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Cover Photo: The picture on the cover highlights two iconic buildings at USAFA. In the forefront is the Center for Character & Leadership Development which was made possible through generous contributions of USAFA graduates and donors and the United States Air Force. In the background is the USAFA Cadet Chapel. Both buildings represent the necessity for character development in all leaders.

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INSIGHTS

RESEARCH

The Effect of Character on Stress Coping Responses Through Motivation to Lead

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ABSTRACT

There have been calls to elevate character alongside competencies and commitment in leadership research. Given the potential importance of character in leadership, it is surprising that the construct has not been more fully integrated into the nuanced nomological network of leadership processes. We built out the nomological network and, specifically, examined the relationship between character and stress coping responses in two field studies involving law enforcement officers. The results of our structural equation models revealed that character had both direct and indirect effects on coping responses through motivation to lead. Furthermore, our results indicated that character was discriminably different from related, empirically validated constructs of personality traits and psychological capital.

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The correlation between character and psychological capital was positive and significant, and they both predicted stress coping responses.

Keywords: Character, Personality Traits, Psychological Capital, Motivation to Lead, Stress Coping Responses

Leadership is a critical success factor in today's public, private, and not-for-profit sector organizations including the military. Effective leadership is a function of competencies, character, and commitment to the role of leadership (Gandz et al., 2010; Thompson et al., 2008). The competency-based perspective toward leadership—focusing attention on those activities, functions, and processes that facilitate the development of strategic, organizational, business, and people competencies—remains a dominant force in the disciplines of human resource management and organizational behavior. Competencies alone, however, are insufficient for leadership to achieve sustainable excellence in organizations. Character has emerged as an indispensable component of good, effective leadership (Hannah & Jennings, 2013; Newstead et al., 2021; Sosik et al., 2019). The focus of character is concerned with who someone is—that is, their habit of being (Crossan et al., 2017; Pike et al., 2021). Character is an expression of virtues, values, and personality traits that manifest in observable behaviors that facilitate human excellence and produce social betterment (Newstead et al., 2021; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Lastly, commitment to the role of leadership refers to doing the hard work of leadership and continuing to develop as a leader. Such commitment is forged from individual aspirations, and the preparedness to be fully engaged in the leadership role and make personal sacrifices in return for the opportunities and the rewards associated with the leadership role.

There have been numerous calls to elevate character alongside competencies and commitment in leadership research and practice (Hannah & Avolio, 2011; Newstead et al., 2021; Sturm et al., 2017). However, there remain theoretical and practical questions about the relevance of character in organizational behavior and its overlap with other individual difference variables such as personality traits and psychological capital. This observation calls for more extensive research into how character influences outcomes that have implications for individual and organizational effectiveness and, importantly, how the effects of character may operate parallel to, yet distinct from, other related constructs.

The purpose of our study is threefold. First, we build out the nomological network of character and, specifically, examine the relationship between character and stress coping responses. We used police recruits as participants because as in military contexts, potentially traumatic event exposures occur frequently in policing, and studies have shown that post-traumatic stress disorder in police populations represents a significant health concern (Chan & Andersen, 2020; Horswill et al., 2021). For example, Saunders et al. (2019) found that police officers across the United States experienced increased fear and stress due to recent changes in the socio-political environment, which were characterized by (1) strained police—community relations; (2) increased scrutiny associated with the 24-h news cycle, and the partisan reporting creating an appetite for polarizing stories about law enforcement; and (3) the ubiquity of personal recording devices and the sharing of videos on social media so that virtually every police action could be reviewed out of context with the poten-

tial to become a viral news story. Hence, the question as to whether individuals are willing to take up a leadership role and engage in effective leadership behaviors in a high stress environment—and the role that character plays—is a salient one for both police recruits and those serving in the military.

Second, we explored motivation to lead as a potential mediator of the relationship between character and stress coping responses. Chan and Drasgow (2001) described motivation to lead as an individual difference variable that, among other things, influences individuals' willingness to assume leadership roles and the associated responsibilities as well as their persistence to grow and develop as leaders. By investigating how character may support motivation to lead, we integrate two robust yet separate leadership constructs and their associated academic literatures in a much-needed effort to develop a more holistic understanding of the process of leadership (Dansereau et al., 2013; Meuser et al., 2016).

Third, we included two variables in our research design—personality traits and psychological capital—that are often considered similar to character. The relative lack of research on character often leads to questions about construct validity. We argue that there are fundamental differences between character, psychological capital, and personality traits that justify the treatment of them as distinct constructs. Furthermore, we provide empirical evidence, showing that these constructs are related yet different, which is important for both theoretical and practical advancement of character research.

Our paper proceeds as follows: We begin by providing a brief overview of existing research on character and motivation to lead. Next, we focus on the relationships among character, motivation to lead, and stress coping responses. We then introduce the design of Study 1 and present our results. We also discuss the challenges with construct proliferation and outline the conceptual differences between character, personality traits, and psychological capital—this is largely the focus of Study 2. We conclude our paper with a discussion of the theoretical and practical significance of the results that we obtained and outline areas for future research.

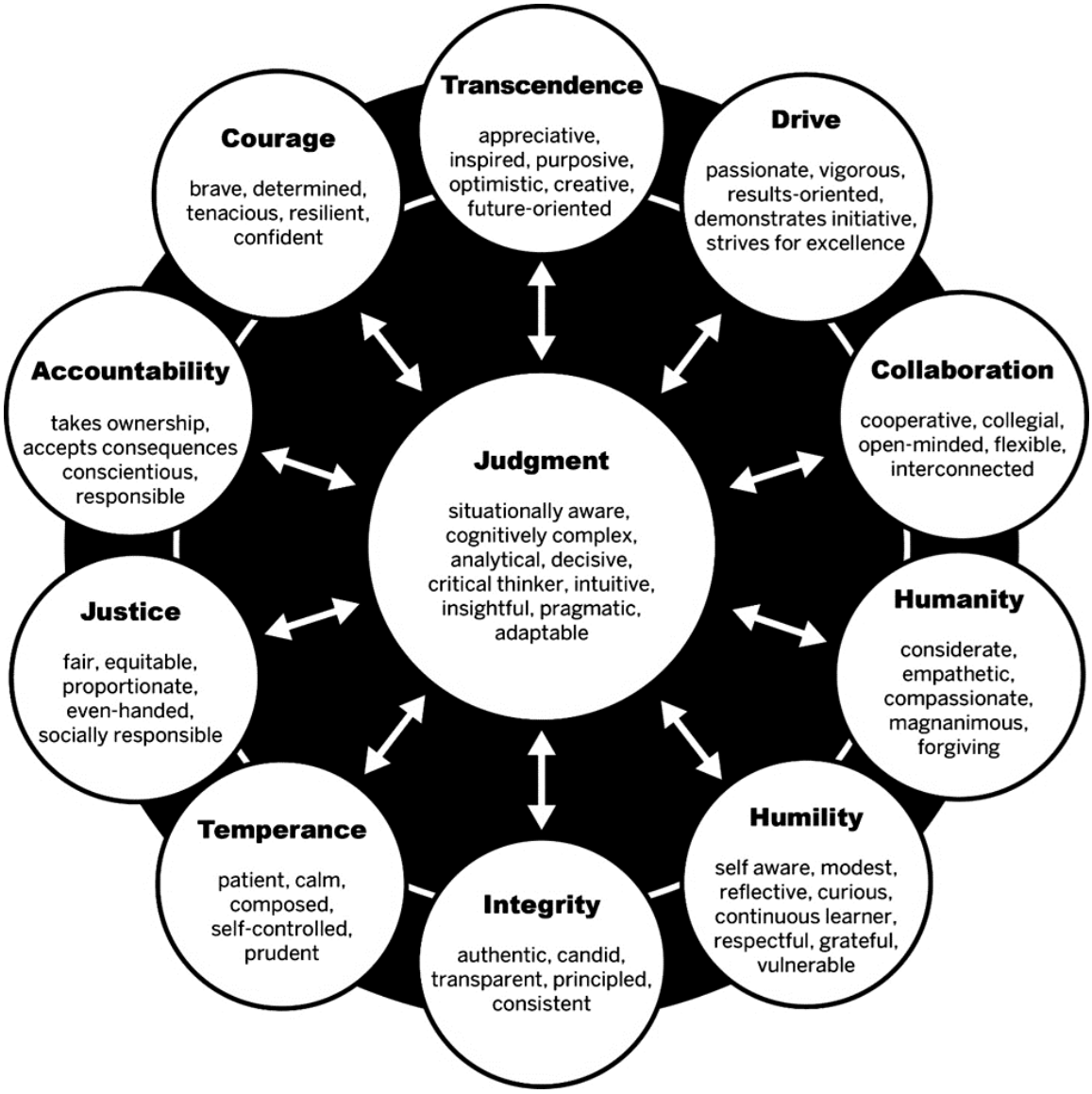
Character

Many scholars examining the origin, antecedents, and consequences of character anchor their discussion of character in virtue ethics. The science and practice of virtue ethics seeks to guide and promote the habitual display of positive behaviors that enable human flourishing and produce social betterment. The foundational research program led by Peterson and Seligman (2004) led to the formulation of six universal virtues (courage, humanity, justice, practical wisdom, temperance, and transcendence) and 24 character strengths grounded in behavioral indicators. The character strengths reflect the six domains of virtuous conduct. For example, the character strengths of forgiveness, humility, prudence, and self-regulation comprise the virtue of temperance. Character, then, can be considered as a set of behaviors that reflect habits through the internalization of virtues.

Crossan and her colleagues (2016, 2017) extended the research by Peterson and Seligman (2004) to organizational settings. Their engaged scholarship approach built on prior academic studies from various disciplines (e.g., psychology, philosophy, management, education, theology, and sociology) and led to the identification of 11 dimensions of character (or virtues) and 62 supportive behaviors—character elements (or character strengths)—that are widely considered by leaders from the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors to be exemplars of virtuous leadership and, importantly, meet the original criteria for virtues and character strengths offered by Peterson and Seligman (2004). Their theoretical framework of character is shown in Figure 1 and provides the basis for our study.

Figure 1

Framework of Leader Character, Adapted from Crossan et al. (2017)



We used the Crossan et al. (2017) framework because their multi-year investigation of character was motivated by the observation that many organizational leaders (1) had difficulty relating to some of the language (e.g., zest and love) used in the Values in Action Character Strengths survey designed by Peterson and Seligman and (2) felt that the classification structure proposed by Peterson and Seligman did not include key virtues and character strengths perceived as important for leadership in organizations. Therefore, Crossan et al. captured the voice of organizational leaders to develop and then validate a framework of character.

Figure 1 shows that judgment exists at the center of the interconnected set of dimensions. The effective application of any of the dimensions is context-sensitive, thereby creating cross-situational variance in behaviors (Crossan et al., 2017; Hannah & Avolio, 2011; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006). Consequently, judgment is placed at the center of the character framework because good judgment (or the Aristotelian concept of phrónēsis or practical wisdom) is the outcome of applying the dimensions of character (and their supporting behaviors) in situationally appropriate ways (Crossan et al., 2017; Eikeland, 2006; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010). Effective leaders are those who are able to activate each of the dimensions at the right time and in the right amount to guide their decision-making and call forth the right set of behaviors to address the challenges with which they are confronted. Prior research has shown that the 11 dimensions are unique yet highly correlated (Crossan et al., 2017; Monzani et al., 2021; Seijts et al., 2022).

Research has and continues to investigate how character relates to outcomes for leaders, managers, and employees, thereby building a nomological network for character. We link character to stress coping responses through the construct of motivation to lead.

Motivation to Lead

It is easy to envision why academics and practitioners take great interest in the construct of motivation to lead: a well-executed research program helps to answer the question of who is most attracted to leadership roles and whether those individuals who are motivated to pursue leadership roles actually become more effective leaders through fulfilling the requirements associated with leadership (Badura et al., 2020; Chan & Drasgow, 2001; Schyns et al., 2020). This question seems to be an especially relevant one for professions with a heightened risk of stress including individuals serving in the armed forces. Our research contributes to the motivation to lead literature by identifying relevant antecedents and consequences of the construct, seen as a critical area to push research on leadership motivation forward. For example, Badura et al. (2020) observed that we know relatively little about the processes that underpin the motivation to lead.

Chan and Drasgow (2001) formulated motivation to lead as a construct that has three dimensions. The *affective-identity* dimension represents an intrinsic enjoyment of opportunities to lead and is characterized by a tendency to take charge and view oneself as a leader. The *social-normative* dimension of motivation to lead reflects a willingness to lead out of a sense of obligation, honor, or duty. Lastly, the *non-calculative* dimension reflects a willingness to lead without regard to the personal costs and benefits of leading; hence, the less calculating individuals are about leading, the more they are inclined to embrace the leadership role.

Research on the antecedents of motivation to lead has mainly considered fixed individual differences such as personality traits, cognitive ability, vocational interests, and gender. However, Chan and Drasgow (2001) conceptualized motivation to lead as an individual difference variable that is likely to be developed over time through leadership experiences and subsequent development. We therefore advocate for taking a wider, more holistic view of the possible antecedents that may shape motivation to lead.

We posit that motivation to lead is fed by character, which is an important personal resource that contributes to individual excellence and can be developed over time (Byrne et al., 2018; Lindsay et al., 2020; Ramos et al., 2019; Sosik, 2015). For example, those individuals with deep reservoirs of courage (e.g., showing an unrelenting determination, confidence, and perseverance in confronting difficult situations; and rebounding quickly from setbacks) and transcendence (e.g., having a strong sense of personal mission or orientation in life, and seeing possibilities where others do not) can be expected to have high affective-identity

motivation to lead. Furthermore, although leadership is generally viewed as an attractive and rewarding endeavor, it may also entail certain risks and sacrifices that may discourage individuals from taking on a leadership role (De Cremer & Van Knippenberg, 2004; Zhang et al., 2020). Therefore, individuals who can activate the behaviors associated with humanity (e.g., demonstrating genuine concern and care for others) and accountability (e.g., stepping up and taking ownership of challenging decisions and actions, and reliably delivering on expectations) are likely to display a sense of duty to serve and fulfill the obligations associated with the role of leadership that is characteristic of social-normative motivation to lead. Therefore, we hypothesize that character contributes to the prediction of motivation to lead (Hypothesis 1).

Character, Motivation to Lead, and Coping

The degree to which a stressful event results in distress or negative outcomes is related to the coping responses individuals use. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined coping as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (p. 141). Long (1990) identified three specific categories of coping: avoidance (e.g., behavioral disengagement, self-blame, or venting); problem reappraisal or appropriate reassessment of the experience (e.g., stressful events are reconstrued as benign, valuable, or beneficial); and active problem-solving (e.g., seeking emotional support, engaging in problem-solving and planning, or exercising self-care and seeking hobbies). Our research extends previous studies by examining the relationship between character, motivation to lead, and the use of effective (problem reappraisal and active problem-solving) and ineffective (avoidance) coping responses.

Seijts et al. (2022) argued that character is a personal resource that contributes to beliefs of personal mastery and helps individuals deal more effectively with stressful events, which, in turn, prevents them from making poor decisions, engaging in unethical behaviors, and experiencing negative outcomes such as emotional exhaustion. Specifically, they asserted that individuals who have strong, well-developed character are better equipped to handle the demands in their environment—whether they be physical, mental, emotional, or otherwise—and to support positive behaviors that facilitate leader excellence. For example, individuals who are able to activate the positive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors associated with character elements identified by Crossan et al. (2017) such as self-control, confidence, resilience, gratitude, open-mindedness, optimism, reflection, and patience to handle stressful life events may believe they are capable of handling unforeseen events and actively deal with the circumstances they face—more so than individuals who lack these elements of character (Harzer & Ruch, 2015; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Sosik et al., 2019).

Seijts et al. (2022) tested their hypotheses using students in a business education setting as participants. Their results revealed that character dampened the perceived stressfulness of life events commonly reported as stressful by students. The results imply that it is essential for faculty and students at educational institutions to fully appreciate the importance of character for effective functioning and to develop the various character dimensions to address adverse personal, social, and environmental situations in a positive fashion.

We think this advice is as valuable for individuals in actual military/work settings as it is for students. For example, law enforcement officers, firefighters, and military personnel experience significant levels of stress, which may contribute to dysfunctional behaviors and poor decision-making (Gershon et al., 2009; Obuobi-Donkor et al., 2022; Perez-Floriano & Gonzalez, 2019). Hence, the question as to whether individuals – including professionals such as police recruits and military service members – engage in effective leadership

behaviors in a high stress environment, and what role character plays is a salient one. Based on the findings reported by Seijts et al. (2022), we hypothesize significant positive relationships between character and active problem-solving (Hypothesis 2-a) and problem reappraisal (Hypothesis 2-b), and a significant negative relationship between character and avoidance (Hypothesis 2-c).

Furthermore, we posit that motivation to lead will have a direct effect on how individuals cope with stressful situations. Motivation to lead is a predictor of a range of positive leadership behaviors and leadership effectiveness (Badura et al., 2020; Chan & Drasgow, 2001; Kark & Van Dijk, 2007). This implies that individuals with high motivation to lead are more likely to invest time and energy to fulfill the demands associated with leadership and to sustain efforts under stressful conditions. Motivation to lead, therefore, helps individuals to select and persist with suitable coping responses. Specifically, individuals with higher affective-identity motivation to lead tend to have more positive emotions, are more confident in their abilities, and may even welcome the challenges associated with stressful situations because these challenges strengthen their self-identity as a leader (Badura et al., 2020; Kennedy et al., 2021). Similarly, individuals with higher social-normative motivation to lead are likely to have a stronger sense of duty and higher purpose associated with their role, which can help them overcome personal discomforts and stressors encountered in their professional lives (Hannah et al., 2014; Maurer et al., 2017). Finally, non-calculative motivation to lead implies a tendency for other-orientation and willingness to incur personal costs. This willingness to take risks and incur costs suggests an inclination for an approach-oriented coping strategy: to accept the stressor, to understand its underlying causes, and to actively find a solution to the stressor (Healy & McKay, 2000; Taylor & Stanton, 2007). Taken together, we hypothesize that motivation to lead will be positively associated with problem-solving (Hypothesis 3-a) and problem reappraisal (Hypothesis 3-b), and negatively associated with avoidance (Hypothesis 3-c).

Finally, we hypothesize that motivation to lead will mediate the effect of character on coping strategies such that character increases motivation to lead, which, in turn, facilitates active problem-solving (Hypothesis 4-a) and problem reappraisal (Hypothesis 4-b), and character increases motivation to lead, which, in turn, decreases avoidance (Hypothesis 4-c).

Study 1

Method

Sample

The participants were recruited from a Canadian police college. Every police recruit in the province where we collected the data is mandated by legislation to attend the college and successfully complete the program on their ongoing journey to become a law enforcement officer. The training includes three broad areas: legislation (e.g., knowledge concerning all statutes relevant to the province and hence police officers); policing skills (e.g., defensive skills and control tactics, patrol driving, and safe and lawful use of firearms); and a broad set of topics identified through formal inquests and political recommendations (e.g., diversity and inclusion, death notification, and accountability for actions). The college is committed to offering unique and innovative learning opportunities for both newly hired and seasoned police officers to prepare them well for the myriad on-the-job challenges in urban and nonurban centers. The college also offers non-mandated training programs as part of ongoing professional development. The average age of the participants was 30.02 years (SD = 5.88). Seventy males and 60 females completed the full set of surveys.

Design and Procedure

The police recruits received an email from the senior leadership inviting them to participate in a study framed

around character and well-being. The participants were asked to complete two surveys at different time intervals. The first survey included a self-assessment of character. Upon completion of the self-assessment, the participants received a detailed report summarizing their character scores so as to provide developmental feedback that could assist them in their professional development. Leadership and effective leadership behaviors are topics that are discussed extensively in professional development programs offered by the college and hence a deeper insight into a critical component of leadership—character—was seen by the senior leadership as something of interest to the college and its stakeholders. The report was provided free of charge and included free online resources (e.g., books, practitioner articles, blogs, podcasts, and videos) to access if the participants wanted to learn more about one or more behaviors associated with strong, well-developed character. The second survey, sent to the recruits 6 weeks later, included measures of motivation to lead and stress coping responses. It was anticipated that each of the surveys would take about 20 min to complete. We randomized the order in which the participants completed the items for each scale to prevent any order effects. Furthermore, we employed different response scales to avoid automatic-pilot responses. These procedures were utilized to strengthen the internal validity of our results.

We separated the surveys to limit the challenges associated with cross-sectional research designs. This was especially important because all measures we collected were self-report due to the nature of our variables and the relationships we studied: intra-psychological and behavioral processes. The surveys were connected by the research team through the use of a unique ID provided to the participants during the completion of the first survey.

Participation in the study was voluntary, and the surveys could be completed on the participant's own time. All the data collected were confidential and accessed only by the research team. Studies involving sensitive topics for respondents have shown that the promise of anonymity generates higher response rates and more honest answers in survey research (Gnambs & Kaspar, 2015; Warner et al., 2011).

There were three cohorts from which we collected data. The college typically hosts three cohorts annually for the training program. The program lasted 12 weeks. Cohorts 1, 2, and 3 had 387, 431, and 408 police officers, respectively. We encountered challenges in linking the surveys even though we sent out specific instructions to the recruits on how to retrieve their unique ID from previous emails. We had 562 individuals complete the first survey and 316 individuals complete the second survey indicating slippage. Our final sample with complete (and linked) cases for cohorts 1–3 consisted of 130 participants or a 11% effective response rate.

Instruments

Character. We used the revised and shortened self-report version of the Leader Character Insight Assessment (LCIA) developed by Seijts et al. (2022) to measure character. The LCIA asks individuals to self-rate the likelihood of demonstrating 33 specific behaviors that reveal strength of character within a leadership role. These leader behaviors can be classified into one of the 11 dimensions of character: accountability, collaboration, courage, drive, humanity, humility, integrity, judgment, justice, temperance, and transcendence. Sample items are "Holds and pursues high standards of performance" (drive) and "Does not call undue attention to one's accomplishments" (humility). The scale scores ranged from *extremely unlikely* (1) to *extremely likely* (5); the midpoint of the scale was *unsure* (3). As mentioned previously, studies have shown that the dimensions of character tend to be highly correlated. Consequently, we combined the total score on the dimensions as a single indicator of character. From a practical point of view, the high correlations indicate substantial overlap

among the dimensions and, thus, restrict their use as separate dimensions.

Motivation to lead. Motivation to lead was assessed through 10 items taken from the scale developed by Chan and Drasgow (2001). The scale has three dimensions: affective-identity (four items); social-normative (three items); and non-calculative motivation to lead (three items). A sample item of the motivation to lead scale is "I would agree to lead others even if there are no special rewards or benefits with that role" (non-calculative motivation). The scale scores ranged from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7); the midpoint of the scale was *neither agree* nor *disagree* (4). As explained previously, individuals with high motivation to lead stay committed to conquering personal and professional challenges. Although we might find different effect sizes for the dimensions of motivation to lead on our outcome variables, we expect that the directional effects are the same. We, therefore, treated motivation to lead as a uniform construct and aggregated 10 items into a single score.

Coping responses. We used the stress coping response scale developed and validated by Long (1990) to measure the different ways to cope with stressful life events. The scale has three unique dimensions: avoidance (14 items); problem reappraisal (12 items); and active problem-solving (10 items). Participants were asked to focus on a major stressful event during the previous 2 to 4 weeks and then to respond to each coping response according to the degree to which they used it to deal with the stressor. A sample item of the active problem-solving scale is "I talked to someone who could do something concrete about the problem" (active problem-solving). The scale scores ranged from *not at all* (0) to *used a great deal* (3); the middle scores were *sometimes* (1) and *often* (2).

