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THE PERSONAL RESOURCES OF EFFECTIVE LEADERS: A NARRATIVE EXAMINATION

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ABSTRACT

The practices and overt behaviors of leaders are the immediate causes of their impact on organizations; they also dominate discussions on effective leadership and frequently shape the content of leadership development programs. However, understanding these practices is at best a necessary but not a complete explanation for effective leadership and its development. This paper delves into three categories of "personal leadership resources" that are instrumental in explaining the behavior of particularly effective leaders. These resources are often termed "dispositions," a label sometimes used interchangeably with traits, abilities, personal leadership resources, and components of a leader's personal "capital." The emphasis of this section is on three categories of resources (social, psychological, and ethical), primarily identified through systematic research methods. For each category, the paper outlines the conceptual framework used to view its dispositions and explains how each specific disposition within the category contributes to a leader's effectiveness. Additionally, the paper reviews evidence regarding how each disposition aids leaders in achieving valuable organizational outcomes. The final section discusses implications for research and leadership development.

Keywords: Precursors to leadership, characteristics, dispositions, personal assets.

INTRODUCTION

The actions and visible conduct of leaders are critical determinants of their influence on their organizations. These factors are central in the study of effective leadership and are often pivotal in shaping leadership development programs. However, understanding these behaviors alone provides an incomplete framework for comprehending and nurturing effective leadership. This paper delves into three distinct categories of personal leadership resources (PLRs), shedding light on the reasons behind the behaviors of successful leaders. In this context, "Personal leadership resources" (PLRs) encompass a broad range of concepts such as dispositions, traits, abilities, and elements of leaders' personal "capital."

To validate the focus on PLRs, two primary methodologies have been employed. The first, often linked with the selection of dispositions in standards and development programs for educational leadership, involves logical reasoning or professional judgment. PLRs identified in this manner typically have high intuitive appeal but their predictive validity remains uncertain. The alternative approach involves collecting empirical data on the impact of a PLR on valued organizational outcomes. PLRs validated through such empirical research often demonstrate considerable predictive validity (Rea et al., 2011).

In this narrative review, we scrutinize three categories of PLRs primarily identified through empirical research methods. While the primary focus is on educational leaders, the scope of this research extends to various organizational settings. These categories encompass crucial interpersonal skills (social resources), psychological dispositions or traits (psychological resources), and deep-seated personal beliefs that inform ethical decision-making (ethical resources). The paper outlines the theoretical perspectives for each category, explains how each resource contributes to leadership effectiveness, and presents evidence of their impact on achieving organizational goals. A preliminary discussion of these and other personal leadership resources is available in Leithwood (2012).

This exploration does not cover all possible personal resources. Notably, it excludes what is commonly known as "intellectual" or "cognitive" resources, including academic intelligence, domain-specific problem-solving skills, and systems thinking. These cognitive resources play a significant role in differentiating leaders' emergence and performance (Mumford, Watts, & Partlow, 2015) and will be the subject of future research.

BACKGROUND

Social Resources

In discussing social resources, this segment focuses on three terms that closely align with the concepts of "capacities" or "abilities". These social resources are grounded in the theoretical and empirical research surrounding social and emotional intelligence (SEI), as detailed in scholarly discussions. There is a growing body of evidence that underscores the connection between the effectiveness of leaders and how their SEI is perceived

(Zaccaro, 2007; Sun, Chen, & Zhang, 2017). This body of work often references the foundational work on emotional intelligence by Salovey and Mayer (1990), and its further popularization by Goleman (1998).

Though the exploration of the link between school leaders' social resources and their effectiveness is in its early stages, findings from various fields indicate a moderately robust correlation. The intensity of emotional labor required in a job often dictates the strength of this correlation. The paper delves into how emotional management skills, especially in jobs demanding high emotional labor, are closely tied to performance (Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004). School leadership and teaching are prime examples of professions that rank high on the scale of emotional labor.

Leaders' social resources enhance organizational outcomes by fostering empathy, trust, confidence, effective communication, and appreciation for team members' contributions and achievements. The abilities encompassed within the SEI framework involve understanding and managing one's own and others' emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in interpersonal contexts, and acting appropriately based on this understanding. These abilities mirror the emotional intelligence dimensions outlined in Salovey and Mayer's initial model and are expanded upon in subsequent literature (Kim, Ferrin, & Rao, 2009).

Perceiving Emotions

This ability, reflecting the "social appraisal" aspect in Salovey and Mayer's framework, involves detecting one's own emotions (self-awareness) and those of others from various cues. Leaders adept at this can recognize their emotional responses and understand how these influence their attention and actions. They can also discern others' emotions through cues like tone, facial expressions, body language, and other forms of communication.

