Increasing Student Leadership Effectiveness through the Development of Hope and Other Qualities of Psychological Capital

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Statement of the Problem

- Aim of student leadership development is leadership effectiveness

- Student leadership development models emphasizing relational leadership suggest that awareness of one’s strengths contributes to leadership effectiveness

- While this conclusion seems intuitive, this claim has not be substantiated in the research literature on student leadership
Theoretical Frameworks

**Strengths Philosophy**
- Rooted in positive psychology
- Focus on developing areas of talent rather than improving weaknesses (Clifton, Anderson, & Schreiner, 2006)
- Awareness and development of one’s strengths, rather than a specific constellation of strengths, leads to effectiveness

**Psychological Capital**
- Rooted in positive psychology
- Consists of the constructs of Efficacy, Hope, Optimism, and Resiliency (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007)
- Focus on development of these internal positive qualities to enhance effectiveness
Psychological Capital

- Psychological Capital (PsyCap) is an individual’s positive psychological state of development and is characterized by:
  - Having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks;
  - Making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future;
  - Persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and
  - When beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resiliency) to attain success.

- (Luthans, et al., 2007, p. 3)
Theoretical Frameworks

- Leadership Challenge Model (Kouzes & Posner, 2002)
  - Rooted in transformational leadership theory
  - Identifies a set of skills and abilities practiced by effective leaders that can be observed, measured, and learned
    - Model the Way
    - Inspire a Shared Vision
    - Challenge the process
    - Enable Others to Act
    - Encourage the Heart
Research Question:
To what extent do strengths ownership and psychological capital predict effective leadership in college students?

Hypotheses:
   a) Each of the components of psychological capital will significantly predict students’ scores on the SLPI

   b) Student leaders’ strengths ownership scores will explain a significant amount of additional variance in scores on the SLPI, over and above that accounted for by the psychological capital variables.
Research Design

- Hierarchical Multiple Regression

  - Tested the degree to which psychological capital and strengths ownership predicted effective student leadership
### Participants

- 153 student leaders in student development programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residence Life</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Government</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Orientation</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>Student Activities</td>
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<td>Student Organizations</td>
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<td>Multicultural Programs</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Ministries</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Numbers reflect students in multiple leadership roles)
Measures

- Demographic Information
- PsyCap Questionnaire
- Strengths Ownership Scale
- Student Leadership Practices Inventory
  - *Self* and *Observer* forms
  - Organizational Advisor and Peer ratings averaged separately
Results

- No significant results for the Advisor and Peer Models
  - Lack of statistical variance in responses

- Student Leader Model results
  - 40.4% of variance on SLPI scores accounted for by Student Leader Model
# Student Leader Model by Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SLPI Scale</th>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Variance</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Hope, Gender</td>
<td>40.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>Hope, Gender</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inspire</td>
<td>Hope, Efficacy</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage</td>
<td>Efficacy, Optimism</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enable</td>
<td>Hope, Optimism, Gender</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Other Results

- Strengths Ownership was not a significant predictor of effective student leadership
  - Lack of statistical variance in responses
Implications for Practice

- Student Leadership Selection
- Student Leadership Training
  - Develop effective means of impacting hope and goal-oriented thinking in student leaders
  - Develop effective means of increasing student leader self-efficacy and optimism development in leadership training
Hope and Effective Leadership

- What accounts for differences between most effective student leaders and the least effective student leaders?
  - Hope accounted for 40.4% of the differences in students’ ratings of their effectiveness

- Students with high Hope scores rated themselves high on leadership effectiveness
Hope

A combination of *willpower* (agency thinking or energy) and *waypower* (pathways thinking or ability to generate alternative plans) to *achieve a goal*.  

Avolio & Luthans, 2006; Snyder, 1995
Hope Scale Items

- If I should find myself in a jam in my role as a leader of this group, I could think of many ways to get out of it.
- At the present time, I am energetically pursuing my goals in my organization.
- There are lots of ways around any problem.
- Right now I see myself as being pretty successful as a leader in this organization.
- I can think of many ways to reach my current goals in this organization.
- At this time, I am meeting the goals that I have set for myself as a leader of this organization.
Relationships between Effective Leadership and Hope

Leadership Practices
- Goal setting behaviors
- Vision casting
- Pursuing shared aspirations
- Innovation, change, growth
- Risk taking, challenging status quo
- Collaborative, trust building, empowering
- Skilled in relationships

Hope
- Goal directed thinking
- Pursuit of meaningful and challenging goals
- Challenge current systems by generating new ideas
- Welcomes an element of risk to achieve a goal that has value
- Motivated
- Connected to others
Developing Hope

Hope Finding

- Measuring hope
  - PsyCap Questionnaire

- Sharing personal narratives
  - How have they experienced hope in the past when pursuing goals?
  - What did they think about? How did they feel?
  - What common themes exist across individual’s stories?
    - Goals, pathways, obstacles, willpower, reflection on the process of how a goal was pursued and achieved

Lopez, 2004
Developing Hope

Hope Bonding

- Forming relationships with mentors and peers who will support and challenge them in the pursuit of their goals
  - Create a supportive environment to share goals, vision for future

Lopez, 2004
Developing Hope

Hope Reminding

- Creating feedback processes that will help students recognize their goal thoughts and barrier thoughts

- Use feedback to motivate and encourage leaders to use their thinking to more effectively pursue goals

Lopez, 2004
Developing Hope

Stretch Goals

- Ambitious goals that improve performance by motivating leaders to push harder to accomplish a difficult task
- Require knowledge, tools, and means

- Challenging and motivating
- Attainable
- Move leaders away from limiting behaviors and thoughts about themselves and others
- Focused on the future
- Require leaders to “think outside the box”
Developing Hope

Strengths development

- Strengths are pathways that can be utilized to reach goals
  - Identify talents, explore strengths themes
  - Teach leaders to intentionally invest in and develop their strengths into effective means for achieving their goals