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliabilities for Variables Measured in Studies 1 and 2

Measure	Study 1			Study 2		
	M	SD	α	M	SD	α
Gender	1.46	0.50		1.29	0.46	
Age	30.02	5.88		27.81	5.05	
Character	4.42	0.29	0.90	4.45	0.31	0.92
Motivation to lead	6.02	0.58	0.84	5.76	0.82	0.91
Active problem-solving	1.63	0.59	0.84	1.60	0.61	0.85
Avoidance	0.70	0.47	0.86	0.59	0.42	0.87
Problem reappraisal	2.00	0.50	0.83	1.89	0.61	0.89
Psychological capital				5.46	0.68	0.92
Agreeableness				4.86	1.00	
Conscientiousness				6.27	0.82	
Emotional stability				6.00	0.89	
Extraversion				4.94	1.31	
Openness to experience				5.48	0.95	

Note: Reliability shown as Cronbach's alpha (α) for Study 1 (N = 130) and Study 2 (N = 255).

Table 2

Correlations Among Variables Measured for Studies 1 and 2

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Gender		0.02	-0.05	0.01	0.05	0.17**	0.06	-0.02	0.12	0.16*	-0.08	0.14*	0.13*
2. Age	0.12		0.18**	0.06	-0.02	-0.23**	-0.05	0.02	0.19**	0.07	0.14*	0.05	0.16*
3. Char	0.01	0.14		0.44**	0.29**	-0.24**	0.20**	0.40**	0.20**	0.24**	0.32**	0.12	0.38**
4. MTL	0.08	0.03	0.30**		0.18**	-0.16*	0.18**	0.50**	-0.12*	0.15*	0.05	0.26**	0.19**
5. APS	-0.05	-0.02	0.22*	0.19*		0.09	0.58**	0.14*	0.06	0.07	0.03	-0.02	0.14*
6. Avoi	0.13	0.03	-0.18*	-0.26**	0.12		-0.02	-0.28**	-0.04	-0.28**	-0.41**	-0.21**	-0.17**
7. PR	-0.12	-0.02	0.12	0.29**	0.43**	-0.07		0.22**	0.14*	0.05	0.08	-0.10	0.01
8. PsyCap									0.03	0.28**	0.16*	0.19**	0.20**
9. Agr										0.18**	0.32**	-0.02	0.28**
10. Con											0.48**	0.20**	0.33**
11. ES												0.11	0.34**
12. Ext													0.35**
13. Open													

Note: Study 1 is depicted in the bottom triangle (N = 130). Study 2 is depicted in the top triangle (N = 255). Char = character, MTL = Motivation to lead, APS = Active problem-solving, Avoi = Avoidance, PR = Problem reappraisal, PsyCap = Psychological capital, Agr = Agreeableness, Con = Conscientious, ES = Emotional stability, Ext = Extraversion, Open = Openness.
* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Tables 1 and 2 show the means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations among the measures we collected. The participants self-reported high character across the 11 dimensions; the average score was 4.42 (SD = 0.29) on a 5-point scale. Furthermore, the participants reported high motivation to lead (M = 6.02, SD = 0.58) on a 7-point scale. The most frequently used coping response was problem reappraisal (M = 2.00, SD = 0.50), followed by active problem-solving (M = 1.63, SD = 0.59) and avoidance (M = 0.70, SD = 0.47) on a 4-point scale.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

We conducted reliability and confirmatory factor analyses on the measures for character, motivation

Table 3

Goodness-of-Fit Indicators of Models for Character, Motivation to Lead, Coping Responses, and Psychological Capital for Studies 1 and 2

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2 diff	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	TLI
Study 1							
All Items							
1-Factor	10580.03**	3,002		0.14	0.16	0.64	0.63
3-Factor	7143.20**	2,999	3436.83**	0.10	0.14	0.80	0.80
5-Factor	4804.07**	2,992	2339.13**	0.07	0.12	0.91	0.91
7-Factor	4362.62**	2,981	441.45**	0.06	0.12	0.93	0.93
Revised[a]							
1-Factor	10269.27**	2,849		0.14	0.16	0.64	0.63
5-Factor	4587.97**	2,926	5681.3**	0.07	0.12	0.92	0.91
7-Factor	4146.51**	2,828	441.46**	0.06	0.12	0.94	0.94
Study 2							
All Items							
1-Factor	31201.84**	3,827		0.17	0.16	0.73	0.73
4-Factor	15586.53**	3,821	15615.31**	0.11	0.13	0.86	0.88
6-Factor	8727.57**	3,812	6858.96**	0.07	0.10	0.95	0.95
8-Factor	7512.57**	3,799	441.46	0.06	0.09	0.96	0.96
Revised[b]							
1-Factor	30667.98**	3,740		0.17	0.16	0.74	0.73
6-Factor	8388.61**	3,725	22279.37**	0.07	0.10	0.95	0.95
8-Factor	7170.82**	3,712	1217.79**	0.06	0.09	0.97	0.97

Note: RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation, SRMR = standardized root mean square residual, CFI = comparative fit index, and TLI = Tucker–Lewis index.

[a] Two items were removed due to low factor loading and poor inter-item correlations.

[b] One item was removed due to low factor loading.

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

to lead, and coping responses to address convergent and discriminant validity of the measures. First, the solutions for a single-factor with all items loading onto the same underlying factor and a 3-factor model were compared to investigate whether the measures are truly distinct or measure the same latent variable. Second, we explored whether the items loaded more strongly on their corresponding construct than on the other constructs we measured. Third, we considered the results of the reliability analysis for each measure. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis are shown in Table 3.

The chi-square difference test showed that there was a significant difference between the single- and 3-factor model, where the 3-factor solution showed a better fit. However, the results also indicated that the 3-factor solution could be much improved. First, our initial 3-factor model suggested that the coping response items should be split into their respective dimensions: active problem-solving, problem reappraisal, and avoidance responses (thus creating a 5-factor model). Second, we investigated the model fit when we split the respective dimensions for motivation to lead: affective-identity, non-calculative, and social-normative motivation to lead (thus creating a 7-factor model). Third, we removed two items (one each from active problem-solving and avoidance coping responses) from the coping response scale for subsequent analyses because their factor loadings were low and/or because of poor reliability as shown by the inter-item correlation matrix and the item-total statistics that the SPSS statistical package provides. The fit indices of our final 5-factor model are shown in Table 3. The RMSEA; standardized root mean square residual or SRMR; comparative fit index or CFI; and Tucker–Lewis index or TLI. were satisfactory. There was little indication that including the additional dimensions for motivation to lead provided substantially better fit as the 5- and 7-factor models reached comparable fit indices. We therefore proceeded using the more parsimonious 5-factor model.

Analytical Approach

We constructed structural equation models to test our hypotheses captured in Figure 2A. A maximum likelihood-revised estimator with 10,000 iterations and 20 starts was used. We completed an initial model and observed both the fit indices—chi-square, RMSEA, SRMR, CFI, and TLI—and the modification indices provided by the Mplus 8.8 statistical software package to consider the best-fitting model to our data. First, the fit indices were compared to cutoff points from established recommendations (cf. Cheung & Rensvold, 2002). Second, the modification indices were inspected to improve the overall fit of the model while remaining theoretically sound. Third, the INDIRECT command in Mplus was used to test the significance of the indirect effect of character on coping responses as mediated by motivation to lead. Fourth, gender was added as a covariate in our structural equation model, loading onto our outcome measures.

Hypothesis Testing

Our model showed an acceptable fit to our data—$\chi^2(1) = 0.90$, $p = 0.34$; SRMR = 0.02; RMSEA = 0.00; CFI = 1.00; and TLI = 1.00. We next observed the direct and indirect paths that tested our hypotheses (Figure 3A). Our results indicated that character significantly and positively predicted motivation to lead, $\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$, and active problem-solving, $\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$. These results support Hypotheses 1 and 2-a. There was, however, no direct relationship between character and two dimensions of coping responses: problem reappraisal and avoidance. Next, we considered motivation to lead as a predictor of coping strategies. Results indicated that consistent with Hypotheses 3-b and 3-c, motivation to lead significantly and positively predicted problem reappraisal, $\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$, and significantly and negatively predicted avoidance, $\beta = -0.24$, $p < 0.01$. However, no direct relationship was found between motivation to lead and active problem-solving.

The indirect path from character through motivation to lead was significant and positive for problem

Figure 2A

Model Depicting the Impact of Character on Coping Responses through Motivation to Lead.

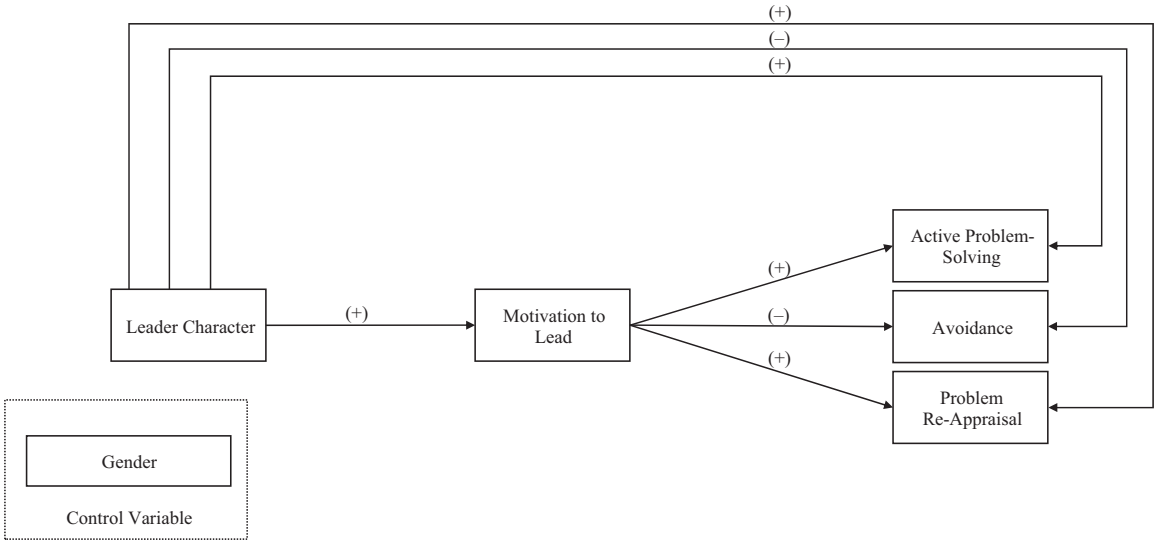


Figure 2B

Model Depicting the Impact of Character on Coping Responses through Motivation to Lead Controlling for Psychological Capital and the Big Five Personality Dimensions.

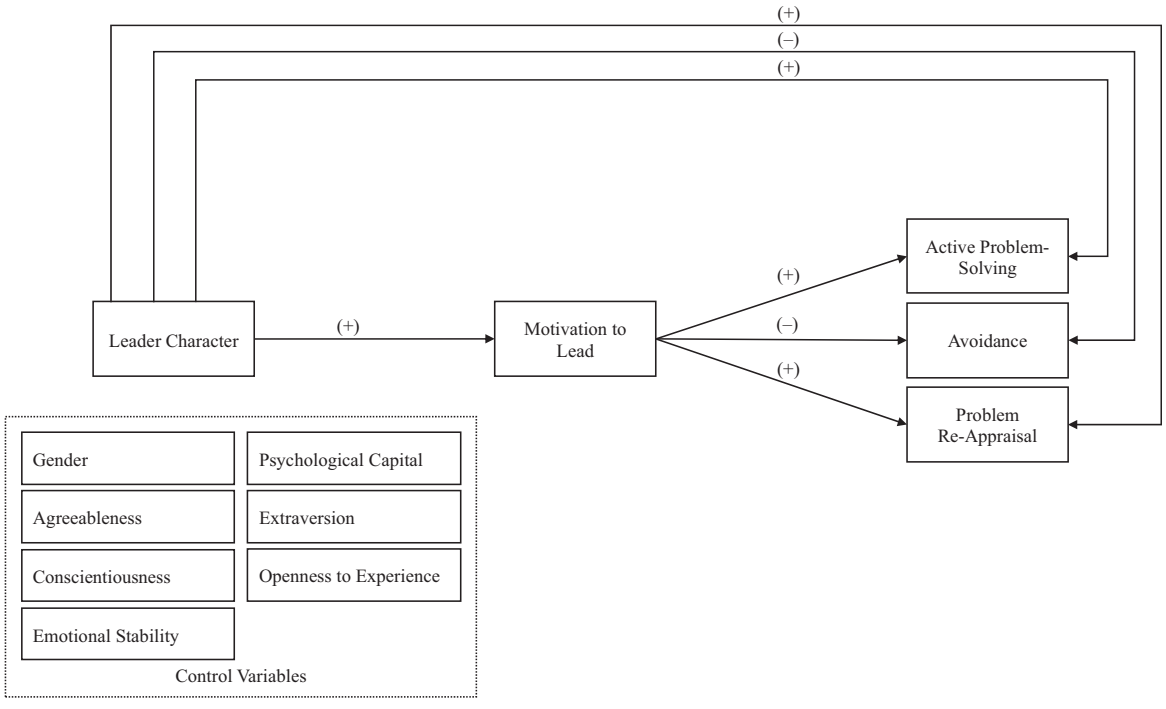
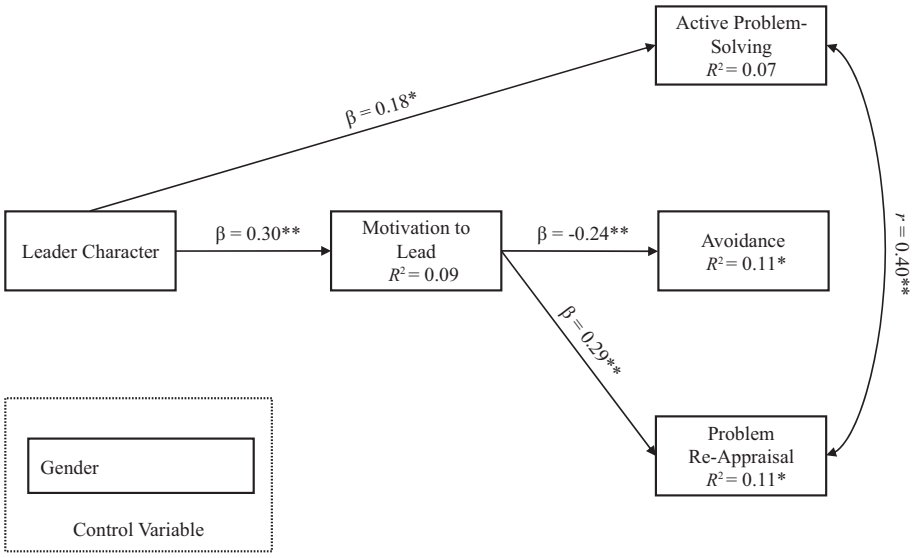


Figure 3A

Structural Equation Model Depicting the Impact of Character on Coping Responses through Motivation to Lead and Controlling for Gender.

Note: Paths are depicted with straight lines. For parsimony, only significant paths are shown. Correlational relationships are depicted with curved lines.

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.



reappraisal (Θ = 0.09, SE = 0.03, $p < 0.01$), supporting Hypothesis 4-b, and significant and negative for avoidance (Θ = −0.07, SE = 0.03, $p < 0.05$), supporting Hypothesis 4-c. However, motivation to lead did not mediate the relationship between character and active problem-solving. Our outcome measures showed one significant correlation: active problem-solving was significantly and positively associated with problem reappraisal ($r = 0.40$, $p < 0.01$). Gender was not a predictor for any of the coping responses in our model even though the correlation between gender and the avoidance coping response approached significance.

Study 2

The results of Study 1 are consistent with prior studies that revealed that character is an important individual difference variable associated with motivation, learning, and the activation of effective leadership behaviors. Hence, our findings help to build out the nomological network of leadership processes. The purpose of Study 2 was to replicate and extend our findings with a slightly different design and a larger sample. Replication is a natural and critical part of the scientific process (Cook & Campbell, 1979; Pashler & Wagenmakers, 2012) in particular with relatively new constructs such as character (Van Zyl et al., 2024). Furthermore, in Study 2, we explicitly address the issue of construct proliferation and empirically show that character is separate from related constructs such as personality traits and psychological capital. This need for differentiation has been largely ignored by researchers who study character.

Construct Proliferation

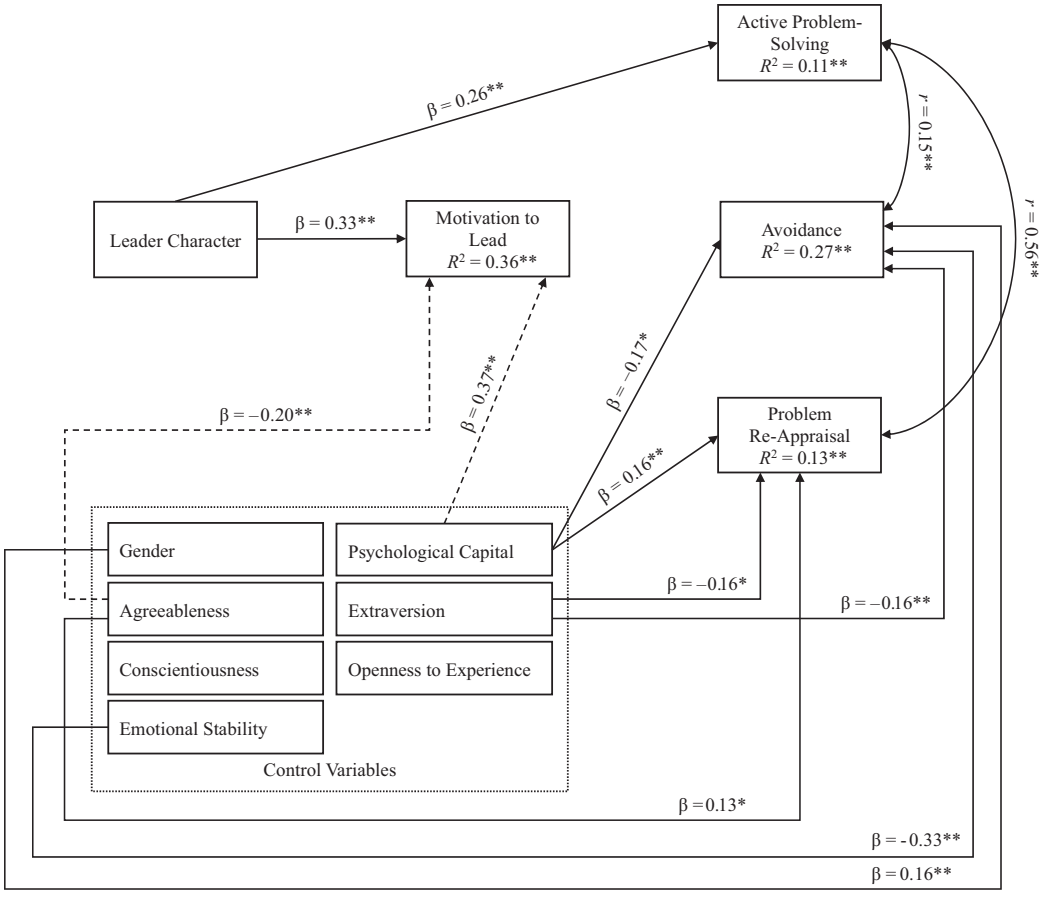
The accumulation of ostensibly new constructs that are theoretically and empirically indistinguishable from established constructs has been identified as an issue of concern in the field of organizational behavior. For

Figure 3B

Structural Equation Model Depicting the Impact of Character on Coping Responses through Motivation to Lead and Controlling for Gender, Psychological Capital, and the Big Five Personality Dimensions.

Note: Paths are depicted with straight lines. For parsimony, only significant paths are shown. Correlational relationships are depicted with curved lines. Dashed lines depict additional paths or correlations added based on the modification indices.

$^{*}p < 0.05.$ $^{**}p < 0.01.$



example, Le et al. (2010, p. 112) explained that construct proliferation should be considered "... a major failure to adhere to the canon of parsimony in science ... The problem is a serious one because a science that ignores the mandate for parsimony cannot advance its knowledge base and achieve cumulative knowledge."

Two constructs that appear to be conceptually close to character are personality traits and psychological capital—both of which have a deep, rich literature. For example, Wright and his colleagues (Wright & Klotz, 2017; Wright & Lauer, 2013) observed that some scholars have defined character as personality. Therefore, the question of what value is added by the construct of character over personality is a predictable (and important) one. Furthermore, like character and its associated virtues and character strengths, the construct of psychological capital has its roots in positive

psychology; because both constructs focus on "who you are" and "who you can become" (Crossan et al., 2016; Luthans & Broad, 2022), people may see these two constructs as highly complementary. For example, studies and meta-analyses revealed that psychological capital is a personal resource that promotes desirable employee and organizational outcomes (e.g., organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behaviors, or employee creativity) as well as buffers against negative employee and organizational outcomes (e.g., turnover intentions, burnout, or cynicism) (Loghman et al., 2022; Wu & Nguyen, 2019). Studies have also shown that psychological capital, like character, can be developed in individuals through micro-interventions lasting from 1 to 3 h (Lupșa et al., 2020; Luthans et al., 2006; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). How then is character truly different from psychological capital?

We believe there are fundamental differences between character, psychological capital, and personality traits, which justify the treatment of them as distinct constructs in both research and applied settings. The first difference involves the epistemology and ontology of the constructs. Some virtues and character strengths may be trait-like individual differences, but character and personality traits are by no means equivalent. For example, character is anchored in virtuous behaviors and can be developed, as opposed to personality traits, which are relatively stable and, importantly, mostly agnostic to virtue (Cawley et al., 2000; Seijts et al., 2019). Character involves a set of habits of behaviors that can be strengthened through deliberate practice, the impact of context and, sometimes, because of some intense, crucible experience (Byrne et al., 2018; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Moreover, character addresses strengths and deficiencies, whereas personality traits just are as they are. For example, we typically do not talk about a good or bad extrovert; however, we do emphasize strengths, excesses, and deficiencies in humanity or temperance (Potosky et al., 2023; Seijts et al., 2019). We also note that character—and presumably psychological capital—is heavily influenced by the work context, including an organization's systems and cultural values. Such factors have less influence on personality traits. For example, personality traits operate quite independently of context and culture (Monzani et al., 2023; Van Zyl et al., 2024). And whereas character is a malleable trait or disposition, psychological capital is a state, highly influenced by the situation or mindset of the respondent when taking the survey (F. Luthans, personal communication, August 6, 2006).

A second critical difference between the character as it relates to personality traits and psychological capital centers around their operationalization. For example, the character framework that forms the basis for our study is often treated as a network structure that recognizes the interdependencies among the dimensions of character as well as its constitutive elements (Crossan et al., 2017; Seijts et al., 2022). In contrast, personality traits and the four resources that comprise psychological capital—efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience—are typically treated as relatively independent without expecting that a weakness or strength in a dimension would undermine or support other dimensions. For example, developing strength in accountability and integrity without the support of humility and humanity could turn virtuous behavior into a vice—being dogmatic and arrogant (Crossan et al., 2016; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006). Because of the interconnected nature of the dimensions of character, leaders cannot arbitrarily choose which dimensions to demonstrate without risking their virtuous behavioral expression turning into a vice (e.g., courage turning into recklessness in the absence of temperance). The virtue-and-vice problem is understood as lack of connection across dimensions (Crossan et al., 2016; Monzani et al., 2021; Potosky et al., 2023). Thus, deficiencies in any of the character dimensions may compromise leaders' judgment (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006, 2010), given that judgment acts as the network's hub. No such interre-

lationships are typically defined (or explored) with psychological capital and personality traits.