While such empathy is invaluable, it must be balanced with the risk of misinterpreting others' emotions. Young (1997) suggests that empathetic tendencies should be complemented with respectful, reflective dialogues to verify the accuracy of these perceptions.

Managing Emotions

Aligned with Salovey and Mayer's concept of "emotional regulation", this skill involves managing one's own emotions and those of others, particularly in group dynamics. Effective emotion management can foster positivity and confidence, encouraging creativity and idea generation. Leaders skilled in this area are insightful about their emotional responses and their implications, and they encourage others to do the same.

Acting in Emotionally Appropriate Ways

Leaders proficient in this area respond to others' emotions in ways that support their interaction goals. They exercise significant cognitive control over their emotional responses and help others act on emotions that are beneficial. This skill is a part of the "emotional utilization" aspect of Salovey and Mayer's theory.

An extensive range of meta-analytic reviews provides substantial empirical evidence on the positive impact of these three social resources on organizational outcomes. These studies highlight the role of leaders' social resources in various aspects such as employee perceptions of leaders' effectiveness (Kerr, Garvin, Heaton, & Boyle, 2006), conflict management (Schlaerth, Ensari, & Christian, 2013), and leadership approaches (Miao, Humphrey, & Qian, 2021; Humphrey, 2015; Martin, 2008).

The roots of these social resources can be traced back to the leadership theories developed at Ohio and Michigan State universities in the 1950s and 1960s, which emphasized "relationship building" as a critical element of effective leadership. Contemporary leadership theories, like transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006) and leader-member exchange theory (LMX) (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1996), continue to highlight the significance of leaders' social resources.

In conclusion, the necessity of social resources for fostering productive working relationships has been long recognized as essential in nearly all organizational settings. The value of these resources escalates with the interpersonal intensity of an organization and the demands this intensity places on its leaders (Wang, 2021).

Psychological Resources

The foundational principles of the six psychological resources discussed here have their origins in the late 1990s with the emergence of positive psychology and its branches, including positive organizational psychology (POP) and positive organizational behavior (POB) (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Donaldson & Ko, 2010). Positive psychology delves into the realms of "positive subjective experience, positive individual traits (and states), and positive institutions" (Luthans, 2002). Unlike traditional organizational studies that often focus on addressing "problems", positive psychology highlights "positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities" (Luthans, 2002) that can be quantified, nurtured, and efficiently managed for enhancing performance in contemporary workplaces.

In this context, the psychological resources under review are often considered "states" rather than "traits", emphasizing their flexibility and adaptability. Psychological states are more dynamic compared to the relatively stable traits. They can be quantified, developed, and strategically managed for performance enhancement in the workplace, offering significant practical implications for management (Kluemper, Little, & DeGroot, 2009).

These psychological resources gain prominence due to the complexities associated with leadership roles, particularly in education. Leaders in complex roles frequently face ambiguity, risk, and uncertainty, especially in achieving outcomes for which they and their institutions are held accountable. As the complexity of challenges escalates, it places a substantial demand on leaders' psychological resources. Well-honed positive psychological resources enable leaders to handle these complexities effectively, avoiding burnout or excessive strain.

Four of these psychological resources, namely hope, optimism, self-efficacy, and resilience, play a crucial role in fostering leader initiative, creativity, and responsible risk-taking (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Leaders are more likely to innovate and deviate from established norms if they possess a strong belief in their potential for success. These resources significantly contribute to leaders' inclination towards responsible risk-taking and their subsequent success (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). When leaders exhibit high levels of these four resources, they significantly contribute to proactive leadership behaviors (Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2013; Luthans, Luthans, & Chaffin, 2019). Proactivity is positively correlated with work performance and the ability to maintain productive social relationships within the organization. Avey et al.'s meta-analysis underscores the impact of these states on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and well-being at work (Avey, Reichard, Luthans, & Mhatre, 2011).

Unlike emotions such as enjoyment, pride, frustration, and anxiety, as described in Chen's measure of leaders' emotions (Chen, 2021), psychological resources are more enduring and form the basis for emotional responses. Berkovich et al. define emotions as transient affective experiences that arise from events or situations with personal significance (Berkovich, Eyal, & Eyal, 2015). In contrast, psychological resources are more consistent and often shape the emotions leaders experience. For instance, two principals with differing levels of self-efficacy (a psychological resource) may have entirely different emotional responses to the same challenging situation.

Proactivity

Proactivity is a motivational resource that predisposes individuals to initiate actions aimed at improving their circumstances (Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006). Proactive leaders not only aim to bring about change but also persist in their efforts to make a meaningful impact. They identify opportunities, act on them, and transform their organization's mission by finding and solving problems (Crant & Bateman, 2000).

