scores on questions 2, 8, 11 (reversed), 15, and 20. Participant responses on the following statements were used to measure the qualities of supportive leadership:

2. The leader maintained a friendly working relationship with us.
8. The leader did little things to make it pleasant to be a member of the group.
11. The leader said things that hurt group members’ personal feelings.
15. The leader helped us overcome problems that stopped us from carrying out our tasks.
20. The leader behaved in a manner that was thoughtful of members’ personal needs.

Group scores in the 31 groups on the supportive style ranged from 22.55 to 32.92. The average group score for the supportive leadership style was 27.89. According to the interpretation rubric, there were two supportive leadership scores that are considered “low.” There were 29 scores that are considered “common.” Finally, there were no supportive scores considered “high.”

### Participative Style Results

The participative style is computed by adding the scores on questions 3, 4, 7 (reversed), 12, and 17. Participant responses on the following statements were used to measure the qualities of participative leadership:

3. The leader consulted with the group when facing a problem.
4. The leader listened responsively to our ideas and suggestions.
7. The leader acted without consulting the group.
12. The leader asked for suggestions from members concerning how to carry out assignments.
17. The leader asked members for suggestions on what assignments should be made.

Group scores in the 31 groups on the participative style were as low as 18.67 and as high as 32.5. The average group score for the participative leadership style was 25.64. According to the interpretation rubric, there were no participative leadership scores that are considered “low.” There were 17 scores that are considered “common.” Finally, there were 14 participative scores that are considered “high.”

### Achievement-Oriented Style Results

The achievement-oriented style is computed by adding the scores on questions 6, 10, 13, 16 (reversed), and 19. Participant responses on the following statements were used to measure the qualities of achievement-oriented leadership:

6. The leader let us know that he/she expected us to perform at our highest level.
10. The leader set goals for our performance that were quite challenging.
13. The leader encouraged continual improvement in our performance.
16. The leader showed that he/she had doubts about our ability to meet most objectives.
19. The leader consistently set challenging goals for group members to attain.

Scores in the 31 groups on achievement-oriented style ranged from 21.58 to 29.67. The average group score for the achievement-oriented leadership style was 25.52. According to the interpretation rubric, there were no achievement-oriented leadership scores that are considered “low.” There were 7 scores that are considered “common.” Finally, there were 24 achievement-oriented scores that are considered “high.” Table 2 provides a summary of the leadership style data.

### Correlation Between Group Cohesion and Leadership Style

The group cohesion data and the leadership style data were then correlated to determine the relationship between the two by measuring correlation coefficients between group cohesion scores and each of the leadership style scores. The correlation significance standard was 0.05 (2-tailed test). The results recognize that there are some outliers, however, when removed, the significance of the correlations did not change.

The correlation coefficient between group cohesion scores and directive

**Table 2.** Leadership Style Scores

<i>Leadership Style</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Common</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
Directive	0	16	15	28.03	2.27
Supportive	2	29	0	27.89	2.85
Participative	0	17	14	25.83	3.95
Achievement-Oriented	0	7	24	25.52	2.05

leadership style scores was 0.39 with a 0.03 significance level, making the relationship statistically significant. A further illustration of the correlation between group cohesion and directive leadership can be seen in Figure 2. This XY scatter plot graph shows the degree of correlation. The closer the plots are to following the trend line, the better the correlation is. In most cases, XY scatter plot graphs with higher correlations would have the plots clustered around the trend line in a sort of oval shape. The more concentrated the cluster, the higher the correlation. The plots in this case form an imperfect oval around the trend line. While not perfect, the plots are mostly in line.

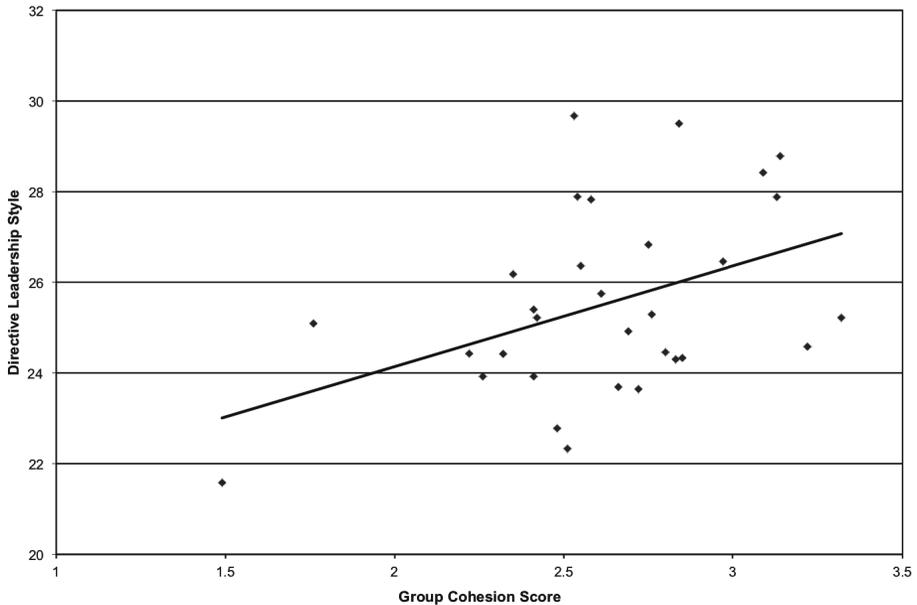
The correlation coefficient between group cohesion scores and supportive leadership style scores was 0.35 with a 0.06 significance level. Because the standard for significant relationships is at the 0.05 level, the correlation between group cohesion and supportive leadership was not significant. As seen in Figure 3, the plots representing the correlation between group cohesion and supportive leadership are not extremely concentrated and are not significantly correlated.