Lastly, psychological capital has four resources: (1) having confidence (efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering toward goals and when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success (Luthans et al., 2015; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). These resources are, in fact, reflected in the character framework albeit under a different vocabulary (e.g., efficacy versus confidence or optimism). Luthans and Youssef-Morgan (2017, p. 25) wrote that their list of resources was never meant to be conclusive and "... that other positive psychological resources have considerable potential to be included in PsyCap [positive psychological capital]." Thus, it appears that, at least for now, the character framework is a more comprehensive, inclusive constellation of positive behaviors or personal resources.

Shaffer et al. (2016) argued that to establish a new construct or to validate an existing construct, researchers must demonstrate at least two things. First, they must show that the construct is conceptually distinct from related constructs. We articulated conceptual distinctions between character on the one hand versus personality traits and psychological capital on the other hand. Second, researchers must demonstrate that the construct is empirically distinct from related constructs. Thus, in Study 2, we controlled for psychological capital and personality traits when we examine the effect of character on stress coping responses through motivation to lead. For example, we expect to see a positive and significant correlation between the character and psychological capital. However, we also expect that character predicts significant variance in our variables of interest while including psychological capital and personality traits as control variables in our analyses. Doing so may also address the problem that omitted variables such as demographics, personality traits, and psychological capital might influence the results (Hill et al., 2021; Sackett et al., 2003). Our hypotheses are summarized in Figure 2B.

Method

Sample

We obtained permission from the senior leadership at the police college to collect additional data from an incoming cohort. The same procedures were used to recruit participants for our study. The cohort had 422 officers enrolled.

Design and Procedure

We used identical materials and procedures in our data collection as Study 1 with two important differences. First, we collected data through a single survey. We did so because the slippage in the collection of data experienced in Study 1 was a major problem. We were often unable to link the surveys the participants completed. Second, we added measures of psychological capital and personality traits to the survey. No changes were made to the measures we used in Study 1. Interestingly, our results indicated that there were neither substantial differences in the means and standard deviations for the measures we collected using the two formats (Studies 1 and 2) nor the pattern of relationships among the variables we obtained. Our final sample size after filtering for complete cases was 255 participants or a 60% effective response rate. The average age of the participants was 27.81 years (SD = 5.05). One-hundred-and-eighty-one males and 74 females completed the full surveys.

Instruments

Psychological capital. We measured psychological capital or PsyCap with 10 items taken from Luthans et al. (2007). We slightly rewrote some of

the items to make them domain specific; for example, we replaced "at work" with "in the program" (see Luthans & Youssef-Morgan 2017).[1] A sample item of the PsyCap scale is: "If I should find myself in a jam in the program, I could think of many ways to get out of it" (hope). The scale scores ranged from *never* (1) to *always* (6); the middle scores were *once a month or less* (3) and *a few times a month* (4). Empirical studies typically use the overall (or single) score for psychological capital in the analyses (Luthans et al., 2006, 2014).

Big Five personality dimensions. We used the 10-item inventory of the Big Five personality dimensions developed by Gosling et al. (2003). The Big Five personality framework has become the most widely used model of personality (Feher & Vernon, 2021; Gosling et al., 2003). The framework suggests that personality can be classified into five broad, empirically derived domains. Specifically, the traits or dimensions are agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, extraversion, and openness. Each dimension is captured by two items (e.g., for extraversion: extraverted and enthusiastic, or reserved and quiet). The participants were given 10 statements and told that these personality traits "may or may not apply to you." They were then asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with that statement. The scale scores ranged from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7); the midpoint of the scale was *neither agree* nor *disagree* (4).

Results

Sample Statistics

Tables 1 and 2 show the means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations among the measures we collected for Study 2. The means and standard deviations for the two studies were highly similar (see Cohen, 1988). Furthermore, the pattern of correlations among the measures was consistent in that most were in the same direction and similar in magnitude. Our results also indicated that multi-collinearity does not appear to be a problem. Notably, the correlation between character and psychological capital was 0.40 ($p < 0.001$) or a medium effect (Cohen, 1988). The magnitude of the correlations between character and the Big Five personality dimensions was medium at best, ranging from 0.12 ($p > 0.05$) to 0.38 ($p < 0.001$).

The overall score for psychological capital (M = 5.46, SD = 0.68) on a 6-point scale was relatively high. Across the Big Five personality dimensions, the participants scored highest on conscientiousness (M = 6.27, SD = 0.82) and emotional stability (M = 6.00, SD = 0.89) and lowest on extraversion (M = 4.94, SD = 1.31) and agreeableness (M = 4.86, SD = 1.00) on a 7-point scale.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

We conducted reliability and confirmatory factor analyses on the measures for character, motivation to lead, coping responses, and psychological capital to address convergent and discriminant validity of the measures. The fit indices of the models we tested are shown in Table 3. The RMSEA, SRMR, CFI, and TLI for our 6- and 8-factor models were satisfactory. As in Study 1, there was little indication that including the three facets for motivation to lead as separate dimensions (thus creating an 8-factor model) provided substantially better fit of the 6-factor model. Therefore, we proceeded with the more parsimonious 6-factor model. We removed one item (from the active problem-solving coping response) from subsequent analyses because the factor loading was low. Overall, the confirmatory factor analysis indicated that our measures for character, motivation to lead, the three dimensions for coping responses, and psychological capital represent related but distinct constructs.

1. PCQ Copyright © 2007 by Fred Luthans, Bruce J. Avolio and James B. Avey. All rights reserved in all media. Published by Mind Garden, Inc. at www.mindgarden.com. The survey was altered with the permission of the publisher.

Hypothesis Testing

We first tried to replicate the model we tested in Study 1 without the two additional control variables. We found that our model showed excellent fit to our data, $\chi^2(1) = 0.38$, $p = 0.54$; RMSEA = 0.00; SRMR = 0.01; CFI = 1.00; and TLI = 1.00. Consistent with Study 1, character significantly and positively predicted motivation to lead, $\beta = 0.44$, $p < 0.01$, and active problem-solving, $\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.01$. Furthermore, character significantly and positively predicted problem reappraisal, $\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.05$, and negatively predicted avoidance, $\beta = -0.19$, $p < 0.01$. These results supported Hypotheses 1, 2-a, 2-b, and 2-c. In contrast to Study 1, there were no significant relationships between motivation to lead and any of the coping responses. Gender significantly and positively predicted the avoidance coping response, $\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.05$. This finding suggests that women engage more in the negative response to stressful situations than men. No significant indirect paths from character to coping responses, through motivation to lead, were found. Therefore, Hypotheses 4a-c were not supported.

We then tested the model with the added control variables. We observed the fit indices of our initial model and found a suboptimal fit to our data, $\chi^2(7) = 61.28$, $p < 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.17; SRMR = 0.07; CFI = 0.82; TLI = 0.03, and one start without convergence. We then explored the modification indices. We added two additional paths that improved the model fit while remaining theoretically sound. Specifically, we added paths from psychological capital and agreeableness to motivation to lead. Our final structural equation model showed acceptable fit to our data, $\chi^2(5) = 10.39$, $p = 0.06$; RMSEA = 0.06; SRMR = 0.03; CFI = 0.98; and TLI = 0.87. We next observed the direct and indirect paths that tested our hypotheses (Figure 3B).

Again, consistent with Study 1, character significantly and positively predicted motivation to lead ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.001$) and active problem-solving ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.001$). These results support Hypotheses 1 and 2-a. There was no direct relationship between character and two dimensions of coping responses: problem reappraisal and avoidance. Furthermore, in contrast to Study 1, no significant relationships were found between motivation to lead and any of the coping responses. Finally, we considered our planned indirect paths which tested whether motivation to lead mediated the relationship between character and the coping responses. No significant indirect paths from character through motivation to lead were found. Therefore, Hypotheses 4a-c were not supported.

The results also revealed that gender positively and significantly predicted the avoidance coping response ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.01$). Psychological capital significantly and positively predicted motivation to lead ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < 0.01$) and problem reappraisal ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.01$), and significantly and negatively predicted avoidance ($\beta = -0.17$, $p < 0.05$). Agreeableness significantly and negatively predicted motivation to lead ($\beta = -0.20$, $p < 0.01$) and positively predicted problem reappraisal ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.05$). Emotional stability significantly and negatively predicted avoidance ($\beta = -0.33$, $p < 0.01$). Extraversion significantly and negatively predicted problem reappraisal ($\beta = -0.16$, $p < 0.05$) and avoidance ($\beta = -0.16$, $p < 0.01$).

Our outcome measures showed some significant correlations. Active problem-solving was significantly and positively associated with the two other coping responses: avoidance ($r = 0.15$, $p < 0.01$) and problem reappraisal ($r = 0.56$, $p < 0.01$) (as in Study 1).

Discussion

We expanded the existing body of research on character by examining both its direct and indirect effects through motivation to lead on stress coping responses, using two samples of law enforcement officers. We studied character as a personal resource to tackle stress

because post-traumatic stress disorder in law enforcement populations represents a significant health concern (Chan & Andersen, 2020; Horswill et al., 2021). Furthermore, we integrated the empirical literatures on character and motivation to lead, thereby bringing a deeper understanding of how and why individuals may choose to invest in leadership roles. Additionally, we included two variables closely related to character, namely, personality traits and psychological capital, as control variables in our analyses. Our aim was to demonstrate that character explains variance in the prediction of stress coping responses that may not be accounted for by established, empirically validated constructs that are seen as conceptually close to character.

The results we obtained revealed that character was positively associated with motivation to lead. This suggests that character is a personal resource that supports motivation. The results also indicated a robust direct positive effect of character on active problem-solving. Furthermore, our findings showed a direct and indirect positive effect of character on problem reappraisal through motivation to lead as well as a direct and indirect negative effect of character on avoidance. The pattern of results obtained in Studies 1 and 2 suggests that developing character may help to navigate personal and professional challenges. The direct effect of character on active problem-solving remained after including personality traits and psychological capital in our model (see Study 2). However, the direct effects on problem reappraisal and avoidance disappeared. We note that psychological capital was a positive predictor of motivation to lead, as well as a positive predictor of problem reappraisal and a negative predictor of avoidance. An unexpected yet interesting finding was that women tended to display the avoidance coping response more so than men. Emotional stability, extraversion, and agreeableness were related to two stress coping responses: avoidance and problem reappraisal.

Our results add to the understanding of the construct of character: its relationship with individually and organizationally relevant variables such as motivation to lead and stress coping responses, as well as how character is different—conceptually and empirically—from related constructs such as psychological capital and personality traits.

Our study is unique in that no prior research has explored the effect of character on the activation of stress coping responses by individuals who have a high likelihood to be exposed to potentially traumatic events, such as law enforcement officers, military personnel, firefighters, nurses, and social workers. However, continued programmatic research to develop a better understanding of the correlates and consequences of character is warranted. This is because a more robust understanding of character helps scholars and practitioners raise awareness of the importance of the construct, ensure it is brought to the forefront of leadership development, and initiate evidence-based practices to unlock sustained excellence in individuals and organizations through the exercise of effective leadership. We also feel it is important that current and emerging research discoveries pertaining to character based on a rich, diverse, and cumulative body of research be more fully integrated into existing leadership theories. Furthermore, our research contributes to the motivation to lead literature by identifying relevant antecedents and consequences of the construct, seen as a critical area to push research on leadership motivation forward.

The findings we obtained provide practical implications in particular for occupations with heightened risk of stress that could affect job satisfaction, job performance, absenteeism, teaming behaviors, and outcomes related to physical and psychological well-being, such as anxiety, burnout, depression, and suicide (Harzer & Ruch, 2015; Queirós et al., 2020; Sosik et al., 2020). Character is an important personal resource that

facilitates the use of effective stress coping responses (active problem-solving and problem reappraisal) and lessens the activation of dysfunctional coping responses (avoidance). Studies have shown that character can be developed in people through deliberate practice (Lindsay et al., 2020; Sosik, 2015). Hence, it is essential for organizations to fully appreciate the importance of character for effective personal functioning and, therefore, to support training and developmental opportunities to strengthen the various character dimensions in individuals to help them address adverse personal and professional situations. For example, reflecting on leadership development in the United States Air Force Academy, Lindsay et al. (2020) articulated that organizations must purposely engage the individual in a comprehensive manner to develop character that assesses, challenges, and supports them through a host of experiences and roles. Individuals – or cadets – should reflect on these learnings and then begin to practice habits of thought and action to exercise character and tackle the challenges that are presented to them. Such developmental opportunities may not only facilitate the use of effective coping responses and maintain well-being but may also build individuals' enthusiasm for accepting leadership roles through motivation to lead. There is a well-documented phenomenon in the practitioner literature that suggests that talented, high-potential individuals may be reluctant to take on leadership roles. Hence, interventions aimed at strengthening the dimensions that comprise motivation to lead – affective-identity, social-normative, and non-calculative – are of relevance in particular for those leadership roles that involve risk and sacrifice that may discourage individuals from taking on a leadership role.

Strengths, Limitations, and Areas for Future Research

Our studies have several strengths. First, the studies were conducted in a field setting involving law enforcement professionals who encounter both personally and professionally stressful situations while serving their communities. The research setting, therefore, allowed us to investigate the relationships among character, motivation to lead, stress coping responses, psychological capital, and personality traits in a meaningful way. Second, we tried to avoid the challenges associated with a cross-sectional design by collecting data in two waves with a 6-week time lag. We found no meaningful differences in the descriptive statistics between cohorts 1 and 3 in Study 1, whose data were collected with a time lag, and cohort 4 in Study 2, whose data were collected in a single sitting. However, we did obtain some differences in our structural equation models between the two studies. For example, unlike Study 1, there were no statistically significant relationships between motivation to lead and any of the stress coping responses in Study 2; in contrast, character was related to all three coping responses. Third, we used established, validated scales in our design. We used different response scales and randomized the order in which the items were presented to the participants. These procedures enhanced the internal validity of our results. Fourth, in examining the effect of character on coping responses through motivation to lead, we included several control variables in our design, including personality traits and psychological capital.

A limitation of our studies is that we did neither utilize an experimental design nor manipulate any of our variables. Consequently, we cannot firmly establish causal relationships. Furthermore, we measured our main variables of interest—character, motivation to lead, and coping responses—only once. It is highly likely that these variables are reciprocally related. For example, the effective use of coping responses in stressful situations may enhance character and motivation to lead, and an increase in motivation to lead may positively affect character through such dimensions as drive, courage, and accountability. Put differently, there may be positive feedback loops that we did not capture in our design. Furthermore, the data were self-reported. Our results did not indicate that there

were serious concerns with multi-collinearity. However, future studies should include other-evaluations of character and objective outcomes of stress to more firmly establish the results we obtained. Studies should also replicate and extend our findings, thus testing the generalizability of the results to other professions and settings. Importantly, the Crossan et al.'s (2017) framework is one of several models of character. Other frameworks include the Values in Action Character Strengths survey (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), the virtues-centered moral identity framework (Wang & Hackett, 2020), and the Character Strengths Rating Form (Ruch et al., 2014). These frameworks are based on different assumptions or theoretical perspectives. Scientific knowledge and theories are developed gradually based on accumulated research findings from quantitative and qualitative studies, both inductively and deductively. This requires humility and an open mind from researchers as opposed to what Locke and Latham (1990) label "barricade" theorists who are rigid in their thinking, deny the validity of disconfirming studies, and refuse to make any revisions to their theories. Future studies should aim to integrate and build on the findings and limitations of the different approaches to character. Also, researchers may want to probe the dimensionality of motivation to lead and its association with character, stress coping responses, and other work-related behaviors. For example, Badura et al. (2020) reported that the affective-identity dimension of motivation to lead tends to explain most of the variance in leader behavior and outcomes. This is because those individuals with high affective-identity motivation view holding a leadership role—and the ability to perform it effectively—as an important part of their identity. We expected that the directional effects of motivation to lead on the stress coping responses would be the same; furthermore, given sample size limitations, we chose the parsimonious model with fewer parameters as our final model and hence treated motivation to lead as a single or uniform construct. Future studies may want to consider in more detail the main and interactive effects of the individual dimensions of motivation to lead on stress coping responses and other outcome variables. Nevertheless, and despite these limitations, we believe that our results contribute to a deeper understanding of how character, a foundational personal resource, affects motivational processes and subsequent leadership behaviors and outcomes.

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RESEARCH

Cultivating Retention: Exploring Transformational Leadership Dynamics in Military Nursing through Qualitative Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

Background: The shortage of nurses heightened the need to retain nurses in the workforce, particularly within military treatment facilities (MTFs). Despite quantitative analyses on factors affecting nurse retention, qualitative aspects of nurses' free-text responses in routine surveys remain unexplored.

Objective: This study explored the impact of leadership, using qualitative data from the 2016 and 2018 Military Nursing Practice Environment Surveys, through the lens of the transformational leadership theory on preventable nurse attrition within the military health system (MHS).

Methods: Free-text responses from 1372 nurses in MTFs were analyzed using thematic content analysis methodology.

Results: Leadership emerged as the most prevalent concern, with 647 comments referencing leadership's impact on preventable loss. Analysis revealed 25 leadership subcodes, highlighting negative sentiments about manager and executive leader presence and engagement, lack of acknowledgment, and ineffective communication, constituting 61.3% of negative comments.

Conclusions: This study highlighted the importance of leadership in nurse retention within the MHS. The findings align with Bass's transformational leadership theory, emphasizing the need for idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Dissatisfaction with leadership trends resonates with the four pillars, suggesting that adopting a transformational leadership culture could positively impact MHS nurse retention. The recommendations include enhancing leadership visibility, improving communication channels, and fostering a supportive environment to address nurse dissatisfaction and prevent turnover.

Keywords: Nursing, Retention, Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Military Health System

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The global shortage of nurses, estimated at 5.9 million by the World Health Organization (2020), has brought the issue of nurse retention to the forefront. A 2023 report by the Government Accountability Office published a "Key Insights: Health Care Staffing," report highlighting that of 70 military installations, 85% reported a shortage of nurses (Warner, 2023). Given that the Military Health System (MHS) recruits its nursing workforce from the same pool of candidates as the civilian sector, which is also grappling with shortages, military leadership has responded to staffing shortages within military treatment facilities (MTFs) by implementing measures such as re-engaging retired nurses and rapidly onboarding new and contract staff (U.S. Department of Defense, 2020). The Army Nurse Corps routinely survey active-duty and civilian government service nurses, exploring various factors. These include job satisfaction, potentially preventable loss, intent to leave, and evaluating the practice environment using the Practice Environment Scale of the Nursing Work Index (Lake, 2002). The qualitative aspects of nurses' free-text responses on routine surveys have remained unexplored, and this article uses the 2016 and 2018 Military Nursing Practice Environment Survey (MNPES) to research into how cultivating a transformational leadership culture can impact MHS nursing retention. Based on the qualitative data, the concepts from Bass' theory on transformational leadership (Bass, 1985) appear lacking within the MHS and could help improve retention among military nurses. Bass' theory emphasizes the capacity of

leaders to drive inspiration and personal development among employees (Mengyue et al., 2023).

Bass delineated four critical characteristics of transformational leadership—the four I's—that encompass idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Idealized influence pertains to followers' recognition and alignment with leaders' values and goals, shifting focus from self-interest to collective objectives (Lai et al., 2020). Leaders who lead through idealized influence act as role models within their organizations, thus building a trusting relationship to embrace change (Kariuki, 2021). Trust is an essential element in the relationship that transformational leaders have with their followers and can determine the commitment of their employees (Givens, 2008). Inspirational motivation involves leaders effectively communicating a vision and motivating subordinates toward desired goals (Lai et al., 2020). Jyoti and Bhau (2015) explained the importance of relational identification. Employees with solid relational connections with their leader are motivated to fulfill their role expectations because of increased meaning within the workplace. This becomes challenging if leaders struggle to communicate effectively with their nursing staff to build a relationship. A leader's vision and developing a shared purpose are crucial to inspirational motivation (Jyoti & Bhai, 2015). Intellectual stimulation encourages subordinates to seek solutions that exceed expectations (Gabel, 2013). Finally, individualized consideration denotes leaders providing personalized support tailored to followers' needs (Lai et al., 2020). Adopting these transformational leadership principles could lead to a more supportive work environment, thereby improving nurse retention within the MHS.

Studies across sectors, including religious organizations, industries, technology, and laboratories, have demonstrated the effectiveness of transformational leaders possessing these four traits (Givens, 2008). A review of leadership research revealed that transformational leadership has much empirical evidence to support its effectiveness regarding multiple objective and subjective leadership outcomes. In response to employee organizational commitment, Hoch et al. (2018) found that transformational leadership was positively correlated with organizational and affective commitment in their transformational leadership meta-analysis research. Another meta-analysis by Bishop et al. (2023) examined 28 studies to assess the impact of transformational leadership on diverse leadership outcomes. Their meta-analysis used measures to differentiate the influence of transformational leadership at the individual, team, and organizational echelons. The findings highlighted transformational leadership's effect on employee satisfaction ($r = 0.34$), organizational commitment ($r = 0.33$), and team cohesion ($r = 0.32$), which are all retention factors worth noting as more effective than other leadership styles. There was a positive correlation between healthcare employee retention and transformational leadership in a 2016 study that examined supervisor transformational leadership behaviors and employee turnover intentions (Sow et al., 2016).

Based on the effectiveness of transformational leadership, this study recommends the development of transformational leadership through initiatives like training, coaching, and mentoring due to the qualitative responses of the MHS nursing staff. The article "Qualitative Research and the Study of Leadership" points out that examining leadership through qualitative means is beneficial as it provides a more comprehensive range of contextual variables based on people's experiences (Bryman et al., 1988). Karin Klenke (2016) published a book titled *Qualitative Research in the Study of Leadership*, which provides a framework for conducting qualitative interview studies in leadership research. However, this study is unique in considering MHS nurses' survey responses and providing transformational leadership recommendations.

This study investigates coded comments from over 1372 nurse free-text comments in the 2016 and 2018 MNPES, which revealed a predominant concern—

leadership within the organization and its impact on preventable loss (Miller et al., under review). Leadership was the largest coded category, encompassing 647 comments referencing leadership concerns as a factor in their retention status.

Method

We analyzed free-text responses from Licensed Practical Nurses and Registered Nurses across the Army, Navy, and Air Force who are actively involved in direct patient care at military medical treatment facilities (MTFs). The 1372 free-text comments that were analyzed came from the over 6000 respondents who answered the last free-text comment in the survey, "Is there anything else you would like to comment on?" This study is representative of the over 11,000 nurses within the MHS who were offered to complete the survey on a volunteer basis. Table 1 depicts the demographic breakdown of respondents. The focus was on frontline nursing staff, excluding leadership roles, nurse practitioners, and other nursing specialists. This exclusion aimed to minimize potential bias, acknowledging the distinct perspectives that leadership roles and varied nursing specialties might bring to the study. By concentrating on staff nurses primarily engaged in direct patient care, our study sought to capture a more homogeneous set of perceptions within the military nursing environment.