Optimism

Optimism in leaders is characterized by a positive outlook on future expectations and a style of interpreting events positively (Avey et al., 2011). Optimistic leaders anticipate success and persist in their efforts, finding alternative solutions when faced with setbacks. Their optimistic outlook does not extend unrealistically across all organizational aspects but is grounded in realism, focusing on areas within their control (Higgins, Dobrow, & Roloff, 2010).

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy, distinct from optimism, is rooted in one's belief in their capabilities and performance (Bandura, 1997). It influences the risks leaders are willing to take, their perseverance, and their response to challenges (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998; Chemers, Watson, & May, 2000; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008).

Resilience

Resilience, the capacity to adapt and recover from setbacks, is supported by self-efficacy but extends beyond it, encompassing the ability to surpass initial goals despite adversity (Youssef & Luthans, 2005). Resilient leaders are adept at navigating the complexities and uncertainties inherent in leadership roles (Paglis, 2010).

Hope

Hope in leadership can be dispositional or state-based, where state hope is a motivational state combining the desire for goal achievement and planning to meet those goals (Avey et al., 2011). Leaders with hope are characterized by their proactive approach to overcoming challenges and controlling their circumstances (Peterson & Luthans, 2003; Reichard, Avey, Lopez, & Dollard, 2013).

Humility

Although empirical evidence on leader humility is still emerging, it is recognized as a vital trait in various leadership models. Humble leaders foster a climate of psychological safety, encouraging collaboration and learning within the organization (Rego, Ribeiro, & Cunha, 2010; Owens, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2013). Humility in leaders promotes trust, encourages collective learning, and positively influences other psychological dispositions like hope and optimism (Rego et al., 2017; Leblanc, Rousseau, & Harvey, 2022).

In conclusion, these six psychological resources serve to foster a proactive disposition, provide the stamina needed for effective leadership in demanding environments, and encourage a positive organizational culture. They are integral to nurturing leadership that is adaptive, resilient, and effective in fostering a collaborative and productive work environment.

Ethical Resources

Leaders often encounter decisions heavily influenced by moral considerations. This category involves the moral principles guiding leaders in ethically challenging situations. Leaders with robust ethical resources consistently act in line with their moral principles, striving to balance the interests of their organization, its employees, and the communities they serve. This balancing act, however, can be complex due to the potential conflict of various values.

Authentic leadership, which emphasizes leaders' personal values, may not always provide comprehensive guidance in decision-making. Instead, ethical leadership involves considering a broader range of values beyond personal beliefs. Ethical Leadership Theory forms the basis for understanding leaders' ethical orientations. According to this theory, ethical leaders are committed to morally upright actions and foster similar behaviors among their colleagues (Zhu, May, & Avolio, 2004). They embody values that prioritize others and uphold high

moral standards. When leaders' actions reflect these values, and when they establish systems that reward such behaviors, it encourages the entire organization to act ethically (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005).

The core values of an organization, as demonstrated by ethical leaders, are pivotal in shaping its culture. This shared value system bolsters organizational success and enhances its appeal to the target audience. Research by Brown and Treviño (2006) underscores that ethical leaders are seen as honest, caring, principled, and fair. They actively engage in ethical communication, set clear standards, and use rewards and consequences to uphold these standards.

Values such as honesty, fairness, trustworthiness, and concern for others are fundamental to individual and organizational morality, particularly in Western contexts. These fundamental moral values are crucial for ethical leadership across various organizational environments. However, leaders often need to consider additional professional values, notably equity and social justice, especially pertinent in educational leadership.

Fundamental Moral Values

Values such as honesty, trustworthiness, fairness, and care, as noted by Brown and Treviño (2006), are essential. The educational sector, in particular, emphasizes care, along with benevolence, virtue, and altruism (Smylie, Murphy, & Seashore Louis, 2016).

School leaders who prioritize care demonstrate attention to the needs of staff and students and act selflessly (Noddings, 1991; Louis & Murphy, 2017). The concept of care in leadership encompasses benevolence, virtue, and altruism. Cameron, Bright, and Caza (2004) describe benevolent leaders as those committed to moral goodness and social betterment without seeking personal gain. Virtuous leaders aim to embody excellence in both personal and professional domains. Altruistic leaders, as characterized by Sosik, Jung, and Dinger (2009), selflessly support their organizational members.

The positive impacts of these values are evidenced in increased innovation, customer retention, reduced employee turnover, and profitability. Other benefits include enhanced job performance, organizational commitment, and employee satisfaction (Sverdlik, Oreg, & Berson, 2022).