The correlation coefficient between the participative leadership style and group cohesion was 0.38 with a 0.03 significance level. Thus, there is a statistically significant relationship between the two. As seen in Figure 4, the plots form an imperfect oval around the trend line. While the correla-

**Table 3.** Correlations between Group Cohesion and Leadership Styles

		<i>Directive</i>	<i>Supportive</i>	<i>Participative</i>	<i>Achievement-Oriented</i>
Group					
Cohesion	Correlation	.39*	.35	.38*	.43*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.03	.06	.03	.02
	<i>N</i>	31	31	31	31

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).



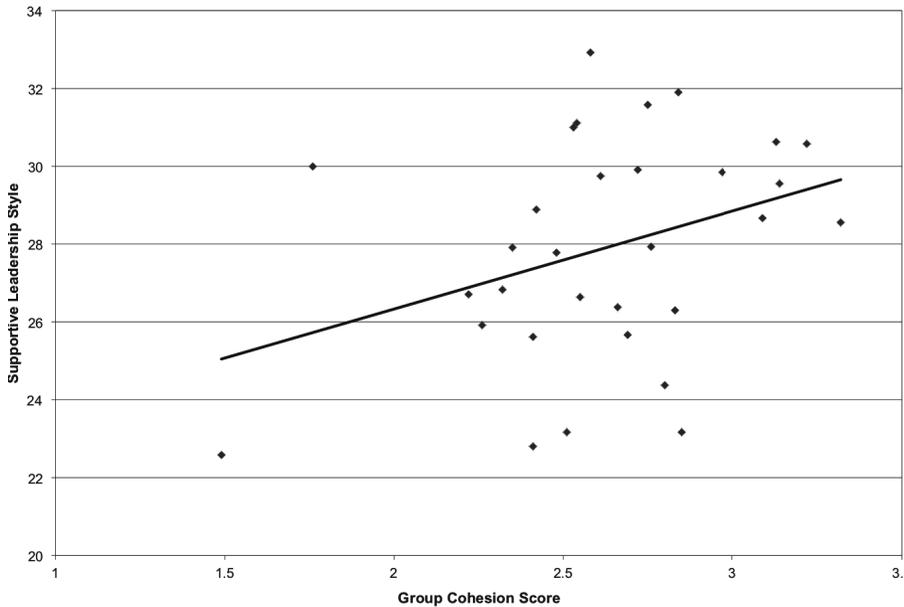
**Figure 2.** Group cohesion score and directive leadership style. While the graph is expressed as having a plot range of 1–3.5 on the X-axis, the actual range is 0–3.5. Similarly, the Y-axis is expressed as having a range of 20–32, when the actual range is 0–32. The same is true for Figures 3–5.

tion is not perfect, it can be seen that the plots are somewhat in line with the trend line. The correlation between group cohesion and participative leadership was statistically significant.

The highest correlation coefficient, 0.43 with a significance level of 0.02, was between group cohesion and the achievement-oriented leadership style. As seen in Figure 5, the plots form an imperfect oval around the trend line, but are in fact clustered around it. As this correlation was the strongest of the significant correlations, the plots form more of an oval than the other graphs.

## Discussion

Results of this study suggest that there is a correlation between group cohesion and the directive, participative and achievement-oriented leadership styles. The data did not support a significant correlation between group cohesion and the supportive leadership style. What is it about each style