The MNPES was the data collection instrument that assesses various facets of the nursing practice environment, and the demographic data provide insights into the distribution of respondents across the military services and nursing roles. During the data processing phase, de-identified free-text comments were extracted. This study utilized a content analysis methodology with NVIVO Release 1.7.1. A descriptive-analytical framework was utilized to categorize comments, identify themes and word patterns, and assess sentiment frequencies (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

The comments were coded and categorized based on prevalent themes and the frequency of respondents' opinions and views among the free-text responses. Reliability and validity were increased by ensuring each comment was reviewed by at least two research team members. Two teams within the research group independently coded 140 responses for cross-validation, ensuring consistency (>90%) before advancing to the subsequent coding phase. Each team then focused on specific data segments, allowing for a more detailed analysis. Regular collaborative meetings were held to discuss findings, resolve coding discrepancies, and refine the schema. This approach facilitated the exploration of complex patterns and themes related to job satisfaction, intent to leave, and potentially preventable loss among

Table 1
Demographics

Service branch	Service type	Role	*n*	%
Air Force	Military	RN	8	0.58
Navy	Military	RN	11	0.81
Army	Military	RN	433	31.56
		LPN	67	4.88
	Civilian	RN	534	38.92
		LPN	319	23.25
Total			1372	100

RN: registered nurse; LPN: licensed practical nurse.

military nurses. The process continued until saturation, with a final agreement consistently above 90%. See Miller et al. (under review) for a complete description of the method and results.

Results

Among the 1372 free-text responses, the parent code leadership emerged as the most prevalent, resulting in 25 leadership subcodes. This prevalence signifies its importance as a factor susceptible to preventable loss among nurses within the MHS. A closer examination yielded the development of 10 subcodes that specifically addressed comments about nurses' perceptions of manager/supervisor leadership versus executive-level leadership. Table 2 outlines the distribution of the 630 leadership responses across the 25 subcodes in descending order by a percentage of positive and negative comments. There are 17 general leadership comments coded, which did not fit within the subcodes and are not included in Table 2.

There was a notable difference between the negative and positive comment categories. There were 17 subcodes for negative responses and only eight for positive comments. The total negative responses reached 552 segments, much more than the 78 positive responses.

Leadership Trends

The three largest coded categories were presence and engagement, lack of acknowledgment and response to employees, and ineffective communication. Due to the number of responses, those were further divided by references to managers or executive leadership.

Presence and Engagement

The category exhibiting the most prevalent leadership feedback was manager and executive presence and engagement (n = 199). From a negative perspective (n = 148), numerous comments highlighted a perceived lack of leadership presence. One statement emphasized the need for managers to allocate more time to daily challenges within the clinics: "Managers need to spend more time in the clinics, observing and understanding daily challenges." A similar sentiment was echoed regarding the executive leadership team. Their remarks included "Chain of Command is rarely visible within our work area" and "I do not even know the name of our Deputy Commander of Nursing, and their presence in our clinic is almost nonexistent." One suggestion emphasized the need for managers to enhance their visibility by conducting regular visits within their clinics: "Managers should be more visible on the units, rounding regularly." Leadership's lack of physical presence emphasizes a disconnection between staff and their leadership. While most of the comments were negative, roughly 25% had positive sentiments toward the presence of their manager and executive leadership (n = 51).

Acknowledgement and Response to Employees

The second most prevalent category, acknowledgment and response to employees, encompassed 20.6% (n = 114) of the total negative comments. At the executive level, a trend surfaced within comments echoing the feeling of being unheard. One respondent summarized this frustration: "Our concerns are continuously expressed but met with no assistance or concern." Similarly, a nurse expressed the absence of effective communication to agreed-upon plans, "There is a lack of solid communication and follow-through." Among the managerial comments (n = 63), nurses overwhelmingly criticized their leadership's lack of response to discussed concerns. One respondent highlighted the repeated dismissal of suggestions, stating, "Our ideas are consistently squashed, making it immensely challenging to feel heard." Insufficient acknowledgment from leadership demonstrates a general feeling of being unheard in times of difficulty.

Ineffective Communication

The third largest theme was nurse's dissatisfaction with leadership communication (n = 77). Among the 77 segments, nurses felt their manager's communication

Table 2
Leadership Subcodes

	Negative comments	
Subcode	***n***	**%**
Manager negative presence & engagement	82	26.8
Executive negative presence & engagement	66	
Manager lack of acknowledgment response to employees	63	20.6
Executive lack of acknowledgment & response to employees	51	
Manager's ineffective communication	52	13.9
Executive ineffective communication	25	
Policy management	35	6.3
Favoritism	29	5.2
Mistreatment & bullying	28	5.0
Unit leave management	27	4.8
Participation in decision-making	24	4.3
Hostile environment	20	3.6
Toxic Leadership	16	2.8
Lack of accountability	14	2.5
Lack of collaboration (teamwork)	13	2.3
Lack of standard operating procedures dissemination	4	0.7
Lack of standard operating procedures	3	0.5
	Positive comments	
Subcode	***n***	**%**
Manager positive presence & engagement	38	65.3
Executive positive presence & engagement	13	
Positive leadership	11	14.1
Positive collaboration (teamwork)	8	10
Manager effective leadership communication	3	5.1
Executive Effective Leadership communication	1	
Policy management (positive)	3	3.8
Positive environment	1	1.2

lacked the most (n = 52). One nurse's remarks highlight this: "Decisions are made, and those directly affected by them are the last to find out and often find out late after problems have already occurred." Another recurring response was unheard nurses: "No one truly sits down and talks about the issues with us." Among the executive-level comments on ineffective communication (n = 25), there was a sense among nurses of being uninformed. Multiple words echoed this sentiment: "Policies are set in place without any discussion, communication,

or training" or "Communication is all but absent; I do not feel supported and have not for many years by the nursing leadership of this hospital." When nurses feel uninformed about workplace changes and disconnected from decision-making processes, it can lead to increased dissatisfaction and a higher likelihood of seeking opportunities elsewhere.

These three categories—Presence and Engagement, Lack of Acknowledgment and Response to Employees, and Ineffective Communication—constitute more than half (61.3%) of the negative survey comments. Notably, 14.1% of the total comments were of nurses commending their leadership team. These comments suggested that positive leadership traits are being demonstrated across the MHS; however, the high percentage of negative comments engulfs the positive comments and offers potential areas for improvement.

Discussion

Nurses are the backbone of the MHS due to their multifaceted roles within MTFs (Jackson et al., 2022). Therefore, retaining nurses is vital to delivering high-quality, consistent healthcare. Concerns should be addressed to combat the negative sentiment among nurses within the MHS, as evidenced by the survey data. Bass and Avolio's four pillars of transformational leadership outlined in their book *Transformational Leadership and Organizational Culture* (1993)—idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—provide a framework for analyzing the impact of negative leadership traits on nursing retention within the MHS. Throughout this discussion, we will compare how dissatisfaction with their current leadership trends resonates with the four pillars of Bass's transformational leadership theory.

Idealized Influence

A leader's ability to influence their nurses' behaviors requires leaders to embody the behaviors they seek within their nurses. The survey results demonstrated that nurses believe that idealized influence is lacking within the presence and engagement survey results. Overall, nurses reported that their leaders were distant and disengaged from the daily clinic demands. Leaders cannot expect their nurses to feel connected to the organization and inspired to come to work each day if they are not demonstrating similar behaviors. To address this issue, leaders must strive to be more visible and accessible to their staff. In a healthcare setting, this can be achieved by participating in team meetings, engaging with nurses during clinic rounds and fostering more face-to-face interactions. An engaged leader has a better chance of inspiring their employees when their involvement is felt within the clinic. Leaders lead, by example, by embodying the values they expect from their nurses and actively engaging among their teams, which can create change to a more committed and inspiring workforce (Kariuki, 2021).

Inspirational Motivation

Motivating employees requires leaders to establish personal relationships with their employees by helping them realize their full potential. Nurses voiced dissatisfaction with their leaders' communication, sensing that decisions were made without their input or prior discussion. These actions can leave nurses uninformed, unheard, and disconnected from leadership, fostering disengagement. Leaders cannot create a sense of shared understanding unless employees feel connected to them. Presence and engagement are fundamental for cultivating this connection, but effective communication is equally important in establishing shared meaning. MHS leaders can reassess the communication channels through which information is disseminated to their nurses. Regular town hall or department meetings led by leadership, including all hospital/department employees, will ensure policies, updates, and organizational information sharing. These gatherings allow nurses to voice their concerns and feel empowered, fostering shared understanding within the organization. This approach aims to cultivate a more connected and

inspired nursing staff, enabling them to comprehend the "why" behind their leaders' intentions.

Intellectual Stimulation

The concept of intellectual stimulation in nursing leadership ties into the issue of nursing retention. When nurses feel their innovative thoughts and expertise are not valued, it impacts their commitment to their roles (Kamalaveni et al., 2019). This discontent was the third most prevalent coded survey response labeled "acknowledgment and response to employees." Nurses seek an environment where their contributions are valued, and their ideas are encouraged. Nurses' responses within the survey overwhelmingly expressed that their concerns were ignored by the lack of response to their needs, or that their ideas were dismissed. When acknowledgment is absent, it can lead to dissatisfaction, which drives them to seek employment elsewhere.

Encouraging a culture of inclusion by incorporating nurses' insights at all levels is crucial. Actively involving nurses in decision-making empowers them and aligns their interests with the organization's goals. Creating venues/meetings for idea exchange and investing in continuous education develops an environment conducive to growth. Empowering nurses to lead change initiatives they are interested in can increase commitment to the workplace. Recognizing expertise reinforces nurses' sense of worth and encourages further engagement. Due to intrinsic motivation, nurses who experience intellectual stimulation can exhibit higher job satisfaction and commitment. Leaders are pivotal in fostering an intellectually stimulating environment that ensures a more fulfilling and engaging workplace for nurses.

Individualized Consideration

Individualized consideration requires personalized support for the unique needs of each employee (Lai et al., 2020). The presence and engagement category highlights how a leader's physical presence is essential for personalized support. The negative feedback from the survey demonstrates a concern in leadership's understanding of their nurses' day-to-day challenges. Comments revealed that nurses' desire for increased presence among their leadership aligns with the foundation of individualized consideration. Accessible leaders can understand the needs of their nursing staff and can offer personalized support. In addition, the second most consistent theme of "acknowledgment and response to employees" highlights the significance of leaders attending to their employees. Nurses expressed frustration at feeling disregarded despite articulating their concerns. A leader's lack of acknowledgment of their employees impacts that leader's ability to support them at the individual level. Individualized consideration consists of leaders responsive to their staff, ensuring each concern is heard with leader support and coaching (Khan et al., 2020).

Limitations

This study's limitations included the use of cross-sectional data, which limited the breadth and scope of the analysis. However, the broad prompt provided rich data for analysis of nursing team personnel's perceptions regarding their turnover intentions. In addition, open-ended questions tend to be negatively biased; however, given the survey's focus on intent to leave, this bias likely had little impact on our findings (Poncheri et al., 2008). Future studies should include more significant numbers of Air Force and Navy nurses and all resource personnel.

Conclusion

The importance of retaining nurses within the MHS cannot be overstated due to their essential roles in delivering quality healthcare. The survey results emphasize the need to address the negative sentiments among MHS nurses. There was a difference in 522 negative comments and 78 positive comments related to leadership. The Four Pillars of Transformational Leadership by Bass is a framework that MHS leaders could adopt to demonstrate how leadership traits can positively impact potentially preventable loss trends within the 2016 and 2018 survey responses. The most prevalent trends from the survey are lack of

presence, acknowledgment, and effective communication, which are issues that make nurses feel undervalued and unheard, leading to increased turnover and impacting patient care. Leaders can help reverse the negative sentiment among MHS nurses by creating a more supportive, engaged, and empowered MHS nursing workforce.

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RESEARCH

Mindset about Talent Moderates the Effect of Grit on Academic Performance: Evidence from West Point Cadets

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ABSTRACT

Grit, defined as perseverance and passion for pursuing long-term goals, is an important predictor of academic achievement. Whether mindset about talent moderates the relationship between grit and academic achievement has not been tested. Institutional data collected prior to starting at West Point was analyzed using hierarchical multiple regression to assess the predictive power of grit, physical fitness test scores, entrance exam scores, mindset about talent, and the interaction between grit and mindset about talent on first semester and cumulative academic performance for 1140 cadets from the Class of 2019. Hierarchical

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regression results showed that grit, physical fitness, and entrance exam scores significantly predicted first semester grades, as did the grit by mindset about talent interaction. Regression results predicting cumulative academic performance showed grit and entrance exam scores to be significant predictors, along with the grit by mindset interaction. Although entrance exam scores were the best predictor of both outcomes, simple slope analyses showed that the strongest association between grit and academic performance was observed for cadets with fixed mindsets about talent. Having a fixed mindset about talent moderated the relationship between grit and academic performance at two points in time for West Point cadets.

Keywords: Grit, Mindset, Military, Performance, Academic Achievement

The United States Military Academy at West Point (USMA) produces approximately one out of every six commissioned Army officers each year (U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 2019). For over 200 years, West Point has been building, educating, training, and inspiring Cadets to become leaders of character within the military and nation (USMA, n.d.-a). To maintain its status as a preeminent leader development institution, West Point consistently assesses and refines its experiential leadership curriculum to optimize performance outcomes. The past two decades have seen a growing interest in how noncognitive constructs such as grit and mindset are associated with various performance outcomes (e.g., Duckworth et al., 2007, 2019; Peterson et al., 2024).

Grit, defined by Duckworth et al. (2007) as perseverance and passion for pursuing long-term goals, predicts performance across numerous domains, including academic performance among Ivy league students (Duckworth et al., 2007) and West Point cadets (Duckworth et al., 2019). Although Credé et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis showed the association between grit and performance outcomes to be modest at best, Lam and Zhou's (2022) meta-analysis found grit to be a modest but consistent predictor of academic achievement, even across cultures. Still, grit might be best considered as simply one of many variables that explain variance in performance outcomes. Prior research with 10 cohorts of West Point cadets found that grit contributes in different ways depending on the nature of the criterion variable. For example, entrance exam scores best predicted academic achievement, but grit and physical ability predicted similar amounts of additional variance by adding incrementally to the predictive power of entrance exam scores (Duckworth et al., 2019). Indeed, if a long-term goal is to graduate from West Point, then being persistent enough to keep striving towards that goal despite encountering some of the inevitable setbacks and challenges associated with service academy life should also help predict performance. However, the role of an individual's mindset about talent in the grit-academic performance relationship remains unexplored.

Mindsets involve implicit beliefs about whether traits and characteristics, such as intelligence, athleticism, or creativity, are fixed or malleable (Dweck, 1999, 2006; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Whereas grit focuses on the behaviors that a person engages in when pursuing long-term goals and facing challenges or obstacles along the way (Duckworth et al., 2007), mindsets appear to exert influence by affecting goal choices and motivation, along with how people interpret and react to results and feedback (Dweck, 2017). Theoretically, both grit and mindset about talent may influence academic achievement by affecting how students engage in their goal pursuits and respond to setbacks.

Dweck proposed that mindsets exist on a continuum, with a fixed mindset at one end and a growth mindset at the other (see Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Yeager & Dweck, 2012 for reviews). Individuals who operate with fixed mindsets about intelligence or personality tend to believe that these attributes are unchangeable. These individuals would be unlikely to strive for improvement in domains where they believe their existing abilities are fixed. However, a person with a growth mindset would consider the targeted talent or characteristic to be more malleable, such that engaging in deliberate effort to try to develop in a malleable domain might be worthwhile. A growth mindset is associated with embracing challenges, learning from mistakes, and believing that improvement is possible when effort is combined with effective strategies (Dweck, 2017).

Research on mindsets to date has primarily focused on how beliefs about the malleability of intelligence relate to academic achievement. Although some studies found null effects (e.g., Li & Bates, 2019) and meta-analytic findings suggest the overall effect sizes to be small (i.e., Sisk et al., 2018), results generally support the notion that growth mindset is associated with better academic performance. The large-scale *National Study of Learning Mindsets* found growth mindset to be associated with better academic performance for low-achieving students as well as increased enrollment in advanced mathematics courses (Yeager et al., 2019). Rege et al. (2021) found evidence linking growth mindset with challenge-seeking behavior for samples from two different countries. Claro and Loeb (2019) also found growth mindset and academic performance to be positively related, and the 2018 *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) results showed a positive relationship between growth mindset and academic performance in samples from 72 of 76 countries (OECD, 2019). Thus, the combination of high grit and a growth mindset about talent might be especially advantageous for excelling in academics at West Point, though no prior studies have addressed such a possibility.

The purpose of the current study was to extend the understanding of how grit predicts academic achievement in a military education context to include consideration of mindset about talent. We hypothesized that mindset about talent would moderate the relationship between grit and first semester academic performance for cadets at West Point and account for variance above and beyond entrance exam scores, physical physical fitness assessment scores, and grit scores. We also hypothesized that mindset would moderate the relationship between grit and final cumulative academic performance scores in a similar manner.

Method

Participants

The initial sample included all cadets (N = 1262) in the graduating Class of 2019 at West Point. Demographics resembled other recent cohorts, with approximately 22% female, 61% Caucasian, 12% African American, 11% Hispanic/Latino, 8% Asian, and 8% from other backgrounds or more than one. The average age was 18.35. With both Institutional Review Board approval as an exempt study of secondary data (control numbers 21–121 and CA-2023-63) and USMA approval, cadets' data for each variable described below were obtained from existing institutional records. Cadets with missing or incomplete data were excluded. Demographics for the final sample of 1140 resembled the initial cohort.

Procedure and Measures

All Cadets completed an assessment battery the second or third day of summer training in 2015, which included the eight-item Grit-S scale (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009) and three items that measured mindset (Dweck, 2006). Four grit items tap the perseverance component (e.g., "Setbacks don't discourage me") and four tap consistency of interest, or passion (e.g., "I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one"). Cadets rated how much they agreed with each statement on a scale of 1–5, from "not at all like me" to "very much like me." After reverse coding, we calculated

average scores, with higher scores reflecting more grit. The three mindset items tapped beliefs regarding the malleability of talent (e.g., "You have a certain amount of talent, and you can't really do much to change it"). Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with each statement on a scale of 0–5, with 0 indicating strong disagreement and 5 indicating strong agreement. All items were negatively worded and reverse coded so that low scores reflected a fixed mindset and high scores reflected growth mindset about talent. Coefficient alpha for the Grit-S and mindset scales reflected acceptable reliability at 0.74 and 0.93, respectively.

Highest college entrance exam score on the SAT or ACT served as an index of prior academic achievement, with ACT scores converted to the SAT scale using published concordance rates (ACT, 2018). Scores on the Cadet Fitness Assessment (CFA), which consisted of six timed tests on activities such as a one-mile run and pull-ups, served as an index of physical ability. The CFA was administered prior to arrival at West Point in 2015. Outcome measures included first semester academic program scores (APST1) and final cumulative scores for the academic program (APSC) at graduation.

Analytic Strategy

Two separate hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted with APST1 and APSC serving as the dependent variables. Entrance exam score, CFA, and grit were entered as predictors in the first step, mindset was added in the second step, and the grit by mindset interaction was added in the third step. Continuous predictors and the interaction term were mean-centered prior to analyses. To evaluate the influence of missing data, we tested whether data were missing completely at random and then imputed 30 datasets to determine whether the results using the combined parameter estimate were consistent with the simpler complete-case approach. The resulting pooled estimates were not substantially different for either APST1 or APSC, although CFA was a significant predictor of APSC when using imputed data but not when using the complete-case approach. Given that the difference did not involve grit, mindset, or the interaction term, we present and interpret results from the more conservative complete-case analyses.

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations among predictor variables are presented in Table 1. Table 2 displays results from hierarchical regression analyses predicting APST1. The analyses showed that entrance exam scores, grit, and CFA predicted APST1 in the first step. Mindset did not result in an improved model or predict APST1 in step 2. However, the grit by mindset interaction in step 3 was statistically significant and improved model prediction, indicating that mindset moderated

Table 1

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among variables

Variable	Mean (Std. Dev.)	Correlations			
		CFA	EE	Grit	Mindset
Cadet fitness assessment	584.92 (70.31)	–	0.08**	0.06*	-0.01
Entrance exam	1325.19 (114.68)	–	–	-0.09***	-0.12***
Grit	3.70 (0.61)	–	–	–	0.19***
Mindset	2.94 (1.37)	–	–	–	–

CFA: Cadet Fitness Assessment; EE: Entrance exam.
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

Table 2

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting First Semester Academic Program Scores (N = 1112)

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	***SE B***	***β***	***B***	***SE B***	***β***	***B***	***SE B***	***β***
Constant	2.88	0.02		2.88	0.02		2.89	0.02	
CFA	0.00	0.00	0.09**	0.00	0.00	0.09**	0.00	0.00	0.10**
Entrance exam	0.00	0.00	0.63**	0.00	0.00	0.63**	0.00	0.00	0.63**
Grit	0.14	0.03	0.11**	0.14	0.04	0.11**	0.14	0.04	0.11**
Mindset				0.00	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01
Grit × Mindset							-0.07	0.02	-0.08**
R^2		0.648			0.648			0.653	
F for change in R^2		267.183**			0.020			12.427**	

Note: All variables plus the interaction term were mean centered.
**$p < 0.01$.

the relationship between grit and first semester academic performance. Following Holmbeck (2002), we probed the significant interaction using post-hoc simple slopes testing at 1 SD above and 1 SD below the mean on mindset scores, which allowed us to retain the variables as continuous. The slope for 1 SD below the mean was considered to represent a relatively fixed mindset, whereas the slope for 1 SD above the mean was considered to represent more of a growth mindset. Simple slope analyses revealed a significant positive association for the fixed mindset and grit association ($B = 0.234$, SE = 0.039, $p < 0.001$), but the test for the association between growth mindset and grit was nonsignificant ($B = 0.044$, SE = 0.041, $p = 0.283$). In other words, the association between fixed mindset and grit appears to have been driving the observed interaction rather than the association between growth mindset and grit. Figure 1 depicts the interaction predicting APST1 as the outcome.

Results from hierarchical multiple regression analyses predicting final APSC showed that entrance exam scores and grit both predicted APSC in the first step, although CFA scores did not. Mindset did not result in an improved model or predict APSC in step 2. However, the grit by mindset interaction in step 3 improved model prediction and was statistically significant; mindset moderated the relationship between grit and cumulative academic performance (see Table 3). Tests of simple slopes at 1 SD below and 1 SD above the mean on mindset scores again showed a significant positive association for fixed mindset and grit ($B = 0.131$, SE = 0.030, $p < 0.001$), but that the association between growth mindset and grit was nonsignificant ($B = 0.026$, SE = 0.030, $p = 0.397$). Figure 2 depicts the interaction predicting APSC as the outcome.

