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Toward a Positive and Dynamic Theory of Leadership Development

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Abstract

In this chapter, we draw from the literature on positive organizational scholarship to inform and extend current theories and research on leadership development in organizational settings. Specifically, we highlight the value of a strengths-based approach to leadership development, draw attention to the emergence of positive cycles of leadership development, and emphasize the role of high-quality relationships and connections in facilitating leadership development. Our hope is that these theoretical insights provide the basis for new theory on cultivating extraordinary leadership capacity in organizations and stimulate future research on the positive and dynamic processes involved in leadership development.

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In this chapter, we draw from the literature on positive organizational scholarship to inform and extend current theories and research on leadership development in organizational settings. Specifically, we highlight the value of a strengths-based approach to leadership development, draw attention to the emergence of positive cycles of leadership development, and emphasize the role of high-quality relationships and connections in facilitating leadership development. Our hope is that these theoretical insights provide the basis for new theory on cultivating extraordinary leadership capacity in organizations and stimulate future research on the positive and dynamic processes involved in leadership development.

Leadership has long been recognized as an important source of competitive advantage for organizations (McCall, 1998; Tichy & Cohen, 1997; Vicere & Fulmer, 1998). Indeed, leadership is an important predictor of follower job performance and satisfaction, group effectiveness, and organizational performance (DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011; Waldman, Ramírez, House, & Puranam, 2001). Yet, leadership is not simply about meeting performance standards or individuals' being merely satisfied at work. Leadership is also about enabling individuals, groups, and organizations to thrive, be the best they can be, and dramatically exceed expectations. As Cameron states (2008, p. 13), "leaders focus on organizational flourishing, enabling the best of the human condition, and creating exceptionally positive outcomes, not merely on resolving problems, overcoming obstacles, increasing competitiveness, or even attaining profitability." People look to work for meaning in life (Wrzesniewski, 2002) and long to be part of something larger and more significant than themselves. Leadership can be a catalyst for enabling individuals to discover this meaning and realize their sense of purpose at work and beyond.

Recognizing the importance of leadership, organizations are spending approximately half of their organizational learning and development budgets on leadership development (O'Leonard, 2009). In fact, leadership development is often cited as one of the most important priorities for human resource and talent management in organizations and is becoming a strategic priority at all levels of the organization (O'Leonard, 2009; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004). In parallel, organizational scholars are answering calls for more research on leadership development. Recent studies have examined the validity of experience-based leadership development (DeRue & Wellman, 2009; Dragoni, Tesluk, Russell, & Oh, 2009), explored how different people experience and go through the leadership development process (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009; DeRue & Ashford, 2010a), and expanded the criterion domain to move beyond traditional leadership skills and consider the development of individuals' identities as leaders (DeRue & Ashford, 2010b; Day & Harrison, 2007; Van Knippenberg, Van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004), motivation to lead (Kark & Van Dijk, 2007), and ethical orientation (Lichtenstein, Smith, & Torbert, 1995; Schminke, (p. 785) Ambrose, & Neubaum, 2005). Indeed, the interest in research on leadership development is evident across several special issues on the topic (McCall, 2010; Pearce, 2007; Yammarino, 2000).

Despite the attention that leadership development is receiving from scholars and practitioners alike, we contend that current theory and research on leadership development are limited in several important ways. Leadership has traditionally been equated with individuals in supervisory positions (Ancona & Backman, 2008; Bedian & Hunt, 2006), and as a result, most leadership development research focuses on addressing the skill or motivation deficiencies of individuals in these leadership positions. There are two fundamental problems with this approach to studying leadership development. First, by only focusing on individuals' deficiencies, it is possible that existing research does not capture the benefits associated with investing in and developing individuals' current strengths and talents (Spreitzer, 2006). Second, although there is value in developing individual-level leadership skills, leadership is often conceptualized as a social, mutual influence process that is embodied within a system of leader–follower relationships and patterns of influence that go beyond any single individual and evolve over time (Bedeian & Hunt, 2006; Collinson, 2005; Gemmill & Oakley, 1992; Gronn, 2002; Parry, 1998; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). In this sense, leadership development is not about simply building the capacity of an individual, but that of a collective to exhibit leadership through a relational network of mutual influence (Day, 2000). Unfortunately, current theory and research provide limited insight into the role of individuals' strengths and talents in the leadership development process, as well as the temporal and relational dynamics of the process.

In this chapter, we begin to address these limitations by examining the leadership development process through the lens of positive organizational scholarship (POS; Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003). Specifically, we explore the following question: How can POS enrich our understanding of leadership development in organizations? We organize the chapter around three specific objectives. First, we establish how and why adopting a POS perspective can inform and extend our understanding of leadership development in organizations. Second, we identify three areas in which POS can enrich leadership development theory and research. Within each of these, we identify specific insights that arise from examining leadership development through a POS lens, develop the basis for new theory on leadership development, and highlight several propositions and research questions that can serve as the foundation for future research. Third, we offer a set of specific guidelines and recommendations for conducting research on the intersection of POS and leadership development.