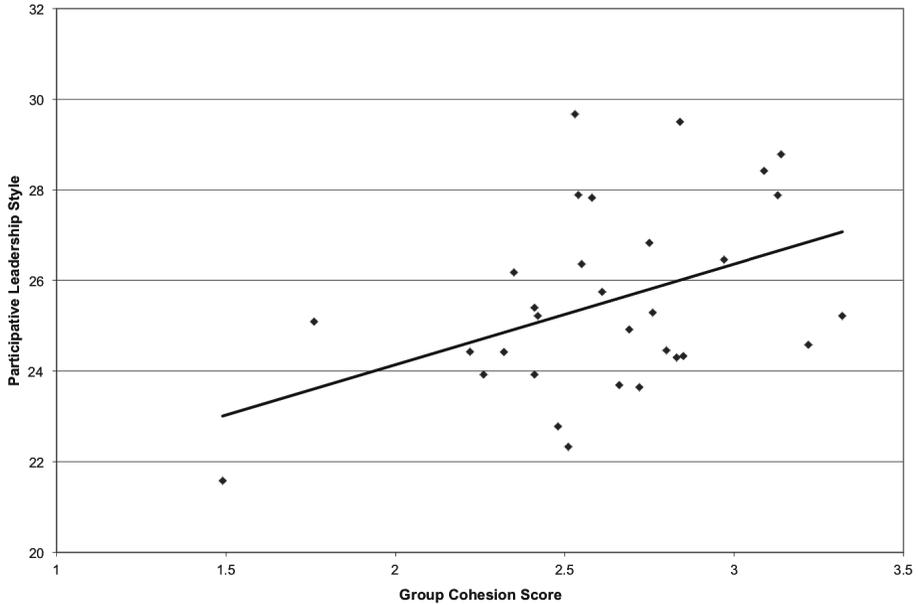


**Figure 3.** Group cohesion score and supportive leadership.

that correlates or does not correlate with group cohesion? The following will discuss and try to interpret the findings.

There are several possibilities to explain why the results showed that directive leadership correlated to group cohesion. First, the program was an intense 4-day camping trip. The participants in the study were adolescents not necessarily comfortable camping. The participants may have wanted a leader who was in charge. They could have felt reassured by a leader who informed the group about what needed to be done and how it needed to be done. They likely were reassured by having a leader who asked them to follow standard rules and regulations.

In thinking about groups of adolescents, it seemed logical to predict that supportive leaders would correlate with cohesive groups. That assumption was incorrect in this study. The data show that groups with friendly leaders, who made it pleasant to be part of the group, who never hurt group members' personal feelings, who helped group members overcome problems that stopped them from carrying out tasks, and who were thoughtful of group members' personal needs did not produce a correlation to cohesive groups. In informal observation, complaints were heard centered around one or more group members having to adjust to the needs of other group members (for example, "Can't we go faster?" or "Why do

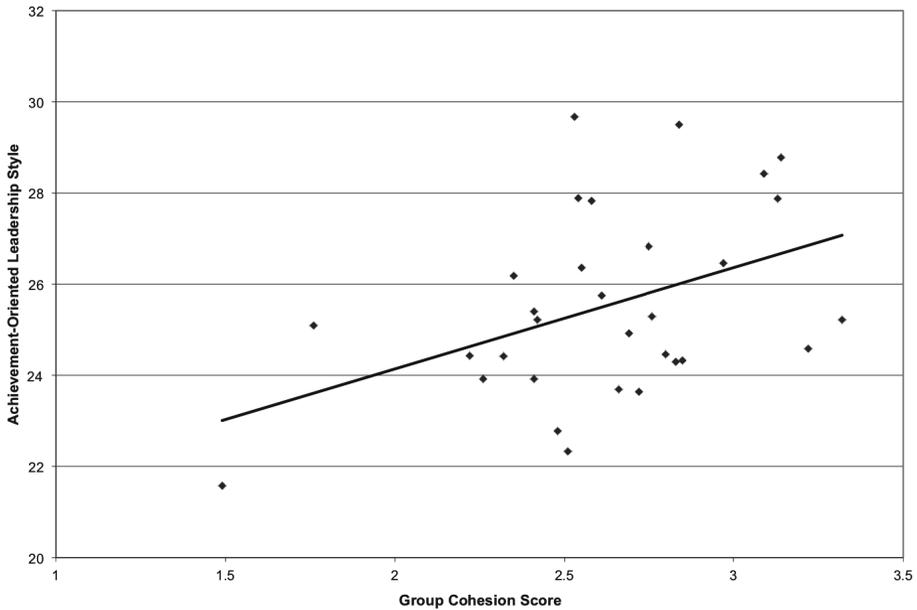


**Figure 4.** Group cohesion score and participative leadership style.

I need to help her out if I’m already finished?”). Perhaps this frustration was too much for participants in the group to feel connected to their peers. It’s also worth considering the impact on the group when individual needs take precedence over group success. Whatever the reason, the supportive leadership style was the only style in the study that did not produce a statistically significant correlation to group cohesion.

Participative leadership, on the other hand, did correlate to group cohesion. Participants reported an appreciation for leaders who consulted with the group when facing a problem. It makes sense that members would feel good as a group if the leader consulted the group on decisions. When the leader asked for suggestions from group members concerning how to carry out assignments and for suggestions on what assignments should be made, there was a correlation to stronger cohesiveness. It may be possible to apply these leadership style traits to other groups of adolescents or even adults in order to help facilitate more cohesive groups.