Discussion

Results showing that entrance exam scores, grit, and physical ability predicted first semester academic performance and that entrance exams scores and grit predicted final cumulative academic program scores are generally consistent with prior research that included 10 cohorts of West Point cadets (i.e., Duckworth et al., 2019). More important, results from the current study also support the hypotheses that mindset moderates the link between

Figure 1

First Semester Academic Program Score by Grit Level by Type of Mindset

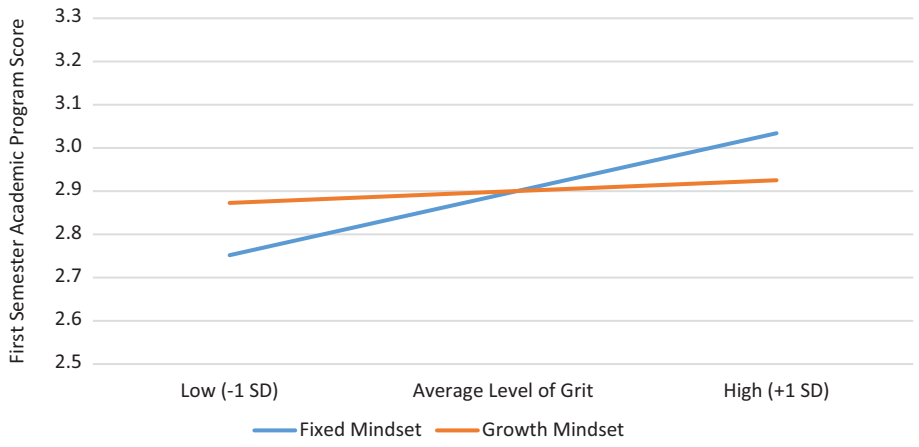


Table 3

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Cumulative Academic Program Scores (N = 959)

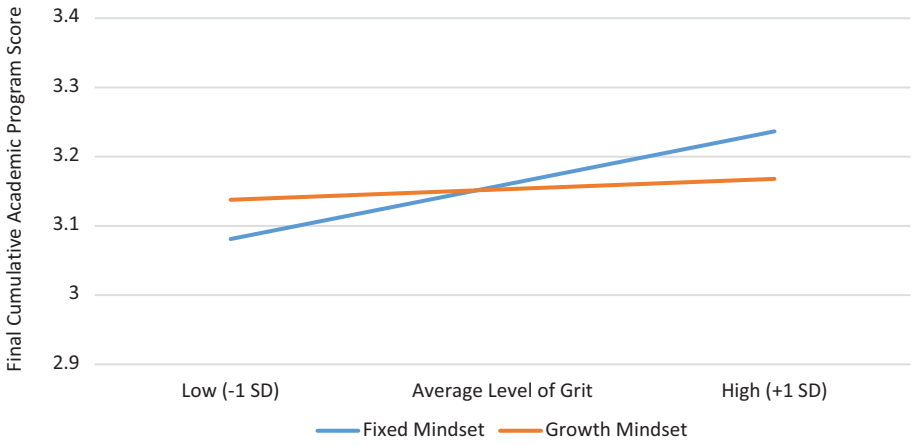
Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	*SE B*	*β*	*B*	*SE B*	*β*	*B*	*SE B*	*β*
Constant	3.12	0.01		3.12	0.01		3.13	0.01	
CFA	0.00	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.00	0.04
Entrance exam	0.03	0.00	0.61**	0.03	0.00	0.61**	0.03	0.00	0.61**
Grit	0.08	0.02	0.09**	0.08	0.02	0.10**	0.08	0.02	0.10**
Mindset				0.00	0.01	-0.01	0.00	0.01	0.00
Grit × Mindset							-0.04	0.02	-0.07**
R^2		0.606			0.606			0.610	
F for change in R^2		184.857**			0.076			6.776**	

Note: All variables plus the interaction term were mean centered.
**$p < 0.01$.

grit and academic performance at West Point. First, mindset moderated the relationship between grit and early academic performance, specifically the first semester. Mindset also moderated the link between grit and final cumulative academic performance for West Point graduates. In both cases the pattern was similar: the relationship between grit and academic performance was strongest for cadets with a fixed mindset about talent and nonsignificant for cadets with a growth mindset. In other words, grit levels mattered most for cadets with a fixed mindset, which is inconsistent with the notion that growth mindset paired with high grit might lead to high levels of academic achievement. Interventions designed to either boost grit or reduce fixed mindset among low grit cadets may prove beneficial. However, promoting a growth mindset among very gritty cadets could ironically undermine their high levels of academic achievement as these cadets appear to be successful in academics

Figure 2

Final Cumulative Academic Program Score by Grit Level by Type of Mindset



even if, or perhaps specifically because, they consider their talent levels to be fixed.

Findings from the current study also revealed a modest positive correlation ($r = 0.19$, $p < 0.001$) between mindset and grit. This finding is consistent with cross-sectional studies examining both variables in the educational domain using samples of children and adolescents from the United States (e.g., Tucker-Drob et al., 2016; West et al., 2016). However, both Zeng et al. (2019) and Zhao et al. (2018) found the correlation to be stronger in samples of teachers as well as primary and middle school students in China, and there is some evidence that grit and growth mindset influence each other developmentally. Park et al.'s (2020) 2-year longitudinal study of 1600 eighth graders in the United States showed that grit and growth mindset were correlated both between and across waves when measured at 6-month intervals four different times ($rs = 0.18–0.23$). They suggested that grit and growth mindset influence each other in a virtuous cycle, as each predicted rank order increases in the other over time. Given the observed pattern of results in the current study, where a fixed mindset rather than a growth mindset moderated the relationship between grit and academic achievement, investigating how these variables may influence each other over time in a military education context merits additional study.

There also are study limitations worth noting. First, there is no means of assessing whether cadets with a fixed mindset believed their talent to be fixed at a low or high level. Without knowing whether they believed their talent to be fixed in an advantageous or disadvantageous way, assessing the potential impact this factor is not possible. For some cadets, successes may have come somewhat easily (and often), and their history of sustained achievement may be linked to the belief that their abilities and achievements are inborn and relatively fixed. For other cadets, success may have come only with persistent effort, which is consistent with prior research showing the perseverance of effort aspect of grit to be more strongly correlated with performance outcomes than the consistency or interest, or passion, component (i.e., Credé et al., 2017). Ascertaining the specific nature of their beliefs about their talent being fixed is worthy of future research. Finally, the current study does not help explain the exact means through which mindset

exerts influence on the relationship between grit and academic performance.

These limitations notwithstanding, results from this study have important implications. The message that cadets need to have grit and other positive traits to develop as a leader of character is stated directly in the description of the performance facet of the West Point Leader Development System (USMA, n.d.-b; see also Peterson et al., 2024). Character is also of central focus at the United States Naval Academy (Macris et al., 2024), the United States Air Force Academy (Abbatiello & Lindsay, 2024), and the United States Coast Guard Academy (Giambra et al., 2024). While grit may not be explicitly labeled as an essential element in their educational and developmental experiences, cadets and midshipmen at these academies are likely to receive similar messages regarding its importance in character. Messages regarding the importance of mindset, on the other hand, are less clear. Regardless, nurturing a growth mindset for cadets who are less gritty or trying to build grit among cadets who have a fixed mindset may enhance academic performance.

Conclusions

Results from the current study extend knowledge of the role of grit in academic performance at West Point by demonstrating that mindset about talent moderates the relationship between grit and both first semester and final cumulative academic performance. In both cases, a fixed mindset was associated with the strongest relationship between grit and performance. Cadets with fixed mindsets who were high in grit outperformed their less gritty peers who also had fixed mindsets. Thus, the effect of grit on academic performance appears to depend on mindset about talent.

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RESEARCH

Sleep and Leadership in a Military Context

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ABSTRACT

Sleep can have a profound impact on leadership and overall mission effectiveness. This narrative review summarizes literature related to sleep and leadership, and demonstrates the importance of both leader and subordinate sleep. Evidence is provided for the general lack of sleep among military members, further demonstrating the relevance of this topic. Practical tools are then provided that may aid leaders in improving the sleep and effectiveness of their respective organizations.

Keywords: Sleep, Fatigue, Leadership

Introduction

In a recent article in *Sleep Advances*, we presented findings from a 7-year retrospective analysis where we recorded the sleep and mood of more than 1000 U.S. Navy sailors aboard eight surface ships (McClernon et al., 2024). We found that sailors who reported worse mood slept less, had worse sleep quality, and had a higher incidence of split sleep (i.e., naps). We found numerous other occupational and lifestyle variables that contributed to sleep and mood outcomes. In the Discussion of that paper, we briefly discussed the impact that poor sleep could also have on leadership, chain of command, and ultimately mission effectiveness; but that study did not directly address these topics. The present narrative review expands on the relationship between sleep and leadership in a military context and then provides suggestions on how to improve military effectiveness.

Sleep and Leadership

Numerous studies have addressed the effects that sleep can have on leader-follower relationships. Guarana and Barnes (2017) conducted a study on 123 leader-follower dyads in a wide range of industries where the follower was a new hire

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(i.e., the first 3 days at a new job). Participants were asked to report how much sleep they received prior to a survey assessing the leader-follower working relationship, leader-and-follower hostility, and other demographic and occupational variables (age, gender, experience, etc.). They found that sleep duration did not predict self-evaluations of leader-follower working relationship quality, but sleep did relate to the other coworker's perceptions of their working relationship. More specifically, if a leader slept less, then the subordinate's appraisal of their working relationship was less favorable; likewise, if a subordinate slept less, then their superior rated their working relationship less favorably. Further analyses determined that this relationship between sleep and working relationships was mediated by hostility – if a leader/follower slept less, then they were viewed by their coworker as more hostile, and this hostility negatively affected their working relationship.

To test how pervasive and long-lasting the effects of sleep are on workplace relationships, Guarana and Barnes (2017) conducted a second study on 40 leaders and 120 newly hired subordinates in a large legal service firm over a yearlong period. Every 15 days, the participants were asked to provide their sleep duration over the preceding 15-day period, and then asked questions pertaining to workplace relationships and hostility. Similar to their first study, they found that leader/follower sleep positively correlated with coworker perceptions of the workplace relationship, and this relationship was mediated by hostility. However, they found that after these initial perceptions were formed (first 15 days), they were maintained throughout the 12-month period regardless of sleep duration – sleep was not a predictor of workplace relations later in their tenure together. Other research has also shown that leader-follow relationships are heavily influenced by early social interactions in working relationships (Graen & Scandura, 1987; Nahrgang et al., 2009).

There are existing psychology constructs that may explain these results. First, these results are directly related to attribution theory which posits that individuals interpret others' shortcomings as individual flaws (e.g., "That person is mean!"), while disregarding external influences (in this case sleep), and people bias their own personal affect to external influences (e.g., "Well, I did not sleep well last night"). The overemphasis on interactions early in a relationship is consistent with the psychological concepts of anchoring bias or first impression bias. Initial social interactions and the resulting opinions are weighted disproportionately, and these opinions are difficult to change. This is especially important in a military context when the very first interactions military members have (basic military training) are not flattering for either party. Arguably, most social interactions occurring early in the tenure of a military assignment (or any workplace environment) can consist of uneasiness, nervousness, and poor sleep, negatively influencing future working relationships.

Other research on sleep and leadership indicates that leaders who were sleep-deprived were perceived by their coworkers as less charismatic and less inspirational (Barnes et al., 2016; Johnson, 2009). Sleep-deprived individuals are also unable or unwilling to notice the negative side effects of their poor sleep (Van Dongen et al., 2003) and react more emotionally, especially with negative emotions (Gailliot et al., 2006; Gujar et al., 2011; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Compounding this relationship, individuals are typically unaware of or underestimate the negative effects poor sleep can have on their social interactions (Banks & Dinges, 2007).

The trends are similar in a military context. Olsen et al. (2016) asked 64 cadets at the Royal Norwegian Naval Academy to participate in simulated combat exercises in a naval navigation simulator. Sixteen of the cadets were selected as leaders for multiple simulation trials. Using a repeated measures design, the assigned leaders received either normal unrestricted sleep or limited sleep (<3 hours per day) in the 5 days preceding the simulator trials. Video recordings of the leaders were assessed for leadership characteristics by expert raters

who were blinded to the condition. Results indicated that sleep-deprived leaders exhibited lower ratings of both transformational and transactional leadership (both positive styles of leadership), and they exhibited higher ratings of passive-avoidant leadership (a negative style of leadership).

Sleep in the Military

The relationship between sleep and leadership is especially disconcerting given the prevalence of poor sleep observed in military populations. Matsangas and Shattuck (2020) collected sleep data from 944 U.S. Navy sailors, and using a standardized subjective sleep instrument (Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index, PSQI) they found that more than 80% of the population was classified as "poor sleepers." Sailors in this study averaged 6.60 hours of daily sleep – below the 7 hours of sleep per day recommended to promote optimal health in adults (Watson et al., 2015) – and 86.9% of the participants took naps. Another issue that further compounds the negative effects of poor sleep in a military context is that many active-duty service members are young adults and therefore require 9 or more hours of sleep per night (Watson et al., 2015). In general, research shows that more than half of military members do not get at least 7 hours of sleep per night (McDonald et al., 2019; Mysliwiec et al., 2013; Seelig et al., 2016).

Poor sleep is not limited to an operational context, and is also prevalent in training environments. A study of soldiers attending the Noncommissioned Officer Academy and the Warrant Officer Candidate School reported that the participants slept, on average, 5.8 hours per night (Killgore et al., 2008). A study of 392 U.S. Army basic combat trainees also found that participants slept less than 6 hours a night (Miller et al., 2012). A longitudinal study at the U.S. Military Academy (USMA) studied a single cohort of cadets during their time as students from 2004 to 2007 (Miller et al., 2010). This population of college-aged participants slept less than 5.5 hours on school nights, with variations in sleep attributed to academic year, season, sex, and day of the week. USMA cadets also received the least nighttime sleep during their first (freshman) year – a formative time in leader-follow relationships – when females and males averaged 5.4 hours and 5.1 hours of sleep per night, respectively.

In an ongoing study by the author investigating the effects that sleep has on marksmanship performance, the trends are the same. This exploratory pilot study on members of the Air Force Academy's Rifle Team during the 2023/2024 NCAA season (9 months) shows that cadets averaged less than 7 hours of daily sleep and received less than 6 hours of daily sleep on 25% of the 213 days observed. This study also revealed a difference in daily sleep when comparing the 2 days leading up to a rifle competition, and the 2 days following competition, 6.3 and 7.0 hours, respectively. This may be attributed to the stress of an impending competition, competing military and academic responsibilities in the days before a meet, or the travel associated with away meets. This sleep debt can have an impact on military effectiveness as observed in the cadets' shooting performance where the average sleep duration in the 2 days prior to a meet was correlated with the average shooting performance at that meet, $r(79) = 0.47, p < 0.001$. More data and analysis in addition to a larger study with more participants are needed.

Discussion

This narrative review highlights the impact that sleep can have on leader-follower relations. But what do these findings mean for leadership in the military? What leverage is available to leaders to affect change? The most glaring impedance to proper sleep in the military is a culture that embraces, if not applauds, poor sleep. Late nights of work, copious consumption of caffeine, and tired eyes have historically been the hallmarks of a hard-working officer. However, combined with the findings that sleep-deprived leaders are unaware of their own shortcomings to include hostility

(Barnes et al., 2016), it is likely that tired leaders are less effective and unaware of this fact.[1]

Our Naval Postgraduate School Crew Endurance research team had a recent engagement with a Navy Admiral that highlighted the importance of culture change. This intellectual, insightful (and rested) leader was well-read in sleep literature, and he decided to do something about his own sleep health as a model for his subordinates. He adjusted his schedule around his circadian and sleep cycle. His staff knows that social engagements, especially those involving alcohol (a known hindrance to proper sleep), must finish at a reasonable hour. Dinners must begin early in the evening to prevent late consumption of food (another hinderance). His home sleep environment is modeled after the best sleep guidance: no electronic devices, no food, limited natural light, cool temperature, etc. (see Walker, 2017 for more). His governing philosophy is that proper sleep and all of the benefits that take place during a proper night of rest (again, see Walker, 2017) are more beneficial than the additional time spent working. It is likely that he is a better leader because of it.

These suggested changes in culture sound simple in an uncontested environment. However, combat presents many challenges to sleep, and our enemies do not wait for us to be well rested. Even in a high operational tempo environment, strategies can be implemented that have an empirical basis. After numerous complaints from Navy sailors, the Crew Endurance team investigated an alternative approach to revolving watchstanding schedules. The previous shift schedules had sailors working at a different time each day, never allowing their body to maintain proper circadian entrainment, and thus resulting in poor sleep. After collecting data and minimizing fatigue with modeling tools, they developed a novel, circadian-based watchstanding schedule that allowed sailors to sleep at the same time each day with the same manning. These data-driven watch schedules are still in use today. Even with these successes, the military still falls short in minimizing fatigue. One military context that likely presents the most control of daily schedules is a training environment, and as shown above, it is in these controlled environments that our military members still experience poor sleep.

Changes can be made to training environments that are proven to improve numerous metrics of readiness. In a study at Navy Basic Training, the sleep schedule of trainees was adjusted to increase the allotted sleep time from 6 to 8 hours a night. As a result of this single change, test scores improved, attrition was drastically decreased, and illnesses among the trainees were significantly decreased (Andrews, 2004; Miller et al., 2004). Most leaders would agree that a reduction in daily productivity by 2 hours for these dramatic improvements in overall organizational effectiveness is good value and good leadership.

As stated, research also shows that working relationships are formed and hardened in the early days of a relationship. Given the difficulties associated with reassignments in the military to include often crossing numerous time zones and increasing fatigue, these relationships are more likely to get off on the wrong foot in a military setting. Policy that allows for smooth transitions and circadian alignment could have long-term benefits in the form of better leadership, higher retention rates, and overall better combat effectiveness.

Training on proper sleep hygiene is another strategy for combating sleep and, thus, improving leadership in the military. A study investigating the efficacy of sleep training provided a 1-hour sleep training course to 39 U.S.

1 There is a population of military members that have either diagnosed or undiagnosed sleep disorders, and these comments are only implied to refer to healthy individuals who are not receiving proper sleep due to self-imposed or external demands.

Army leaders while another 37 leaders did not receive the training (Adler et al., 2021). The training expanded on the following five leader behaviors that can improve a unit's sleep outcomes:

1. Set conditions for adequate sleep through addressing work stress and creating a good physical sleeping environment in terms of light, noise, and temperature.
2. Lead by example, such as demonstrating sleep discipline, maintaining a reasonable work-rest schedule, and not sending unnecessary work emails and texts at night.
3. Educate soldiers about the role of caffeine, alcohol, and medications in sleep health.
4. Encourage soldiers to take responsibility for their sleep, be aware of signs of insufficient sleep in unit members, and follow effective sleep habits.
5. Prioritize and plan for sleep during missions to allow for sleep extension, targeted napping, and adequate recovery following mission-related periods of restricted sleep.

The leaders that received the training reported fewer of their own sleep problems, and 88.2% reported that "The training will help me as a leader" (Adler et al., 2021, p. 27). Subordinates assigned to the leaders enrolled in the study (N = 448) were given questionnaires before and after their leader's training. Members assigned to leaders that received the training rated their leader more positively, and these subordinates also reported more sleep duration following their leader's training.

Conclusion

Sleep deprivation is commonplace in the military, and it can have a negative impact on leadership. While this review presents numerous findings that identify the relationship between sleep and leadership, there is still a lot we do not know. More research is needed that directly assesses the role that sleep has on military leadership and readiness, followed by guiding principles that leaders can follow to enhance military effectiveness. Until these critical gaps are addressed, as mentioned in the original article that was the motivation for this review, sleepy and grumpy will continue to go hand in hand for our military members.

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RESEARCH

Exploring the Utility of Psychological Safety in the Armed Forces

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ABSTRACT

Psychological safety is a concept that has become extremely popular in the management and leadership literature over the past several years. Despite its rising prominence, the term can be misleading, and it is not clear if it holds promise for those leading in the armed forces. This article clarifies the concept of psychological safety and highlights its importance to teams and organizations that operate in contexts like the military. The authors also review antecedents to psychological safety – with a focus on how military leaders can facilitate psychological safety in the teams and organizations they lead. Finally, psychological safety is not a panacea. In fact, high psychological safety in a military context could produce unintended negative outcomes. Therefore, the authors offer suggestions for military leaders to consider when focusing on psychological safety in their formations and propose areas for future research involving psychological safety in the armed forces and other similar organizations.

Keywords: Psychological Safety, Leader Development, Leadership, Organizational Culture, Military Teams

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Over the past several years, the concept of psychological safety has gained increased coverage in academic literature. First explored by Schein and Bennis in 1965, Amy Edmondson's work brought the concept into the spotlight among leadership and management scholars, most notably with her book *The Fearless Organization* (2018). In fact, a search of the term "psychological safety" in Google Scholar for the time period of 2018–2023 yields over 79,000 entries—many of which extoll the benefits of high levels of psychological safety in organizations. However, despite the concept's demonstrated utility in a number of organizational settings (Edmondson & Brandsby, 2023; Frazier et al., 2017), it is not immediately clear if psychological safety holds promise for those leading in the armed forces. The military context is unique in many ways, and outcomes noted in some research studies may not generalize to military organizations (Darr, 2011; Wong et al., 2003). Furthermore, there are some who feel the military is becoming too "soft" (Hsia, 2010). For those individuals, the idea of fostering psychological safety in military organizations may seem ill-advised. We submit that these misgivings are largely misplaced, resulting from a misconception about what psychological safety actually entails and a lack of understanding about the maturing body of research on the topic. Research does suggest that the positive outcomes associated with psychological safety can be nuanced, especially in hierarchical organizations (like the military), but given the armed forces' intense focus on innovating to stay ahead of potential threats, desire to overcome recent recruiting and retention issues (Thomas, 2022; Cohen, 2023), concern with high rates of suicide and other mental health concerns among service members (Khahil, 2022; Perez, 2023), as well as other leadership challenges (e.g., counterproductive or toxic leadership), and given consistent positive outcomes noted in the corpus of psychological safety-focused research, we suggest military leaders embrace the goal of improving psychological safety in their organizations—with some caveats.

This paper will clearly define the concept of psychological safety—detailing what it is and what it is not. We then outline the various positive outcomes shown to result from psychological safety, emphasizing those that suggest promise for leaders in the armed forces. Next, we highlight findings that those leading in the military and similar contexts should keep in mind—noting that psychological safety is not a panacea. We go on to discuss antecedents to creating a psychologically safe culture and provide suggested actions that military leaders may take to foster psychological safety in their formations. Finally, we offer several suggestions for future research.

Psychological Safety–What It Is and What It Is Not

There can be some confusion about what psychological safety entails. Even psychological safety scholars like Edmondson (2022) acknowledge that the term can be misunderstood outside of academic circles. While the term itself may mislead some initially, the definition of psychological safety is not hard to understand. Put simply, psychological safety is a shared belief among members of a group that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking (Edmondson, 1999). In other words, individuals in groups with high levels of psychological safety feel like they will not be chastised, ridiculed, or embarrassed for speaking up. Those working in organizations with cultures that feature high levels of psychological safety are comfortable voicing ideas, asking questions, expressing concerns, or even admitting mistakes without fear that they will be met with humiliation or punishment. Contrary to what some may initially believe, psychological safety is *not* about creating safe spaces or coddling a softer generation, nor it is about consensus decision making or political correctness (Clark, 2021). According to David Altman from

the Center for Creative Leadership, "Psychological safety at work doesn't mean that everybody is nice all the time. It means that you embrace the conflict and speak up, knowing that your team has your back, and you have their backs." Psychological safety is not a shield from accountability, and it does not require leaders to protect those they oversee at all costs. Standards still matter in a psychologically safe team. If someone fails to perform, psychological safety does not mean they are immune to judgment or repercussions. In fact, studies show that in organizations with high levels of psychological safety, performance may actually suffer unless a sense of accountability exists (Eldor et al., 2023; Higgins et al., 2022).

Benefits of Psychological Safety

The purported benefits of psychological safety are widespread. Psychological safety has been linked empirically to positive outcomes in direct, mediating, and moderating roles at the individual, group, and organization levels of analysis (Newman et al., 2017). Some of the individual behaviors noted to emerge when people feel psychologically safe include voicing ideas and making suggestions, seeking feedback, asking questions, admitting mistakes, providing honest feedback, collaborating with teammates, and experimenting or trying new approaches (Edmondson & Brandsby, 2023). Psychological safety has also been shown to aid in new team member learning during onboarding, as well as to trust and increased individual job satisfaction (Lyman et al., 2020; Mitterer & Mitterer, 2023). There is also emerging work that suggests psychological safety might be linked to helping individuals cope with stress and strain (Edmondson & Brandsby, 2023).