What Is the Value in Adopting a Positive View of Leadership Development?

Positive organizational scholarship concerns the study of phenomena "associated with what individuals and organizations aspire to be when they are at their very best" (Cameron, Dutton, Quinn, & Wrzesniewski, 2003, p. 362). Leadership is one such phenomenon. Indeed, McCall (2010, p. 15) describes leadership as a process of "creating a context in which people can reach their full potential in serving the organization's mission." Likewise, Cameron (2008) suggests that leadership is most effective and most likely to enable extraordinary performance when individuals accentuate what is right, what is inspiring, and what is good in organizations. If we adopt this positive view of leadership, the fundamental question with respect to leadership development is as follows: How can organizations develop a capacity for leadership that enables people to reach their full potential and fosters extraordinary performance that exceeds expectations? We propose that adopting a POS perspective on leadership development begins to address this question in three important ways.

First, leadership development practices are most often grounded in a deficit approach to human development, whereby deficiencies in individuals' knowledge, skills, and abilities are identified and then targeted with specific developmental opportunities (Ohlott, 2004; Spreitzer, 2006). Likewise, most research on leadership development has focused on how organizations can assess, provide feedback on, and address individuals' deficiencies in leadership skills and abilities (Day, 2000). Although doing so is important, an alternative POS-based perspective suggests that building on people's strengths and not just focusing on their shortcomings is an important element of leadership development (Rath & Conchie, 2008; Spreitzer, 2006). Thus, one insight from POS is that we need theories and models for how best to build on individuals' strengths and talents during the leadership process, and POS offers a foundation for such research.

Second, a well-accepted tenet in current theories of leadership development is that the development (p. 786) process is dynamic and cyclical (Van Velsor, Moxley, & Bunker, 2004). At both individual and group levels of analysis, the capacity for leadership develops in different ways, at different times, and at different rates over time—ultimately taking on either positive or negative cycles of development (Day et al., 2009). For example, one idea often discussed in research on experience-based leadership development is that the developmental value of a job

assignment is partially a function of an individual's prior job experiences, what lessons and skills were learned during his or her prior experiences, and how "ready" that individual is for the current experience (Avolio, 2005; Avolio & Hannah, 2008; Ohlott, 2004). When job assignments build on and extend the lessons learned from prior experiences, a positive developmental cycle can be created. When job assignments are disconnected or do not reinforce the lessons of past experiences, a negative cycle can be created. Similar negative development cycles have been documented in research on education and child development (Broidy et al., 2003; Nagin & Tremblay, 1999; Spreiker, Larson, Lewis, Keller, & Gilchrist, 1999). However, despite acknowledging that human development processes are cyclical, current theory and research on leadership development offer few insights into how positive and negative cycles of development are created in organizational settings. In contrast, POS is concerned with the study of generative, capability enhancing processes and structures, and thus provides insight into how positive, reinforcing cycles emerge in organizations (Dutton, Glynn, & Spreitzer, 2006). Thus, incorporating a POS perspective into theory and research on leadership development will help illuminate when and under what conditions positive developmental cycles occur.

The third reason for incorporating POS into our study of leadership development is because it addresses the relational aspects of leadership. Leadership is not an individual act but rather a social process of mutual influence that is enacted within a network of leader–follower relationships (Hollander, 1978; Parry, 1998). In this sense, leadership is very much a relational concept. However, with the exception of research on the development of leader–member exchange relationships (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), most research on leadership development fails to account for the relational elements of leadership. Rather than consider the evolution of the content and quality of the interactions between leaders and followers, the literature on leadership development primarily focuses on the development of individuals' leadership skills and behavioral competencies (e.g., McCall, 2004). As a result, current models of leadership development do not fully explain the process through which leader–follower relationships become a social reality in organizations and how those relationships evolve into high-quality, functioning leadership relationships over time. Positive organizational scholarship, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of relational connections and helps explain the process of constructing high-quality connections between people (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). By extending POS to the domain of leadership development, we hope to redirect existing theory toward a more

relational-oriented approach to conceptualizing and studying the process of leadership development.

In sum, we contend that adopting a POS perspective establishes the foundation for at least three new insights related to the leadership development process: the value of a strengths-based approach, the cyclical nature of leadership development and need to understand the emergence of positive development cycles, and the role of high-quality relationships and connections in leadership development. We now examine each of these insights in turn, explaining how POS informs and extends current theories of leadership development.