The results of the relationship between achievement-oriented leadership and group cohesion were interesting, but in retrospect, not surprising. The achievement-oriented style had the strongest correlation with group cohesion of any of the styles. The characteristics of an achievement-oriented leader include letting the group know that he/she expects them to perform



**Figure 5.** Group cohesion score and achievement-oriented leadership style.

at their highest level, setting challenging goals for their performance, encouraging continual improvement, and never showing doubts about the group’s ability to meet objectives. Every participant on the trip had to start at the same place and end at the same place—down the river. The goals of the trip were set high and couldn’t be changed. It seems logical then, that achievement-oriented style had a stronger correlation with group cohesion.

As stated earlier, path-goal theory is a tool designed for leaders to decide which style they should use in particular situations (Jermier, 1996). Leaders help subordinates work toward their goals by making the path they take easier “by clarifying it, reducing roadblocks and pitfalls, and increasing the opportunities for personal satisfaction en route” (House, 1971, p. 324). Outdoor educators are often tasked with leading groups on challenges without clear paths and with roadblocks and pitfalls, while at the same time attempting to provide opportunities for growth and positivity. In this context, understanding the relationship between the path-goal leadership styles and group cohesion can be incredibly helpful. Outdoor educators have decisions to make about how to lead. Because of the unique nature of outdoor education, they face changing conditions and unplanned events. Using path-goal theory, leaders can think about

the different elements in the leadership styles. They can choose times to be directive by clarifying role expectations, assigning tasks, and laying out procedures to be followed. They can be supportive by understanding the impact of attending to group members' needs and preferences. Leaders can be participative to encourage the influence of all members on decision-making. And they can use the achievement-oriented style by establishing challenging goals, expressing confidence, and expecting high performance. While this study did not examine causation, the correlations discovered here may help give outdoor educators a context and vocabulary for considering how to lead in different situations.

### Limitations

This study has several limitations. One limitation is the influence of a leadership trait that was not measured: charisma. Another limitation is the failure to consider socio-economic status, ethnicity, or camping experience. A third limitation is what Naturalists at Large called the "bad last lunch" phenomenon. For example, what if the participants in a group had a bad experience unrelated to the leader at some point on the last day? Would something like that cloud their experience and impact questionnaire results? Next, it would be very difficult to measure emotional baggage participants bring with them. There could be domestic or social trouble, or any number of other issues. One or two group members can sabotage an entire group and it can be for reasons totally unrelated to the leader. Finally, the study did not address other areas of research, such as social network analysis. Social network analysis argues that it is critical to understand relationships and group structure among adolescents, such as to understand peer relations among groups with varying compositions of race and ethnicity (Bellmore, Nishina, Witkow, Graham, & Juvonen, 2007).

### Implications for Future Research

The results of this study open up a number of possible future research topics. This study only scratched the surface of the narrow question of how different leadership styles correlate to group cohesion among adolescents in outdoor education, and opens up even further need to investigate questions about how leadership impacts group cohesion in other educational settings. There are four specific areas that deserve future consideration: (a) a similar study in a different outdoor setting, (b) a similar study with different groups

of adolescents, (c) a qualitative study that examines more specific elements of leadership style and their relationship with group cohesion, (d) an investigation into that elusive leadership phenomenon, charisma, (e) inclusion of social network analysis factors, and (f) impact of considering other factors like, socio-economic status, camping experience, ethnicity and others.

### **Conclusion: Implications for Current Practice**

The results of this study are potentially valuable to current and future educators. Leadership is not an easy topic to study, as there are so many variables that are difficult or impossible to measure. However, it is also one of the most important assets an educator can possess. In my 20 plus years in education, I have heard some say that leadership cannot be taught, or teaching cannot be taught. I have seen people who have natural leadership skills. But even the best can always improve. Educational practice can be improved if educational leaders understand how to use a variety of different leadership styles in different situations with different types of adolescents.

The broader conclusion that comes from the results of this study is that leaders need to have a leadership “bag of tricks” and not rely on a leadership style that is comfortable or singular. The most effective group leaders will be able to use multiple styles in appropriate situations based on the following principles:

1. An understanding of a variety of leadership styles allows leaders to shift styles according to each situation.
2. It is important for leaders to think about when to use different leadership styles; awareness makes for more effective leaders.
3. Leaders should avoid relying on a single style that is comfortable; leaders need to know when to dump one style and try another.
4. An ability to use multiple leadership styles will make leaders more effective in facilitating group cohesion.

The conclusions of this study are a first attempt at researching the relationship between leadership styles and group cohesion in outdoor education. The study may serve to provoke thought among educators and leaders in outdoor education and related fields.

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