At the group and organizational levels, elevated psychological safety is associated with fostering innovation and creativity (Agarwal & Farndale, 2017; Greenbaum et al., 2020; Gu et al., 2013). Research also reveals that by creating an organizational culture where open, authentic communication is accepted, psychological safety facilitates increased job engagement and satisfaction and creates an inclusive team climate (Edmondson & Brandsby, 2023). Psychological safety has also been found to act as a mediating variable in reducing turnover in teams (Chen et al., 2014).

Regardless of the level of analysis, psychological safety is linked to a number of positive outcomes of interest to leaders—at least leaders in most contexts. Research shows that psychological safety often serves as a mediator between various leader behaviors and a number of positively viewed outcomes (Edmondson & Brandsby, 2023). However, those leader behaviors may be more or less effective depending on the context in which a leader finds him/herself operating.

Psychological Safety in the Military

Contextual Discussion

A common concern with many research studies is generalizability—or how useful a study's findings are to a broader context. When it comes to leadership-related research, there are often questions about whether theories that are supported by data from non-military samples will apply or manifest in military organizations. Some theories, like transformational leadership, do apply, regardless of context (Wong et al., 2003). However, there are examples (e.g., some personality measures) that do not generalize to military populations as they do in non-military research samples (Darr, 2011). We submit that psychological safety is one of those concepts which does hold in the military context - for two primary reasons. First, psychological safety *has* been studied in a military context. For example, Wermser et al. (2016) considered psychological safety in the military with regard to integration efforts, while Hedlund and Osterberg (2013) examined psychological safety in military units with an eye toward group learning behavior. The UK's Ministry of Defence (2022) has also examined psychological

safety in its ranks. And more recently, Lobato et al. (2023) studied psychological safety in military units as it relates to reducing work stress.

Second, some of the non-military research samples used in the maturing body of psychological safety research share similarities with military teams. The masculine, hierarchical, high-power distance culture that characterizes many military organizations is not limited to the armed forces. Surgical teams, where a great deal of the current body of psychological safety research has occurred, share some of these same characteristics (Jones et al., 2018). Furthermore, the life-or-death stakes that often accompany military missions are not limited to those serving in camouflage. Many types of teams and organizations operate in extremis environments (police officers and firefighters being two of the most obvious), and the benefits of psychological safety have been demonstrated in these groups (Brinke, 2017; Gong et al., 2020). Additionally, psychological safety's positive impact on High Reliability Organizations (HRO) has been shown in several studies (Cartland et al., 2022), and at least some military elements can be considered HROs—known for their ability to operate effectively in high-risk contexts by preventing avoidable crises and maintaining resilience when challenges arise (Coutu, 2003; Malish & Sargent, 2019). Finally, while it does not provide empirical support for the idea that psychological safety produces positive outcomes in a military context, U.S. Army doctrine makes mention of psychological safety—which implies endorsement of psychological safety as a concept that military leaders might consider beneficial and incorporate into their plans to lead their formations effectively.[1]

Apparent Benefits

Given the above, we wish to highlight several specific outcomes noted to result from high levels of psychological safety—outcomes that could potentially address several recent leadership challenges facing those leading in the military. First, psychological safety facilitates candid, upward-directed communication (Edmondson & Lei, 2014), which, military leaders seeking innovative input from their formations might encourage. Similarly, high levels of psychological safety facilitate information sharing and the flow of information (Swain, 2018)—which can reduce the occurrence of groupthink, helping teams in life-and-death situations adapt and remain agile, ultimately saving lives (Roberto, 2002).[2] Psychological safety has also been linked to reduced instances of burnout and higher levels of job satisfaction (Swendiman et al., 2019), which could prove helpful in addressing the recruiting and retention challenges the military currently faces. In that same vein, Edwards et al. (2021) found that psychological safety was negatively associated with burnout, while Chen et al. (2014) found that psychological safety mediated the relationship between mentoring and turnover.

Psychological safety also appears to offer promise in addressing another major issue of concern for military leaders. Research suggests that psychological safety may be key in helping reduce instances of self-inflicted harm, a predictor of suicide (Seager, 2009). In one study of veterans, psychological safety was identified as being something that could assist in helping creating an atmosphere where people could "let their guard down"—enabling them to share their issues and seek help (McDonald et al., 2023).

1 In a discussion on empathy on page 4–9, Army Field Manual 6–22 (2022) includes a table focused on assessing empathy that directs leaders to "Review command climate survey results to see what members think." And then asks, "Do they feel psychologically safe and protected?" And while ADP 6–22 (2019) does not use the actual term psychological safety, when discussing teamwork on page 1–5, the manual states, "teamwork increases when teams operate in a positive, engaging, and emotionally safe environment." It goes on to state that, "A safe environment occurs when team members feel they can be open and not threatened by unwarranted criticism"—which meets the definition of psychological safety.

2 A postmortem analysis of a tragedy on Mount Everest on May 10, 1996, where five climbers and their two team leaders perished suggests that low psychological safety led to an unwillingness to question team procedures and exchange ideas openly, which prevented the groups from reviewing and improving their plans as conditions changed (Roberto, 2002).

Military leaders are also struggling to address instances of sexual assault and harassment and equal opportunity issues in the ranks. Weeding out these behaviors requires a culture shift (Hlad, 2022)—which may entail encouraging military personnel to be "upstanders" (Spain et al., 2023). Creating a psychologically safe environment might facilitate more people acting in this manner by reducing barriers to speaking up.

Finally, psychological safety—or the actions that can lead to an organizational culture that fosters a sense of psychological safety—may be the same actions that counteract the effects of toxic leadership. Toxic leadership can lead to increased turnover intention, lack of commitment, and psychological stresses such as anxiety, burnout, depression, and employee silence (Wolor et al., 2022). Creating psychological safety in organizations directly addresses these negative outcomes that are noted to result from toxic leadership.

The Potential Downsides

Much of the extant literature extolls the benefits of psychological safety, but there is growing evidence that suggests psychological safety is not a panacea. Leaders should be aware that there are aspects of psychological safety which can lead to deleterious outcomes. Pearsall and Ellis (2011) found that high psychological safety, in instances where perceptions of interpersonal risk are low, created conditions in which teams high in utilitarianism were more likely to engage in unethical behavior. Furthermore, recent work has shown that high levels of trust can lead to lower levels of team performance due to lower levels of monitoring within autonomous teams (Langfred, 2004). As psychological safety can lead to increased trust, it is possible that increasing psychological safety in teams that operate with high levels of autonomy could negatively impact team learning and performance (Newman et al., 2017). For an organization that is looking to create adaptive, agile organizations, this could be an unintended negative outcome. Furthermore, psychological safety has been shown to encourage risk-taking behavior in organizations focused on innovative work operating in dynamic environments (Andersson et al., 2020) and to reduce the fear of failure (Deng et al., 2019). While the military is striving to innovate, a lack of a healthy fear of failure in situations where failure can result in the loss of life could prove disastrous. Additionally, a study by Deng et al. (2019) found that in some situations, psychological safety resulted in a reduction in the motivation to work. No one wants an unmotivated soldier, sailor, marine, airman, or guardian! Finally, Eldor et al. (2023) found a curvilinear relationship between the level of psychological safety on a team and performance, with a negative relationship emerging between higher levels of psychological safety and outcomes when people were performing routinized tasks.

A final factor military leaders should keep in mind is the concept of unity of command. While encouraging input or creating a culture where soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, and guardians are not fearful of speaking up, there can be no question of who is in charge within a given military unit. The military is hierarchical, and ultimately, one decision-maker assumes risk. Psychological safety can help ensure that the decision maker (e.g., commander) gets accurate information and can leverage the different perspectives and benefits of a diverse team, but a culture that promotes high psychological safety could potentially create the false impression that decisions can be debated and may degrade good order and discipline in a unit. That said, leading in a hierarchy does not mean one must lead with an authoritarian style—this reduces psychological safety (Remtulla et al., 2021).

While the risk of these negative outcomes may be low, leaders should be aware of them, or they risk achieving unintentional, and perhaps disastrous, outcomes. Addressing some of these issues could prove challenging—but leadership is not easy. With this in mind, we provide some practical advice for military

leaders interested in fostering psychological safety in their formations.

Creating Psychological Safety in the Military

Several actions have been shown to foster a culture that includes elevated levels of psychological safety. However, it should be noted that fostering psychological safety in the military may be more difficult than in other dissimilar organizations. Appelbaum et al. (2016) found that power distance was negatively related to psychological safety, so it is more challenging in organizations with high power distance (like the military) to foster a sense of psychological safety. Anicich et al. (2015) and Remtulla et al. (2021) similarly found that aspects of hierarchical cultures (like in the military) can make creating a sense of psychological safety difficult; difficult—but certainly not impossible. What follows are several specific things military leaders can do to foster psychological safety cultures in the groups they lead.

Be Competent

Castro et al. (2018) found that leaders who were perceived as competent enhanced psychological safety in the groups they led. Remtulla et al. (2021) similarly found that perceived lack of knowledge was a barrier to fostering psychological safety.

Role Model Humility

Humble leadership leads to psychological safety (Norcross, 2019; Swain, 2018; Walters & Diab, 2016). Humble leaders engage in several specific behaviors that, when taken as a whole, foster psychological safety; these behaviors include admitting shortcomings and weaknesses and a demonstrated openness to learning, which includes a tendency to listen to or accept advice and feedback from others (Swain & Korenman, 2018). Relatedly, Coutifaris and Grant (2021) found that leaders who have the humility to share feedback—who openly discussed criticisms and feedback that they personally received—role-modelled behavior that subordinates then emulated, which facilitated a feeling of psychological safety.

Accept Honest Failure

We are not saying leaders should "embrace failure." In the military, failure could very easily mean a loss of life. We are also not suggesting leaders "celebrate failure." Failing is not a cause for celebration. Accepting honest failure means leaders should not adopt a zero-defect mentality where individuals are chastised or frightened to acknowledge or discuss mistakes. Amy Edmondson's book *Right Kind of Wrong: The Science of Failing Well* (2023) highlights, among several things, that teams that can discuss mistakes learn from them—and can avoid potentially catastrophic outcomes later. The military regularly conducts After Action Reviews (AARs), where team members share lessons learned from recent training events. Leaders can use forums like AARs to signal to their teams that acknowledging failure and discussing mistakes is acceptable, contributing to a culture of psychological safety.

Take Steps to Ensure Equal Voice

Military leaders can search for ways to reduce hierarchical boundaries to encourage all members to share perspectives, problems, and solutions. Creating an environment where people feel comfortable speaking up means leaders need to ensure people are given the opportunity to speak up. To provide opportunities that promote the sharing of problems and solutions, military leaders should utilize town halls, open door policies, command climate surveys, and sensing sessions. When appropriate, leaders should withhold their own thoughts and opinions, which are often heard by subordinates as "*the* way" as opposed to "*a* way."

Measure Psychological Safety

Another step leaders interested in fostering psychological safety can take is to measure psychological safety in their organizations. Many military leaders already

conduct periodic command climate surveys or sensing sessions, incorporating questions focused on assessing psychological safety can not only help leaders gauge where they may need to focus their efforts but can also act to signal the importance of the concept to members of the team. Commonly used measures to assess psychological safety include Liang et al.'s (2012) five-item scale, Carmeli et al.'s (2010) five-item scale, and Baer and Frese's (2003) seven-item scale. Edmondson's seven-item scale is as follows (Gallo, 2023)

- If you make a mistake on this team, it is not held against you.
- Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues.
- People on this team sometimes accept others for being different.
- It is safe to take a risk on this team.
- It is not difficult to ask other members of this team for help.
- No one on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.
- Working with members of this team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilized.

Creating a sense of psychological safety is not easy. In one study, it is estimated that only about 26% of leaders develop the skills needed to create psychological safety in their teams (Carucci, 2023). Being competent, role modeling humility, taking steps to ensure equal voice in the group, and periodically assessing psychological safety can help—but the actions must not simply be performative (Carucci, 2023). Inconsistency in things like leader humility can negatively impact the intended outcome (Rego et al., 2021).

It was mentioned previously in this paper but bears mentioning again—leaders intent on fostering psychological safety in their teams must be clear on what psychological safety is and what it is not. The concept of psychological safety is *not* a shield from accountability. Leaders should *not* be fearful of enforcing standards for fear of negatively impacting psychological safety—a lack of accountability in the misguided attempt to maximize psychological safety can lead to negative outcomes (Eldor et al., 2023).

Furthermore, military leaders focused on increasing psychological safety in their units should be prepared for skepticism and resistance. As discussed earlier, some may perceive psychological safety as incompatible in a military setting. It is not, but creating a sense of psychological safety in an organization where it may not exist is nothing less than culture change—and changing organizational culture can be challenging. Kotter (1995) provides some advice for leading culture change that leaders may find helpful.

Future Research Discussion

There is reason to believe that military organizations can reap some of the positive outcomes associated with high psychological safety, but existing research suggests there may be some downsides that leader should keep in mind. While psychological safety has been linked to overcoming barriers associated with hierarchy (Edmondson & Brandsby, 2023), it is not clear if this comes at the expense of some of the positive aspects of hierarchical cultures (Anicich et al., 2015). Future studies could explore this potential "dark side" to psychological safety in more detail. Researchers could examine the number of disciplinary infractions across organizations and explore the concern that efforts to foster high psychological safety might lead soldiers to be less likely to hold teammates accountable for poor performance. Future work might also explore if those who feel greater sense of psychological safety might be more likely to challenge their superiors and to feel less constrained by the chain of command—which could potentially have a deleterious impact on good order and discipline. Research may also examine readiness statistics or unit/branch-specific performance metrics to address the concern that high-psychological safety environments may make soldiers feel less accountable

for their actions, making them less motivated to meet high standards of performance.

Finally, future research may examine the relationship between trust and psychological safety specifically in the military context. Trust and psychological safety are conceptually different (Edmondson, 2004), yet closely related. Some studies suggest that psychological safety leads to trust (Mitterer & Mitterer, 2023), while others claim trust leads to psychological safety (Basit, 2017). Given the importance of trust in the military (Sweeney et al., 2009), future research to determine the directionality of this relationship could be beneficial.

Conclusion

Psychological safety appears to offer promise for those leading organizations in the armed forces, especially given some of the challenges the military is facing today. Psychological safety has been linked to a number of positive organizational outcomes tied to individual and team performance, innovation, creativity, and employee satisfaction. It has also been linked to outcomes positively associated with conditions that foster upstander and support-seeking behaviors, which may help military leaders reduce harmful behaviors that destroy teams. That said, military leaders should keep in mind some potential negative outcomes or unintended consequences associated with psychological safety. Military leaders should ensure they strike a balance between creating a supportive environment that encourages open communication and feedback while also emphasizing the importance of following orders and maintaining a strong sense of discipline and accountability. As discussed, psychological safety is not about coddling soldiers, airmen, guardians, sailors, or marines. Psychological safety is about removing barriers that can hinder the flow of information and creating a culture that facilitates open, candid discussion and learning focused on successful mission accomplishment.

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PROGRAM/INTERVENTION

Leadership as a Values-Driven System

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ABSTRACT

Leadership is fundamentally a social process. The tendency to view leadership from the unique and private worlds of a leader's individualized experience is a hindrance to developing effective processes and healthy culture. Leaders in organizations must adapt in response to the changing internal and external ecology in which the organization is nested. The Leadership Systems Model (LSM) offers a paradigm encouraging leaders to embrace a systems perspective. The model utilizes a value-driven human centric approach that focuses on changing elements of organizational structures and processes to align outcomes with organizational values to meet intent. The model recognizes the complexity of organizations, and the multiple roles people play as leaders, followers, and teammates. With this approach, we suggest that leaders can enhance organizational performance and develop a healthy culture by applying their power to systems design, increasing engagement, and continuous improvement.

Keywords: Leadership, Systems, Values, Culture, Power

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Introduction

Leadership is a social process that requires an uncommon understanding of people as well as social and technical systems. More than understanding oneself, effective leadership requires us to manage relationships, design systems, develop procedures, and manage resources in ways that align organizational values with organizational goals (or outcomes). From this perspective, a new paradigm for some, effective leadership includes the advancement of organizational goals through the creation of organizational culture that enhances, rather than degrades, organizational performance. A perspective where leaders seek to understand the interaction between structure, relationships, culture, and motivation shifts the focus from individuals to systems and processes, which are fundamental to modern organizations (Weber, 1978 [1920]). The Leadership Systems Model (LSM) offers an approach to organizational leadership from a systems perspective, as opposed to a reductionistic one. The model is presented in general terms and applied to the leadership development programs at the U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA) to further illustrate its utility.

The LSM emphasizes the essential need for human-centered design and values-driven strategies to achieve organizational goals within a broader context. The system must be flexible and adjusted to changing ecosystem inputs and required outputs. The LSM captures the internal and external complexity of organizations and can be tailored to the distinctiveness of different organizations and varied organizational components. The desired outcomes at any level consider interactions with the respective environment of interest and are responsive to immediate concerns and demand signals. Within the context of USAFA, the LSM builds upon the core values (integrity, service, and excellence) and holds as intended outcomes "Leaders of Character" who possess a world-class education and are ready to execute the mission, lead people, and manage resources while improving the unit (AFI 1–2).

A simplified depiction of the LSM is provided in Figure 1 that can be applied in any organization. It includes the basic elements of a single socio-technical system within a broader ecosystem. Note that the LSM assumes multiple systems exist and interact simultaneously, which are often embedded within larger systems with individuals occupying both concurrent and shifting roles as leader, follower, and teammate depending on the level of analysis. These shifting roles are depicted at the center of the model and the organization is embedded within greater ecosystems (Scott & Davis, 2015).

Within the LSM, leaders are responsible for structuring formal processes that govern the informal interactions, which create culture and lead to the accomplishment of organizational objectives and outcomes (Li et al., 2024; Maak & Pless, 2006). Culture in turn affects motivation (Mahal, 2009). Applying this model illustrates how leaders' design efforts can produce both intended and unintended outcomes (Merton, 1968 [1949]; Mintzberg, 1987). As the architect of the system, leaders are responsible for both eventualities. By adopting a broader systems lens, leaders can isolate and address dysfunctional mechanisms and adjust essential processes and policies to ensure congruence with the organizations' values. Cultural alignment advances motivation, fostering a sense of purpose and direction (Schein, 2010), which helps reinforce and reproduce desired outcomes.

Resting on the assumptions embedded in the model (see Figure 2), the LSM provides guidance about where action (also conceived as power) may be needed to align interests and structure processes to create healthy, productive cultures. The LSM proposes pathways for testing and applying tools to address problems effectively. The LSM affords the broad lens needed to recognize where assumptions about best practices and traditions are either misinformed or maladaptive within the dynamic organizational environment.

Figure 1

Leadership Systems Model

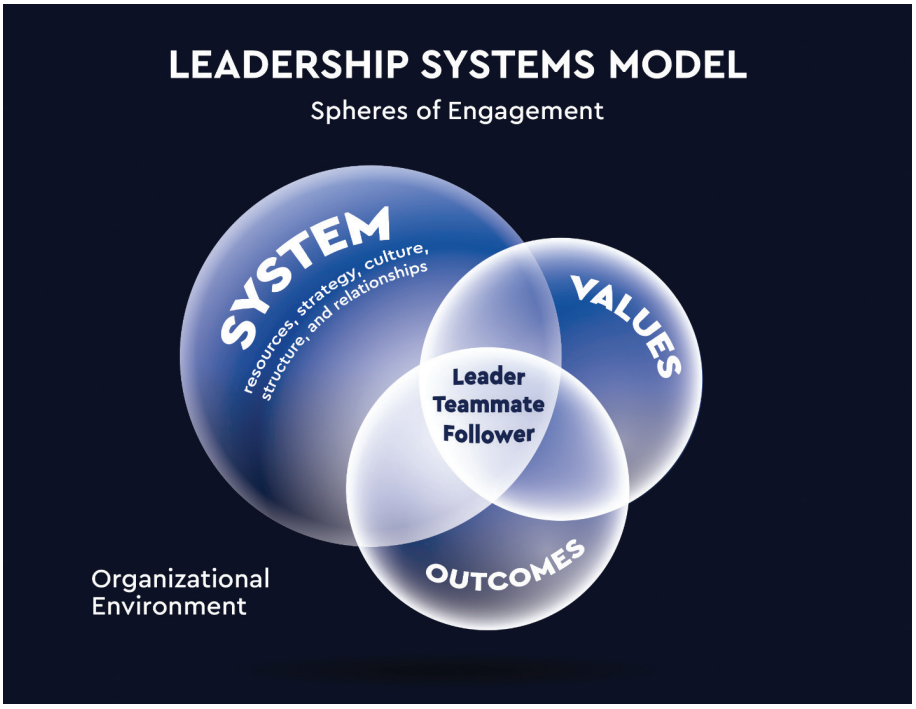

Image design by Rinata Bauzhanova

Figure 2

Assumptions Embedded in the Leadership Systems Model

Organizations

Organizations are complex, dynamic systems.

Organizations exist within a larger environment and are dependent on that environment.

Leaders and Leadership

Leaders own being the architects and stewards of the organization's systems, processes and outcomes.

Leadership is not natural or easy and requires a commitment to constant engagement with the system to ensure the alignment of values, processes and outcomes.

People

Diversity of thought, experience, and background is the engine of creativity and innovation and must be sought, nurtured and protected.

People are motivated when they are respected and valued.

The behaviors observed in an organization are directly related to its design and execution of the design.

Power

The distribution and uses of power are integral to how organizations function.

Managing power requires intentionality and actions that are in alignment with organizational values.

Where power has no purpose related to the assumptions presented above, holding power becomes the purpose.

Systems thinking stands upon the emergence of strategy, structure, and relationships; as well as the consequences of communication and control (Checkland, 2000). Through interactions in organizational structure and processes, various properties and values become esteemed by members and create subsystems to communicate and influence behavior, intentionally or not (Checkland, 2000; Weber, 1978 [1920]). This dynamic interaction requires leaders to develop and apply strategies that foster a shared perspective, which informs intentions and action (Mintzberg, 1987). A strategic vision of the organization aligns its design so that "culture is [becomes] our learned solution to making sense of the world, to stabilizing it, and to avoiding the anxiety that comes with social chaos" (Schein, 2010). In that vein, culture then is the organizational equivalent of character, and it must be taught, developed, and reinforced. This characterization and systems approach is vital if USAFA is to fulfill its charter to generate a core group of innovative leaders capable of critical thinking to "exert positive peer influence to convey and sustain ...traditions, attitudes, values and beliefs essential to the long-term readiness and success of the Military Services" (DoDI 1322.22, Military Service Academies, para 3b). Collectively, LSM conceptualizes a system as a way to scale values for organizational excellence.

Thus, the LSM builds upon USAFA's Leader of Character Framework,[1] which guides USAFA's developmental approach, by emphasizing alignment of organizational and individual values as primary components of leadership. The LSM, therefore, is a process model that aims to achieve outcomes that are aligned with organizational values. It implements "one of the most vital aspects of leadership: it cannot influence people 'downward' on the need or value hierarchy without a reinforcing environment" (Burns, 1978, p. 44). The model consists of three intersecting *Spheres of Engagement* for consistent individual and organizational level inputs. The three *Spheres of Engagement* (system, values, and outcomes) represent entry points for leadership actions. The spheres can be understood as areas that leaders need to actively assess and engage for both organizational maintenance and organizational change.