Toward a Theory of Positive Leadership Development

Strengths-based Leadership Development

Positive organizational scholarship is grounded in an affirmative bias that results in a focus on enhancing strengths, affirming human potential, and maintaining a positive orientation toward what is right, as opposed to overcoming obstacles or deficiencies (Cameron et al., 2003a). The affirmative bias is grounded in an assumption that individuals, groups, and organizations have an innate desire and inherent latent ability not only to improve but also to prosper and excel above expectations. Some scholars have referred to this affirmative bias as an illustration of the *heliotropic effect*, whereby living systems are drawn toward positive energy and away from negative energy (Cooperrider & Srivastava, 1987). Applying an affirmative bias to leadership development implies that it might be more effective to frame individuals' positive qualities, existing strengths, and past successes as opportunities for building on what is already excellent, as opposed to focusing on individuals' existing liabilities and problems, such as negative or underdeveloped qualities, weaknesses, and performance gaps (Clifton & Harter, 2003).

The validity of a strengths-based approach to human development has been established in several different research domains. One of the first studies was an investigation of 10th-grade students' reading ability, in which Glock (1955) observed that high-ability students actually improved at faster rates over time than did low-ability students. As a result, the gap between high- and low-ability students actually increased over time, suggesting that building on one's current strengths and talents can be more effective than trying to develop talents that do not exist

or are deficient in some way. These findings represent the beginning of a strengths-based movement in human development, and indeed, much of the current research on youth development has adopted a positive, strengths-based orientation (Larson, 2000; Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005; Smith, 2006). A similar focus on strengths can be found in recent theories of authentic leadership development (Avolio & Gardner, 2005), and in much of the research on leadership development emerging from the Gallup Organization (Clifton & Anderson, 2002; Clifton & Harter, 2003; Rath & Conchie, 2008). A consistent theme across all of this research is that some of the greatest gains in human development occur when training and development are targeted not at addressing people's deficiencies, but at improving what they already do well—what Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) refer to as people's positive traits.

A strengths-based approach stands in stark contrast to the existing literature on leadership development. For example, much of the research on learning from experience emphasizes the importance and developmental value of on-the-job experiences that are inherently stressful and unpleasant. Research as far back as McCall, Lombardo, and Morrison (1988), and as recent as DeRue and Wellman (2009), identifies job assignments that involve high pressure from outside constituencies, a lack of organizational support, or inherited problems as being particularly developmental. Likewise, Moxley and Pulley (2004) theorize that negative-valence experiences and hardships such as mistakes and failures, career setbacks, personal traumas, problem employees, and downsizing events develop individuals' capacity for leadership by addressing deficiencies in their self-awareness, resiliency, and consideration and compassion for others.

By looking beyond the hardships people face to also consider more positive developmental experiences, a POS perspective brings into focus questions about how leadership development processes can build on people's current leadership capacities and strengths in ways that foster the creation and growth of new leadership capacities. According to adult learning theories (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984; Marsick & Watkins, 1990; Rogers, 1969), experience-based learning occurs when an individual's routines and thought patterns are disrupted by a novel experience, causing the individual to reassess and modify existing knowledge structures, approaches, and processes. Negative experiences, such as setbacks and hardships, can certainly disrupt existing routines and structures, but positive experiences can also provide a stimulus for learning from experience, and potentially without some of the negative consequences associated with hardship and trauma. To this point, Spreitzer (2006) advocates the idea of positive valence

experiences ("positive jolts") that stimulate learning and development by energizing individuals and illuminating the possibilities for personal growth and development. Examples of positive developmental experiences might include receiving feedback about the positive contribution or impact that one has on another individual (Grant, 2008) or being granted the opportunity to shadow or be exposed to senior role models (Graen & Cashman, 1975). Not only can these positive experiences stimulate learning by breaking existing thought patterns and routines, but positive experiences also encourage individuals to create, consider, and work toward a more positive self-image. Moreover, because they are more likely to be perceived as supportive and validating, as opposed to threatening, positive experiences may foster psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), a context that encourages risk taking and embraces personal growth (Dutton & Glynn, 2007; Spreitzer, Stephens, & Sweetman, 2009).