Professional Values: Equity and Social Justice

Equity in education acknowledges the varying needs of students to achieve success. It encompasses broader concepts like social justice and inclusion. Ethical educational leadership, as detailed in works like the "Handbook for Ethical Educational Leadership" (Branson & Gross, 2014), often emphasizes equity as a key focus.

The commitment to equity addresses the challenges faced by marginalized groups. Educational policies increasingly aim to level the playing field for all students and equip educators with the skills to support these

goals. Challenges like disability, language barriers, cultural differences, and socioeconomic status necessitate leaders' attention to equity (Leithwood, 2021; Khalifa, Khalil, Marsh, & Halloran, 2019).

Effective leaders in this realm demonstrate a commitment to equity, respect for diverse ways of knowing, and the ability to engage in critical conversations about bias and social justice (Furman, 2012; Rivera-McCabe, 2017). In conclusion, leaders with substantial ethical resources are committed to navigating morally complex decisions, balancing competing values and interests, and articulating their choices convincingly to others.

CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION

A significant amount of research has detailed the practices of effective leaders and their impact on organizational outcomes. However, less emphasis has been placed on the precursors to these practices, including the personal resources of leaders, which play a crucial role in their decision to adopt successful practices and the manner in which they implement them in different contexts. These resources also account for variations in leaders' emotional responses to similar situations. This paper has explored three categories of personal leadership resources—social, psychological, and ethical. Each category was examined through a foundational theory, the contribution of various resources within each category to leadership success, and a review of evidence on the associated organizational outcomes. The paper concludes with four key recommendations.

The first recommendation is for future research. Although there is a wealth of empirical research on many personal leadership resources, studies in the educational sector are relatively limited. Further research in this area is crucial to validate or modify findings from other sectors. An example of such research is the ongoing large-scale study at University College London investigating the impact of headteachers' psychological resources on teacher retention decisions (Gu, 2023).

The second recommendation relates to leadership development. While this paper has not delved into the development of leadership resources, evidence suggests that it is possible to cultivate these resources in contexts typical of many leadership development programs (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006; Parker et al., 2006). Leithwood (2023) offers an extensive review of pedagogical strategies for developing leaders' personal resources. For instance, increasing leaders' sensitivity to emotions involves coaching in recognizing emotional cues and managing the expression of their emotions to suit different situations (Schutte, Malouff, & Thorsteinsson, 2013).

The third recommendation focuses on diagnosing individual leaders' personal resources as part of leadership development. Significant progress has been made in developing tools for this purpose, such as assessments for hope (Snyder, 1996), optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1985), and resilience (Connor & Davidson, 2003). Formative assessment of these resources should be a key starting point in both pre-service and in-service leadership programs.

Finally, the fourth recommendation is directed at senior leaders who work with school leaders. Personal leadership resources, while developable, can also be diminished. Frederickson (2003) refers to many of these

resources as "enduring," but this should be understood as conditional upon the challenges and demands faced by school leaders. For instance, leaders' sense of efficacy can be undermined when assigned to new schools with unfamiliar challenges, and their optimism and hope can wane without periodic successes. Therefore, senior district leaders should value and support the personal resources of school leaders, avoiding overburdening them with unattainable goals and allowing them discretion in implementing district mandates.

SUGGESTIONS

The recommendations of the research are as follows:

- **Expand Educational Sector Research:** Future research should focus on expanding studies in the educational sector. The ongoing study at University College London on headteachers' psychological resources is a prime example. This will help validate or modify existing findings from other sectors and provide a more comprehensive understanding of personal leadership resources in education.
- **Enhance Leadership Development Programs:** Leadership development should incorporate training in personal resources. Pedagogical strategies, as reviewed by Leithwood (2023), can be implemented to cultivate these resources. Techniques like coaching leaders to recognize emotional cues and manage their emotional expressions are crucial for their growth.
- **Implement Diagnostic Tools in Leadership Programs:** There should be a focus on diagnosing individual leaders' personal resources in leadership development programs. Utilizing tools to assess qualities like hope, optimism, and resilience is essential. This formative assessment should be integrated into both pre-service and in-service leadership training.
- **Support and Value Personal Resources in School Leaders:** Senior leaders working with school leaders should acknowledge that personal leadership resources, while developable, are also vulnerable to depletion. They should be mindful of the challenges school leaders face and avoid overloading them with unrealistic goals. Providing support and allowing discretion in decision-making can help maintain and strengthen these personal resources.

ETHICAL TEXT

This article complies with the journal's writing rules, publication principles, research and publication ethics rules, and journal ethics rules. The responsibility for any violations that may arise regarding the article belongs to the author. The ethics committee permission of the article was obtained by İstinye University/Publication Ethics Committee with the decision numbered 2023/24/07 dated 17.03.2023.

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