The first and largest sphere is the systems sphere, which visually depicts the importance of understanding how resources, strategies, structure, culture, and relationships drive outcomes and reinforce organizational values. When an organizational system is not producing desired results, leaders ought to engage with the System sphere first to consider and implement changes. Outputs from dysfunctional systems also have negative effects on the broader ecosystem, future inputs, and the health of the organization. For example, if an organization's culture is out of alignment with its values, assessing practices and relationships for their contributions to culture is prudent. A leader might employ a tool such as a zero-based budget philosophy to analyze whether these aspects of the organization support or detract from the desired culture. Are there places where a hierarchy is emerging that values something other than what the organization desires? What actions does the architect need to take to arrest that emergence to keep individual competition from hijacking organizational values and outcomes while fulfilling organizational members' needs? What must remain paramount for leaders is that outcomes are connected to our purpose, they tell us why we exist and what we are trying to do.

The second sphere, values, represents the importance of shared beliefs. These beliefs include both legitimate organizational goals and the accepted means for achieving those goals. The specific values within the sphere are of less significance than the interplay between values, structure, and outcomes. According to the LSM, values can be seen as both the "price of

1. https://www.usafa.edu/app/uploads/21st-Century-LoC-Final-March-2021.pdf

admission" for engaging in leadership as well as what is to be developed and maintained through engagement with the system. While leaders are emphasized, the model applies to all organizational members. Managing power requires intentional structure to create a culture based on organizational values, reducing ambiguity of purpose (Weick, 2001). When the values of the organization do not determine how power should be applied, those with power tend to apply it to meet their own purposes or self-interest, often inconsistent with shared goals (Fast et al., 2012). Here again, congruency of values with organizational structure and outcomes ensures consistent decision-making and behavior throughout the organization, fostering enhanced satisfaction and retention (Schein, 2010).

The third sphere is the outcomes sphere. It describes the organization's purpose and reason for existence. Systems produce what they are designed to produce and high functioning organizations have leaders that align organizational outcomes with their values (Li et al., 2024). Organizations that overly focus on efficiency and performance metrics may sacrifice effectiveness as outcomes emerge to replace stated values and purpose, leading to unintended consequences (John et al., 2023). Hence, the values of the organization act as the guiding principles of action (Weber, 1978 [1920]).

This leadership systems approach fosters an understanding of a leader's responsibility for the structure, resources, relationships, culture, and resulting motivations that underpin success and long-term readiness. To bring this about, systems leaders develop influence by earning the respect of followers. This is accomplished through essential interpersonal skills and tools to manage power, assuring the leader's competence in their areas of specialization and their leadership duties. By modeling these practices, leaders serve as the prototypes for values and behaviors they want others to adopt. Managing power requires a keen understanding of context and people, recognizing how holding and applying power affects people, perceptions, and processes within the system. While power is a necessity for accomplishing tasks and essential for the formal structure of organizations (Blau, 1986; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2006), effective leaders remain aware of how it may alter their own and others' perceptions in dysfunctional ways, despite the leader's best intentions (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Power can be utilized for organizational design and change (Blau, 1986; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2006), but we propose it is most effective when applied to change structure and processes rather than to coerce compliance through threat of punishment or enticing compliance through promised rewards.

With this framework in mind, we recognize two lines of leadership engagement and growth—individual and organizational—where both are important and interrelated. From the individual standpoint, the LSM presented here focuses on the importance of embracing values and behaviors, such as humility, integrity, perspective taking, and an ability to communicate effectively, that make a person better suited to perform the role of a leader. Yet, for the organization, it is just as important to understand how to develop leadership systems aligned with theory and practice that explain the nature of organizations and the behavior of people within them. The synergy between these two lines of development support a culture that improves organizational performance and reduces undesired outcomes, thereby enhancing achievement of organizational goals.

The LSM illustrates how action is often context driven and that leaders can and do apply efforts to various spheres to bring about desired change. It emphasizes the second and third order effects of decisions and processes. It makes evident that the values sphere will directly impact elements of the systems sphere, and so outcomes as well as the broader organizational ecosystem. If a culture change is desired, applying energy to the elements of the systems sphere is the most impactful approach to culture change to reinforce val-

ues and cultivate shared beliefs. During times of crisis, focus and energy is often directed and applied to the outcomes sphere through increased demands on organizational members and on system components, increasing stress without changing the processes that produce results. This may yield short-term outcome gains, but the model suggests it would be wise to make changes to the systems sphere if long-term outcome changes are desired. Notice, also, that the systems sphere is the largest and implies that it should be a focal point for almost any leadership initiative.

Conclusions

By using the LSM, leaders can more effectively recognize persistent problems to develop solutions that address root causes. When outcomes do not align with organizational values, the model directs leaders' attention to structures and processes, where otherwise there is often a tendency to over-focus on inputs or make individualistic attributions. Instead of assuming that problems lie with specific people or a lack of resources, a leader's attention is shifted to situational factors within their control that are motivating unintended behaviors. When the behavior of followers and teammates are not aligned with goals, the model assumes actors' best intentions and shifts responsibility to leaders to design procedures and processes—to identify false assumptions, test alternatives, and implement systems changes to overcome persistent problems.

The LSM can aid USAFA as it continuously improves and strengthens its focus on developing leaders of character that can deliver the clear results demanded by the Air Force and Space Force. The LSM fulfills USAFA's congressional charter by implementing a leadership development system that motivates graduates to seek leadership responsibilities with a keen ability to think critically, decide wisely, and act decisively while maintaining a culture where leaders of character exert positive peer influence through their character foundation (DoDI 1322.22). In this capacity the LSM focuses on leaders as the architects of systems rather than on individual leader attributes. Within the LSM cadets can apply a series of tools and gain proficiency through their 4-year USAFA leadership development experience. Introduced in the first year, cadets can employ the LSM throughout their tenure as followers, teammates, and leaders providing ample practice in varying contexts to hone their leadership ability in increasingly complex organizational environments. Thus, the LSM frames a leader's lifelong journey of study, practice, and reflection, encouraging a holistic and nuanced appreciation of the complexity of oneself and the teams they lead as made up by, and making up, the systems they inhabit.

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PROGRAM/INTERVENTION

Developmental Conversations: Mentoring as a Pervasive Cultural Practice

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ABSTRACT

This article details Berry College's efforts to enhance its mentoring culture through the Developmental Conversations initiative. By implementing a multilevel framework consisting of three core principles–Equip, Empower, and Encourage–the initiative advances the institution's mentoring culture in alignment with Berry's mission to develop leaders of integrity. We discuss our strategic approach to mentoring including the integration of competency models, perspectives on empowerment, and the central role of cultural encouragement in generating an environment where mentoring is embraced as a critical component of our educational strategy. Insights from implementation efforts highlight the successes and challenges of creating a pervasive mentoring culture that supports both personal and professional growth across the community. This initiative serves as a replicable example for other institutions seeking strategies to enhance their developmental ethos through mentoring.

Keywords: Mentoring Culture, Leadership Development, Organizational Change, Competency Models, Educational Strategy

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Introduction

Mentoring is widely recognized as a pivotal developmental practice (Johnson, 2007). Despite its potential value, the benefits of mentoring are often to a limited group of program participants. While higher education institutions make commitments to develop the entire student population, formal mentoring programs typically reach only a small percentage of the student body (see Cornelius et al., 2016; Gannon & Maher, 2012; Gershenfeld, 2014; Lunsford et al., 2017; Wefald et al., 2021). Formal mentoring can also place an overemphasis on the structural elements of mentoring interventions, such as mentor-mentee matching and the prescribed frequency of meetings, often at the expense of less tangible but more important factors like the effective qualities of mentoring relationships. Developing higher education students through mentoring requires more than simply having a formal program.

At Berry College, mentoring is deeply embedded in our heritage and core values (Berry, 2001), reflecting a rich tradition that precedes contemporary practice. Formal mentoring opportunities are cherished by students. Graduates report valuing informal mentoring efforts as well. There is also alignment with the college's mission, where "We educate the head, heart, and hand–to inspire leaders of integrity who cultivate thriving communities" (Berry College, n.d.).

Mentoring is generally understood to be relational and developmental (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). Observations of our mentoring practices were consistent with this definition but also revealed a need for a more coherent and unified strategy. In response, this article explores Berry College's efforts to advance mentoring as a pervasive cultural practice aimed at enhancing character and leadership development across the entire student body. Prompted by the insights gained from the variability in current practices and driven by the potential to improve developmental outcomes, the Berry Center for Integrity in Leadership and key campus partners launched the Developmental Conversations initiative during the 2023–2024 academic year. This initiative redefines mentoring relationships by focusing on creating meaningful developmentally focused relationships. Our objective was to standardize practices, integrate them into daily campus life, and in doing so improve opportunities for every student. The following sections explore and then outline three foundational principles—Equip, Empower, and Encourage—that guided our efforts to reshape mentoring at Berry College and offer valuable insights for other institutions seeking to enhance their educational environments through similar initiatives.

Literature Review

In our pursuit of a pervasive mentoring culture at Berry College, we explored a multilevel approach to integrate complementary strategies spanning individual, interpersonal, and organizational levels. This literature review examines key evidence that supports an approach accounting for the interconnected layers of development, providing a comprehensive overview of effective practices that align with our goals of enhancing mentoring practice throughout the institution.

Competency Models

Competency models define the essential knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) required for effective job performance. These models provide crucial insights that organizations can leverage to enhance performance (McClelland, 1973). A well-defined competency model that articulates the roles and responsibilities of mentors, aligned with the desired outcomes of mentoring efforts, creates a solid foundation for effective mentoring practices.

Research specifically addressing mentoring KSAOs, especially in the context of character and leadership development, remains limited. Fleming et al. (2013) addressed this gap by developing the Mentoring Competency Assessment (MCA) to evaluate mentors in clinical and research settings. They identified six critical

competency areas including effective communication, aligned expectations, assessing understanding, addressing diversity, fostering independence, and promoting professional development. Competency models like the MCA provide administrators with measurable indicators of performance that lend themselves to customizable developmental interventions and tailored support to enhance mentoring practice.

Large organizations can gather data through surveys to comprehensively understand job roles and the competencies that underly performance (Rodriguez et al., 2002). Smaller organizations can achieve similar results using focus groups. Selected competencies must align with organizational goals (Campion et al., 2011). Given the scope and scale of mentoring efforts in higher education, which are likely to cover a range of needs including psychosocial development and career support (Kram, 1983), it is essential to have a precise understanding of the objectives of mentoring. Failure to consider and clarify the intent and purpose of mentoring practice within an organization will contribute to diffused conceptual clarity and mismatched expectations within mentoring relationships. A well-constructed competency model is critical to establishing clear expectations that delineate essential KSAOs and the level at which they should be performed. This is the first step in equipping organizational members at all levels with a consistent understanding of the expectations and responsibilities in the mentoring process.

Individual and Interpersonal Conditions

Effective mentoring is more than merely transmitting information or experiences. Mentoring is fundamentally a leadership activity because it involves bringing people together, coordinating actions, and achieving shared goals. Berry College's mission to produce leaders of integrity suggests mentoring students involves a deep commitment to personal growth and nurturing meaningful relationships. This dual focus is supported by the distinction between leader and leadership development (Day, 2000; Day & Dragoni, 2015). Leader development focuses on intrapersonal domains including self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation. Leadership development emphasizes the relational domains of practice that include social awareness and interpersonal skills. Development at the individual level lays the groundwork upon which the practical and relational dynamics are built and continually refined.

Seibert et al. (2011) describe two overarching types of empowerment: psychological and sociostructural. Psychological empowerment, conceptualized by Conger and Kanungo (1988) and expanded by Thomas and Velthouse (1990), aligns an individual's self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation with organizational practices. To create an environment conducive to personal and professional development, it is imperative to align mentoring strategies with the intrinsic goals and capabilities of mentors and mentees. Similarly, sociostructural empowerment involves how organizational structures and practices distribute autonomy throughout an organization, enhancing the overall empowerment framework. In mentoring, this involves allowing mentor-mentee pairs to shape their interactions and collaboratively set goals. This process can enhance both the perception of empowerment and relationship effectiveness.

The Role of Culture

Establishing a mentoring culture offers more than limited, formal experiences by making mentoring a normative part of the organizational experience. A deliberately developmental organization (Kegan & Lahey, 2016) creates a continuous learning environment where every aspect of the organization is oriented toward the personal and professional growth of all its members. Establishing culture involves creating widespread, shared feelings, experiences, and descriptions of the organization that involve its stated values and goals (Schneider et al., 2013).

Creating a pervasive mentoring culture requires a clear understanding of how such a culture contributes

to organizational effectiveness and necessitates specific changes to strengthen and maintain this culture. Without a clear connection to what the organization does, mentoring is likely to remain a peripheral activity experienced by a select few engaged individuals. Broad involvement in mentoring, rooted in a shared organizational philosophy, ensures that mentoring is practiced widely and enhances individual development and overall institutional resilience. The future of organizations depends on how the culture came to be and how it continues to adapt (Schein & Schein, 2017). A pervasive shift across an entire community offers a stark contrast to the incremental changes typically produced by conventional mentoring programs. Actively encouraging community members to engage in and support mentoring invites the integration of developmental pursuits into daily practices aligned with the organization's values and goals.

Principles for Pervasive Mentoring: Equip, Empower, and Encourage

To clarify the operational structure of the Developmental Conversations initiative, the following table (Table 1) outlines three multilevel principles—Equip, Empower, and Encourage. Each is concisely defined and categorized according to the level at which we apply it within the initiative. While these principles extend to the work that mentors achieve with mentees, we selected them for their utility in developing a mentoring culture. The table illustrates the complementary effects of the principles. In the subsections that follow, each is enriched with quotes from community members that illustrate the observed effects.

Principle 1. Equip

The principle of equip focuses on enhancing individual capabilities to mentor. Equip involves introducing and supporting the development of relevant KSAOs that serve mentees with diverse experiences, motives, and goals. Equip operates at an intrapersonal level with an emphasis on the mentor's self-awareness and developmental skills. We start the equipping process by inviting mentors to examine their own developmental experiences.

Berry College applied this principle by introducing targeted workshops and creating a supportive skill-based structure that instructs mentors on how they directly support the college's mission. Workshops cover topics and experiential learning activities including effective communication, understanding diverse learning needs, and inviting mentees to exercise personal agency. Competencies such as these ensure that participants are prepared to lead Developmental Conversations that contribute to individual student needs in direct support of the mission.

Notable quotes:

- *"I've already had a few opportunities to use the skills we practiced, and it has been incredibly helpful in making me feel more prepared to engage with my students."*
- *"The [skills] make me feel more like I'm guiding and not directly trying to solve their problems for them."*
- *"I now think more about how I engage with a student long-term. Before the workshops, I would engage with them whenever they came to me, but now I'm thinking through who actually considers me as their mentor, and not just who stops by to talk."*
- *"It's helped me think about how to have those conversations with students with a certain structure on how to approach and engage in something developmental... [I now have] a road map for these conversations."*

Principle 2. Empower

Empowerment in mentoring concerns creating a relationship where mentors and mentees openly share and collaborate in the development process. This principle builds upon individual-level preparation by embracing a dyadic approach. The mentor-mentee relationship is a space for mutual growth and learning.

We encourage mentors to engage mentees holistically, considering not just academic or career goals but the entire spectrum of development. Our approach is rooted in the concept of psychological empowerment,

Table 1

Multilevel Summary Framework of Mentoring Development Practices and Outcomes

Principle	Definition	Level of engagement	Suggested practices	Outcomes of interest
Equip	Focus on enhancing individual capabilities and readiness for mentoring	Individual (Intrapersonal)	• Psychological assessment with a relational focus • One-on-one coaching support • Workshops activities that promote essential skills • Workshop activities including simulation and role-playing • Resource toolkit	Improved mentor identity, self-efficacy, and relevant KSAOs
Empower	Emphasize development of the whole person in alignment with the organizational mission	Dyadic (Interpersonal)	• Goal-setting frameworks for personal and professional development • Personalized guidance through tailored feedback • Structured reflection activities • Peer mentoring groups	Enhanced psychological safety, adaptability, and trust in mentoring relationships
Encourage	Generate a supportive mentoring culture with shared ideas and practices concerning the accepted ways to think, feel, and act as a community member	Organizational (Cultural)	• Promote interdepartmental collaboration and relationships • Host community events that invite and inspire dialogue and action • Continuous learning opportunities to engage after primary skill development	Shared mindsets about mentoring and student development, culturally institutionalized mentoring practices

KSAO: knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics.

where mentors help mentees align personal goals with academic and professional aspirations. By empowering mentors to create comprehensive developmental conversations, Berry College facilitates a mentoring experience that supports the whole person, forging deeper connections, and promoting more meaningful outcomes.

Notable quotes:

- *"My goal is that students have both professional and personal mentoring from me. What matters is the full picture."*
- *"[From] forming a relationship ... [to] when [students] keep thinking of you as someone who could help them, [I'm] someone who can keep guiding them forward, that is a privilege."*
- *"Great opportunity to ... learn and practice the skill of taking conversations to a deeper, more purposeful level."*
- *"I liked ... being our actual selves so that we weren't trying to act."*
- *"I love that Berry focuses on all aspects of a student's life with the philosophy of educating the head, heart and hands."*

Principle 3. Encourage

Encourage, the third principle, cultivates a supportive mentoring culture across the campus. This principle involves norms and practices that promote mentoring as a valued and integral part of the educational ecosystem. Encourage builds on Bandura's (1971) social learning theory which holds that people learn from one another through observation, modeling, and imitation. Every member of the community plays an active role in creating and sustaining mentoring practices. Encouragement reminds us about the relational aspect of culture creation—where espoused values are widely adopted, practiced, modeled, and taught to one another.

To actualize this principle, Berry College initiated several strategies to promote mentoring interactions among faculty, staff, students, and the surrounding community. These include creating and shaping leadership and character-focused events where potential mentors and mentees can connect, developing recognition programs that honor and celebrate mentoring, and establishing policies that support investing time in mentoring activities. By embedding these supportive activities into the routine, we encourage a culture of mentoring that becomes a shared responsibility and a common practice. The goal is to enhance the overall educational environment that a community committed to developmental growth can co-create.

The choice of the word "encourage" for this principle is intentional, reflecting the commitment required to sustain mentoring as a cultural practice. As Schein and Schein (2017) suggest, culture is a dynamic process whereby new members are socialized into the existing culture. The term "encourage" suggests an intentional emphasis on the nature of this dynamic process, where mentoring is continuously promoted, practiced, and valued. In contrast with solutions that emphasize structural and policy-oriented solutions, we are approaching cultural formation and change with emphasis on the mediating effects of affect, behavior, and cognition concerning developmental practices. The change brought about through mutual encouragement bridges aspirations of personal and professional growth and the community's daily habits.

Notable quotes:

- *"I now understand ... how to be an effective mentor and also feel a sense of connection with others who have done the workshop, even if they weren't in my group or even in my workshop session. This is a transformative experience for our community."*
- *"Exposure to other faculty and staff in the workshops and watching them learn as I learn has been incredibly helpful."*
- *"Creating a culture of mentoring on campus is a good-to-great initiative in itself. We're already good at this, we're trying to be great."*

- *"It has served a really important role in surfacing some of the unspoken truths about our college culture."*
- *"It's a great reminder that we are all part of this work and that we all have to build capacity because we all carry the load."*
- *"It was very helpful not only in learning new ways to approach mentoring but also in making connections to colleagues and as a new employee of Berry."*
- *"One of the greatest benefits is helping people to see the missionality of their work ...affects employee retention, belonging, meaning in their work. Particularly promising with new employees."*

Lessons Learned and Future Directions

The journey of defining, refining, and expanding the mentoring culture at Berry College yielded significant insights and pointed to paths for future development. Our efforts have underscored the importance of intentional and adaptive approaches to cultural enhancement. In our efforts to cultivate leaders of integrity–citizen leaders equipped to serve and improve society–there is yet work to be done to leverage mentoring as a pivotal component of our educational strategy.

Lessons Learned

1. ***Strategic Development.*** A cultural change initiative based on a multilevel framework is showing promising effects for advancing individual growth, mentoring practice, and campus mentoring culture. Thoughtfully designed interventions and complementary support provide a robust context for development. The framework offers a promising approach to better serve our students.
2. ***Scheduling and Participation.*** It is challenging to coordinate workshops that fit the busy schedules of faculty and staff. The workshops' intensive nature requires commitment. We observed faculty and staff who expressed a strong desire to participate but found it difficult to do so. Some simply had too many commitments to sign up for the workshops. Others would sign up but later cancel in response to urgent tasks and responsibilities. Ongoing work is needed to establish mentoring as an intrinsic part of the community's roles where mentoring is perceived as a core role rather than viewing it as an additional responsibility.
3. ***Inclusivity.*** By promoting shared leadership within Berry's mentoring framework, we made measurable progress toward establishing a culture where mentoring responsibilities are increasingly shared by the community. This is a promising indicator that we can mitigate the restrictive assortative processes typical of formal mentoring programs that reach a limited few.

Future Directions

1. ***Support for Mentors.*** We are reviewing our efforts and seeking campus partners to help us encourage wider participation in the upcoming year. We are working to build awareness with a focus on onboarding efforts while providing developmental mentoring resources that are accessible and valued by the full community.
2. ***Potential Costs of Mentoring.*** As more of the community invests in developmental relationships, it is essential to address potential costs (see Lunsford et al., 2013). Despite a clear developmental focus and mission alignment, mentors may perceive that mentoring places additional demands on their time. We are committed to examining the community experience and making evidence-based decisions for continuous improvement.
3. ***Recognition Efforts.*** We are exploring initiatives to recognize and celebrate mentors' contributions appropriately. Crucial mentoring outcomes are distal, so we are exploring ways to enhance engagement and acknowledgment of mentors' work in the near term. This year, Berry initiated a partnership with its Student Government Association to launch a thank-you card campaign. We provided resources and encouraged students to express appreciation for the significant contributions that faculty and staff made to their development. This initiative could significantly impact how mentoring contributions are

recognized and promote reflective practice among students about the value of mentoring.

4. ***Continued Emphasis on Personal and Professional Development.*** We are committed to a culture where mentoring is central to our educational strategy and exemplified by our practice as a community. After workshops and interventions, we collected a wealth of feedback and perspectives from participants to identify potential growth areas in our efforts. Ongoing dialogue with our community is vital to effectively meet the evolving needs and expectations of participants while ensuring that our efforts remain relevant and impactful.

Conclusion

Our journey to enhance the mentoring culture at Berry College through the Developmental Conversations initiative has been challenging, enlightening, and rewarding. By applying the multilevel principles of Equip, Empower, and Encourage, we made significant strides in a year toward embedding a pervasive mentoring culture. These principles have helped us closely align the desired, normative practice with Berry's mission to develop leaders of integrity who actively contribute to thriving communities. In short, our community is experiencing notable gains that are enriching the mentoring experience. As mentors embrace this approach to meet the diverse needs of our student body, they are integrating lifelong learning and development in practical and observable ways that enhance Berry's educational legacy.

To navigate the complexities of these change efforts we built a resilient team of collaborators who are driven by a clear vision for the future. The challenges and collaborative solutions we devised highlight the critical need for a flexible approach while steadily advancing toward our overarching goals. Our experience underscores the substantial value of commitment from key campus leaders who have supported and promoted these developmental opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Let this be a call to action for others in any organization with a developmental purpose. Embracing these principles is not simply a path forward, but a commitment to integrity in the mentoring practices that can positively advance the future of the organization.

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INSIGHTS

What Makes Leadership Development Impactful? Exploring a Whole-Person Approach

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Reconsidering the Essence of Effective Leadership Development

In our Harvard Business Review article published on February 28, 2023, "*What Makes Leadership Development Programs Succeed*," we unveiled the pivotal factors distinguishing impactful leadership development programs from ineffective ones. The insights we shared in this article built upon our ongoing and published empirical research on the outcomes of leadership development initiatives (Yemiscigil et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2023a). Motivated by this work, the aim of this leadership perspective is to propose a novel lens in establishing effective leadership learning and development through a new understanding of expectations, intentionality, and measurement of outcomes (Born, 2016; Born et al., 2012, 2017, 2019; Enger et al., 2010; Hendrix et al., 2015; Yemiscigil et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2023a).

Although leadership development is ingrained in the DNA of our service academies and the military (Enger et al., 2010), it has burgeoned into a substantial industry, estimated at about $60 billion worldwide. It represents approximately 35% of training budgets facilitated by consultancies, human resources offices, coaches, and business/policy schools. Despite this scale, there is growing criticism that the leadership development programs

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are following attention-grabbing developmental approaches that are not backed by evidence (see Born et al., NAS Committee Report, 2020 for examples). Importantly, evidence of learning and development is somewhat ambiguous and is often limited primarily to professional competencies overlooking a broader lens of what could be achieved in leadership development. This is in part driven by the absence of theoretically rooted models on how leadership development functions as well as a dearth of methodologically rigorous research on the topic (Day et al., 2021). This prompts critical questions: What return do investments in leadership development yield for leaders and companies? Does leadership development genuinely instigate change among leaders? What type of change is being and could be pursued?

Why is this exploration essential? The quest for effective leadership is a paramount need in all sectors (Born, 2016; Born et al., 2013; Born & Goldstein, 2018; Cook et al., 2021; Kirschner & Born, 2018). Leadership development stands as the fundamental process for nurturing leaders who can exercise more impactful leadership. This quest gains heightened significance, especially for individuals in positions of influence. However, as it is often acknowledged, true leadership isn't merely about being in charge; it is fundamentally about caring for those under your charge and protecting and promoting the well-being of one's constituents (Pirson, 2019). Yet, a critical missing piece of fulfilling this purpose is an acknowledgment that caring for the well-being of others may start with caring for oneself. This is exemplified by the idea of "putting one's own oxygen mask on first" for enabling more effective guidance and support for others.

In this article, we propose that an acknowledgement of the critical role of leader's self and identity in effective leadership beckons the call for a fundamental rethinking of leadership development, its effectiveness, and outcomes. We specifically argue that this rethinking draws attention to the development of what is commonly referred to as "authentic leaders" who can understand and act upon who they are and why they lead in the broad context of their lives, including at work and beyond work. It is through an evaluation of interventions on authentic leadership development pedagogy focusing on the whole-person and the "who and why" of leadership that we hope to generate a new inquiry into the tangible and empirically demonstrable benefits of leadership development.

Unlocking the Black Box of Authentic Leadership Development

Despite the commendations and accolades showered upon our leadership development programs through enthusiastic evaluations, our experiences as seasoned educators of leaders and of authentic leadership pedagogy revealed a discrepancy. While these assessments often sufficed for program developers and employers to assert the success of their initiatives, we remained skeptical. We were unconvinced that these evaluations painted an accurate or comprehensive picture of the actual change experienced, if any, by the participants. We wanted to discover what measurable changes were occurring in the programs using rigorous empirical methods.

Motivated by this realization, our ongoing and published research embarked on a quest to demystify the elusive nature of authentic leadership development. Our goal was to delve into its impact and investigate to what extent, for whom and why authentic leadership development might be beneficial. Over the past 5 years, our methodology involved a comprehensive examination. We conducted longitudinal surveys with multiple cohorts from six distinct leadership development programs attended by private sector, non-profit and public sector leaders in professional schools and organizations. The diverse sample incorporated about 500 employees and leaders with

varying backgrounds, tenure, and ranks (Yemiscigil et al., 2022a, 2023a).

The Embrace of Authentic Leadership Approach

Central to our approach was the intentional adoption of an authentic leadership pedagogy as an intervention across multiple leadership development programs. Authentic leadership, rooted in identity-based perspectives, fosters a profound shift in leaders' sense of being (Brooks & Winfrey, 2023; Craig & Snook, 2014, 2022; George, 2015; George & Clayton, 2022; George et al., 2007; Gergen, 2022). Drawing from Warren Bennis's assertion that "learning is experiencing a personal transformation," we recognized that learning is not a mere collection of possessions but a journey toward becoming a new person. This philosophy underscored our focus on self-concept, identity, and the intrinsic values that define leadership, and enabling leaders to answer questions like "Who am I? Why am I leading? Who do I want to become?"

Our emphasis was not on the acquisition of technical skills but on enhancing generalized behavioral capacities, such as decision-making and resilience that are applicable at work and beyond. The core principle lies in nurturing positive growth in leaders' entire selves and broader work and non-work identities. An identity-based approach expounded the interconnectedness between professional and personal growth, facilitating the development of broad behavioral capacities applicable to all facets of life. An example is the cultivation of not only psychological safety within teams but leaders' psychological bravery in all areas of life (Born & Caliguiri, 2024). This integration is not only critical for sustained improvements in workplace performance, but also pivotal for psychological well-being, culminating in a more harmonious alignment with one's identity and the encompassing aspects of life (Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012; Rampersad & Hussain, 2014).

Key Factors for Effective Leadership Development

Our research uncovered several essential considerations for potent and impactful leadership development programs:

(1) **Focus on Holistic Growth**: Programs that develop leaders in multiple life areas generate better outcomes, leading to a significant transformation both professionally and personally.

(2) **Encourage Self-Reflection**: Allowing participants time and structure for introspection prompts reorientation, benefiting personal lives and careers. This reflective space contributes to a clearer sense of purpose.

(3) **Address Stress with Precision**: Target programs to coincide with high-stress periods to effectively mitigate stress and bolster well-being. During stressful times, leadership development yields greater stress reduction and enhanced happiness.

(4) **Opt for Shorter, Intensive Programs**: Surprisingly, shorter programs often produce significant positive changes, at times rivaling the impacts of therapeutic mental health interventions. Short-term intensive programs provide optimal results.

(5) **Attention to Resistance**: Acknowledge and support individuals who might resist growth due to strong self-views or other psychological barriers. Tailor approaches to address resistance and cultivate development.

(6) **Strategies for Sustained Impact**: Recognize that growth and well-being changes might fade over time due to adaptation. Focus on establishing habits and continued engagement post-program for sustained growth.

(7) **Online Programs for Efficiency**: Both online and in-person programs yield somewhat similar results, providing an efficient and effective avenue for leadership development. Embrace the flexibility of online programs for broader reach without compromising impact.

Fostering Well-Being: A New Moral Imperative

Our research revealed that one of the most important benefits of authentic leadership development could be well-being. Recognizing the imperative of preventing burnout, our focus on well-being was inspired by the ethical responsibility to safeguard against the perils of its absence. According to well-being expert Jennifer Moss (2021) in "The Burnout Epidemic: The Rise of Chronic Stress and How We Can Fix It," burnout emerges as a prevalent crisis. This drove our attention toward understanding and preventing stress among leaders. Yet, well-being is not only the negative outcomes but also about positive outcomes that underscore optimal psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989; Yemiscigil et al., 2021), so we also assessed and found improvements in sense of personal growth and purpose in life among leaders undertaking leadership development that emphasizes authentic leader identity and whole-person approach.

The resonance between well-being and its far-reaching impact on social and organizational outcomes underscores its critical importance. Despite the growing awareness of its significance, intentional cultivation of well-being remains an elusive domain. Our knowledge remains scarce concerning the well-being and functioning of leaders, despite their significant influence (Guest, 2017; Kelloway & Barling, 2010; Li et al., 2018; Moss, 2021). Unveiling the impact of leadership development on the psychological well-being and functioning of leaders becomes a pivotal pursuit. The common perception of well-being often gravitates toward positive feelings and wellness practices, typically viewed through a hedonic lens. Our research emphasized that leadership development can play a pivotal role in promoting well-being, emphasizing eudemonic well-being, the growth and purpose people experience in life (Ryff, 1989; Yemiscigil et al., 2023b), while tackling stress. These ideas expand organizational theories, highlighting the fact that professional leadership development can be a precursor to holistic well-being, delivering benefits for the whole person rather than only the leader in a professional role.

Conclusion: Rethinking Leadership Development's Impact

Organizations have been seeking to measure return on investment of leadership development programs based on performance outcomes, something that has rarely been accomplished to date. However, our research brings to light a different angle: effective leadership development significantly contributes to personal growth and well-being in both personal and professional realms. In the post-pandemic world, where companies struggle to establish genuine engagement and connections, the significance of these new success metrics should not be underestimated. These metrics can positively impact work performance and employee retention, offering an overlooked but promising path toward well-being and engagement in the workplace.

In essence, our findings underline that well-conceived learning interventions can tangibly enhance well-being in the workplace over the short term. Leadership development, when approached holistically, delivers psychological benefits, shedding light on its efficacy and motivational implications. The data suggest that individual agency plays a pivotal role in transforming growth into well-being. Looking ahead, there remain compelling questions: How does whole-person growth impact performance and leaders' relationships with their teams? How does it compare with more technical developmental approaches? How can we ensure lasting effects rather than momentary shifts?

What Resonates: Empowering Leadership Development for Human-Centered Workplaces of the Future

Finally, we have been moved by the overwhelmingly positive responses to our research and practitioner articles.

The heartfelt feedback speaks to the resonance of our findings and their applicability, not only in leadership training programs but also for individuals seeking avenues for their personal growth and skill development. We have synthesized that our findings can be especially important for empowering leadership development for the human-centered workplaces of the future through the following avenues:

Whole-person approaches can cultivate agility and adaptability amidst uncertainty. A critical perspective shared by readers underscores the significance of developing future leaders who can navigate evolving business challenges, suggesting an imperative focus on skill elevation and uplifting competencies to navigate an ever-evolving business landscape. The feedback indicates that this approach is not just desirable but increasingly vital in today's dynamic work environment.

Personal growth in leaders can promote authentic connection and relationships at work. We all seek leaders who are more "human," leaders who connect, understand, and empathize with the challenges of work and workers. Our research reinforces the notion that leaders who are less stressed, growing themselves, more self-reflective and have higher sense of personal direction are more able to make these connections with their colleagues and subordinates.

Autonomy and personal agency can fuel the fire of continuous learning and growth. The diverse range of comments also underlines the significance of learner autonomy and the effectiveness of cohort models in leadership development. These insights echo our belief in encouraging a participative, active learning process and establishing supportive, nurturing environments to ensure continuous engagement in growth among busy leaders.

Well-being can be important for its own sake. The endorsements from our readers further reinforce the importance of addressing stress and well-being in leadership development, an aspect often sidelined but deemed critical. This recognition aligns with our core belief in promoting a more human-centered workplace. It's deeply heartening to know that our work is resonating with the shared aspirations of making workplaces more humane and cultivating genuine leadership. It's a clarion call for organizations to reflect on the comprehensive development of their leaders beyond mere business outcomes.

As we forge ahead, the affirmations and constructive thoughts shared in response to our research remind us of the transformational power of leadership development. We're spurred to continue our efforts in creating meaningful and sustainable change in the realm of leadership, fueling our curiosity to explore the intersection between personal development and enduring workplace impact.

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INSIGHTS

Prioritizing Profits Over Purpose: Is Commercialized Academia Eroding the Essence of Leadership Education?

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Introduction

In 2014, I stood on the TED stage detailing a solution-focus approach to addressing the complex problems, noting that "our institutions of higher education are having to trade what they hold dear with respect to learning for the tuition generation machine, so they can be sustainable" (Andenoro, 2014). As I reflect upon my time on stage that day, the research that informed my talk, and my 25-year career as a leadership faculty member and university administrator, I am reminded that bad news does not get better with time. Unfortunately, the problems I noted in 2014 have significantly intensified over the last decade for both higher education and leadership education, as universities and colleges declare financial exigency and announce closures (Hill, 2021; Moore et al., 2024; Siegel, 2023). Revealing the unsettling realization that now more than ever, leadership education rests at a tenuous inflection point.

Problem

The field and interdisciplinary space of leadership education is currently navigating through a sea of complex and multifaceted challenges. To effectively navigate these turbulent conditions, a deep understanding of the escalating

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pressures that higher education faces is essential for our collective success. More specifically, the shift toward commodification in higher education endangers the perception of education as a public good, as institutions wrestle with wage inflation, labor shortages, and the decline of federal aid as a crucial source of post-pandemic recovery funds (Caudill, 2020; Zumeta et al., 2021). These economic pressures have led to a significant increase in operational costs for institutions, including the provision of essential services like mental health and wellness support (Scherer & Leshner, 2021). Additionally, adhering too strictly to traditional and inefficient practices, outdated programs, and antiquated educational methods, at the expense of embracing innovation, has hindered the economic resilience of higher education (Andenoro et al., 2017; Devlin & Samarawickrema, 2022; Grawe, 2021; Ueda & Kezar, 2024). Higher education institutions' hesitation to embrace innovation and agility for the changing learner and market dynamics hampers their ability to cope with rising inflation and budget constraints, while the robust job market and increasing cost of living entice potential students away from college and directly into the workforce (Balzer, 2020; Bowen, 2018). In response, the higher education sector finds itself in an era of pivotal transformation, reevaluating and reinventing its business models to address the evolving needs of diverse learner demographics and shifting workforce demands (Halabieh et al., 2022; Hashim et al., 2022).

The preceding challenges demonstrate the need for adaptive solutions that seemingly align with the development of leadership education courses, programs, and degrees to (1) generate tuition revenue due to high student demand, (2) engage students and drive retention due to their unique individual and relationship-focused curricula, (3) demonstrate an institutional commitment to social movements, inclusion, and academic dialogue, and (4) focus on the development of critical thinking skills in concert with emotionally intelligent and character-centric dispositions to produce civically minded graduates. However, in practice, administrators often fail to align with evenly portioned quarters of the previous whole in favor of a concentrated approach to tuition generation, resulting in the emergence of a crucial dialogue surrounding the commercialization of leadership education and its potential detriments. The paradox of commercialization offering a short-term financial lifeline at the cost of eroding the core values of leadership education necessitates a critical re-assessment of the balance between commercial needs and educational integrity. It is essential to uphold leadership education as a pillar of societal development and not just a marketable commodity.

Urgency

The current situation in higher education, where leadership education is being undermined by commercialization, carries a sense of urgency (Kezar & Bernstein-Sierra, 2024). As the market increasingly drives academic decisions, there is a significant danger that the core objectives of cultivating ethical, critical, and transformative leaders will be neglected. This trend not only impacts the quality of leadership education but also has broader implications for society, as the next generation of leaders may not be equipped with the depth of understanding and experience necessary to navigate complex challenges. Therefore, it is imperative to reevaluate and assert the value of leadership education in its truest form, prioritizing its foundational role over short-term financial gains.

Implications for Leadership Education

The potential consequences for leadership education programs and the students they serve, due to academia's commercialization, are multifaceted and deeply concerning (Kezar, 2023). Leadership programs risk becoming transactional rather than transformational. The focus on immediate revenue generation and reduced overhead often results in increased teaching responsibilities for interdisciplinary faculty and a greater reliance on adjunct faculty, who may offer varying levels

of commitment. This emphasis on financial efficiency can lead to a curriculum more focused on providing credentials rather than nurturing key leadership qualities such as ethical decision-making, empathy, and civic responsibility.

In the long term, the integrity and quality of leadership education could be compromised (Ueda & Kezar, 2024). Students may emerge with a set of skills suited to market demands, but lacking the reflective and critical thinking abilities that applied leadership requires. This transactional approach leads to a generation of leaders ill-equipped to face complex societal challenges thoughtfully and humanely. Ultimately, the transformation into commercial entities supplemented by third-party marketing and recruitment firms alters leadership development programs significantly, as they become less focused on fostering genuine leadership competencies and capacities and more focused on providing a quick path to degree completion or increased course enrollment, which could potentially weaken the role of higher education as a bastion of leadership for the public good.

Challenges to Character Development & Societal Impact

A profit-driven model poses considerable challenges to nurturing ethical and character-based leadership. Such a model may prioritize technical skill acquisition over the development of integrity, ethical frameworks, and social responsibility. The neglect of character development can lead to a lack of leaders who are prepared to make principled decisions, lead with compassion, and engage with societal challenges in a responsible manner (Carr, 2017; Lamb et al., 2022; Rockenbach, 2020; Singh, 2019). The consequences of this are far-reaching, as neglecting character development in leadership education risks producing leaders who prioritize profits over principles, potentially harming their organizations and society. Developing ethical leadership is not merely an educational pursuit with financial benefit but a societal imperative essential for a thriving democracy.

Solutions

In navigating the complex landscape of higher education's economic challenges and the commercial pressures on leadership education, solutions must be as innovative as they are imperative. To preserve the integrity of leadership programs, it is crucial to align financial sustainability with educational excellence. The forthcoming solutions delve into strategic approaches that address the dual necessities of financial viability and maintaining the depth of leadership education. They provide institutional administrators with context for recalibrating their programs' financial models to support educational quality and learning environments where ethical, character-based leadership education can flourish.

Profits Over Purpose as a False Dichotomy

Balancing profit motives with educational goals in leadership programs requires a strategic approach that recognizes the inherent value of quality education (Moore, 2015; Ruhviyanti et al., 2023). To dismantle the false dichotomy between quantity-based tuition generation and quality leadership learning, institutions can explore diverse revenue streams such as partnerships with industries, grants, and alumni contributions that support the educational mission without relying solely on student fees. More specifically, by implementing tiered program structures that leverage resources from accessible introductory courses to fund transformative leadership programs (Greere, 2023; Maiya & Aithal, 2023; Robinson et al., 2022), adopting balanced scorecard approaches that equally value financial, customer, internal business process, and learning and growth perspectives (Ruhviyanti et al., 2023; Sauri et al., 2023; Sinuany-Stern & Sherman, 2021) and/or investing in endowments specifically for leadership education that emphasize long-term investment over short-term profitability (Fardows et al., 2023), institutional administrators can secure financial stability while preserving the integrity of their leadership education programs and validating student, faculty, and stakeholder value.

In navigating this competing dichotomy, transparency with stakeholders about the cost and value of educational offerings is essential (Langrafe et al., 2020). Institutional administrators should consider the development of metrics that go beyond enrollment or financials to include educational impact, ensuring that leadership programs remain true to their core mission of developing leadership capacity and competence. Integrating these measures into the operational ethos of higher education institutions ensures that the depth and quality of leadership education are not compromised for short-term financial gains.

Encourage Reform – A Carrot Approach

Encouraging reform involves strategic incentives that align economic viability with quality mandates. This approach can include offering financial incentives tied to specific educational quality benchmarks, such as high student satisfaction rates or successful post-graduation outcomes, and rewarding institutions that enhance their leadership programs (Ortagus et al., 2020). Moreover, prestigious recognition for programs excelling in integrating ethical training and societal impact could motivate continuous improvement. Support for innovative pedagogical practices, such as new teaching technologies or community-based learning experiences, could also be incentivized, encouraging institutions to adopt forward-thinking education models and curricula that integrate real-world problem-solving, ethical decision-making, and opportunities for reflective practice (Averill & Major, 2020; Sorokina et al., 2021).

Concurrently, creating partnerships with industries and organizations through collaborative funding opportunities can help align leadership programs with current market and societal needs. This enhances program and learning relevance and application allowing students to engage directly with leadership challenges (Audretsch & Belitski, 2022; Skalicky et al., 2020). Additionally, incorporating digital and blended learning platforms can expand access to leadership education, inviting a diverse range of voices and experiences to inform and shape the learning process (Alenezi, 2023). Finally, linking student financial aid to participation in leadership development could drive student enrollment in these programs, overall retention, and an institutional focus on quality and expansion (Salmi & D'Addio, 2021). When combined, these strategies can balance financial pressures with a commitment to educational excellence while forging a path that ensures leadership education remains a transformative experience that contributes positively to society.

Accreditation & Standards – A Stick Approach

The creation and enforcement of accreditation standards specifically for leadership education programs could be a powerful means to address the challenges highlighted. Standards would establish a benchmark for the essential elements of leadership education, including but not limited to ethical development, critical thinking, and societal impact. Extending beyond guidelines or suggested practices, programs would need to demonstrate quantitative and qualitative metrics of how their curricula and pedagogies contribute to these outcomes to receive accreditation (Gaston, 2023).

Such standards could mandate that programs offer a balance of theoretical and practical learning experiences, ensuring that leadership is taught as a practice grounded in real-world challenges (Andenoro et al., 2019; Andenoro et al., 2023). Accreditation could also require programs to show how they foster character development and prepare students to make ethical decisions that positively impact society (Guthrie & Beatty, 2022; Guthrie et al., 2021). This could shift the trend away from commodification and force institutional administrators and faculty members to realign with and actualize their core mission of developing competent, conscientious individuals capable of addressing the complex challenges faced by our organizations and communities across our global landscape.

Furthermore, preserving the essence of leadership education amidst financial and market pressures

requires a multi-pronged strategy that anchors itself in the core purpose of cultivating authentic leaders. This idea goes beyond the proverbial ivory tower of higher education to policy-makers, nonprofits, and corporate entities attempting to shape change and viability within higher education spaces as a key function of leader preparation and societal impact (Beerkens, 2020). Policy recommendations should focus on incentivizing institutions to invest in quality leadership programs through strategic partnerships and accreditation standards that emphasize ethical and transformative leadership outcomes and, ultimately, produce ethically driven, socially responsible leaders capable of impacting a positive trajectory for our organizations and societies.

Conclusion & Value

Within the current landscape of higher education, there is an intricate balance between maintaining the veracity of leadership education and the commercial pressures that threaten to undermine it. However, a revitalized approach grounded in innovation and agility that disrupts the traditional preferences and approaches of higher education while preserving the integrity of leadership education has a tremendous value. It provides actionable strategies for realigning educational practices with the core mission of developing adaptive and principled leadership capacity for change within our dynamic student and learner populations.

Understanding this, the preceding purpose-driven approaches provide intellectual merit for the diverse fields and interdisciplinary space of leadership and broader impact for society at large. The intellectual merit of the preceding serves the diverse fields of leadership education by advocating for high-quality leadership programs that adhere to ethical and educational standards, despite prevailing economic pressures. The intellectual merit is extended to the broader context of higher education institutions, as a stakeholder/learner-focused approach that understands and meets the needs of various organizations and communities through leadership education ultimately has the potential to create and extend value for struggling institutions of higher education. This includes a reevaluation of relationships with internal and external stakeholders to ensure that higher education institutions fulfill their educational and societal missions to cultivate the next generation of leaders replete with a toolkit for addressing the most pressing adaptive challenges now and in the future. The broader impact tied to societal advancement is also evident, as the preceding approaches emphasize developing leaders equipped with the foresight and integrity to address future societal challenges, thus reinforcing the importance of leadership education as a public good essential for the advancement of democracy and community well-being.

The outlined strategies emphasize a deep commitment to maintaining the core principles of leadership education and ensuring it continues to produce ethical, reflective leaders adept at navigating our complex society. However, these strategies also serve as a cautionary tale for institutional administrators who will ultimately determine the integrity of their leadership education programs, the strategic allocation of resources, the agency of their faculty, and the quality of their student experience. As a leadership educator and former university administrator with extensive experience in leadership education, I understand that upholding these standards and ensuring leadership education remains a force for positive change depends on the commitment of everyone involved in the process. However, as an advocate for leadership education change, I also recognize that the path to hell is paved with good intentions. We need leadership educators, faculty, administrators, and policymakers to engage in strategic actions that reaffirm our collective commitment to the integrity of leadership education through consistent institutional approaches that ensure leadership education's place as a potent force for good in society. By doing so, we can ensure that leadership education continues to enrich not just the financial bottom line but individuals, communities, and societies, making a profound impact on the world.

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