Based on these POS principles, we propose that positive developmental experiences will explain variation in leadership development above and beyond any effects associated with challenges and hardships. To establish support for this proposition, future research needs to expand the conceptualization of developmental experiences to encompass positive valence experiences, and then differentiate those experiences both conceptually and empirically from the predominantly negative valence experiences identified in prior research (e.g., McCall et al., 1988; McCauley, Ohlott, & Ruderman, 1999; McCauley, Ruderman, Ohlott, & Morrow, 1994). Similarly, scholars need to clarify the dimensionality of positive developmental experiences and identify the factors that explain why some positive (p. 788) experiences are more developmental than others. One way in which positive experiences may differ is whether the experience is self-focused (e.g., a celebration of one's extraordinary performance) or other-focused (e.g., being made aware of one's contribution to the success or well-being of others). It is possible that self-focused and other-focused experiences stimulate leadership development through different motivational pathways. On the one hand, self-focused experiences may create an awareness of what a person is truly capable of and motivate that person to strive for his or her full potential. On the other hand, other-focused experiences may stimulate learning and development by making salient how personal growth and development enable an individual to have a more positive impact on others, thereby creating a prosocial motivation for learning. Positive jolts, such as the Reflected Best Self-Exercise (RBSE; Spreitzer et al., 2009) that incorporate both self- and other-focused elements may be particularly developmental. Researchers should examine the

utility of the RBSE as a leadership development intervention. By affording participants the chance to both identify their strengths and learn about the positive ways in which they affect others and the social system of which they are a part (Roberts, Dutton, Spreitzer, Heaphy, & Quinn, 2005), participants may experience synergistic motivations for self-improvement. By employing a POS lens to broaden the conceptualization of developmental experiences and examine alternative mechanisms to human development, we would construct a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of how positive and negative experiences influence leadership development processes.

Another area of study that will be important for establishing the validity of a strengths-based approach to leadership development is related to the impact that individuals' current strengths and talents have on future learning from experience. In contrast with the traditional deficit approach to leadership development, the prevailing wisdom among POS scholars is that learning and development are best achieved when people have an opportunity to leverage their talents in progressively more complex and significant tasks and situations. To establish the basis for our proposition, it will be important that future research address several issues. First, scholars need to establish the relative validity of a strengths-based approach above and beyond the deficit approach that pervades current theories of leadership development. Second, it will be particularly important to understand which strengths and talents are most important in predicting the developmental value of different types of experiences, how best to assess those strengths and talents, and how individuals can best leverage their strengths and talents in facilitating experience-based learning and development. One tool that should be explored is the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS; Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005), which will enable researchers to identify individuals' character strengths such as hope, integrity, and perspective, and then explore how and to what extent building on these strengths promotes leadership development. Unfortunately, current theories of leadership development offer little insight into these questions. To advance a POS, strengths-based approach to leadership development, it is essential that future research explain how people's strengths and talents can be used to identify the optimal developmental experiences for an individual and how these experiences can be sequenced to facilitate learning and development.

Finally, we want to emphasize that adopting a POS perspective does not undermine or disregard the role of challenges, hardships, and setbacks in the leadership development process.

Existing theory and research make very clear that people can learn from failures (Sitkin, 1992) and often emerge from hardships with key lessons learned about themselves and how to be more effective as leaders in organizations (Ohlott, 2004). Positive organizational scholarship does not deny the developmental value of such experiences. To the contrary, POS suggests that the developmental value of challenging hardships and setbacks can be enhanced by approaching, going through, and reflecting on negative valence experiences with a more positive orientation. Indeed, the literature on POS would suggest that individuals will experience extraordinary learning and development when negative valence experiences are framed and processed as opportunities to capitalize on existing strengths and talents, as opposed to challenges or tests of skills that might not exist or may be deficient in some way. When framed in more positive terms, we would expect individuals to enter into the experience with not only higher efficacy for the task (Bandura, 1997), but also a clearer sense of what strengths and talents they could build from and utilize to learn and grow as leaders. Additionally, negative valence experiences are necessary for positive leadership development because they serve as a foil against which people can cognitively process and interpret the meaning and value of positive developmental experiences (Cameron (p. 789) et al., 2003b). This foil may be particularly important for framing and interpreting positive feedback. Initial research on strengths-only feedback (Spreitzer et al., 2009) suggests that people receiving such feedback may "try to read between the lines" (p. 343), thereby interpreting strengths as weaknesses. Feedback that includes information about weakness as well as strengths may serve to help people process positive feedback as it is intended. Also, these negative valence experiences reduce the possibility of overconfidence, which can hinder learning processes (Chiu & Klassen, 2009), and enable the perspective and humility necessary to maintain a learning orientation (Spreitzer, 2006).

To establish the validity of these framing effects, future research needs to examine the effects of framing negative valence experiences around strengths and opportunities, and how different cognitive frames influence the leadership development outcomes of these experiences. Additionally, research should examine the relative and additive effects of developmental efforts targeted at addressing weaknesses and limitations and at building strengths and talents. It is likely that the former merely produces leaders of adequate ability, whereas the latter or some combination of the two enables leaders to excel (Spreitzer, 2006).

Positive Development Cycles in Leadership Development

Leadership development is, at its core, a process of human growth and change (McCauley, Moxley, & Van Velsor, 1998). Unfortunately, most of the existing literature on leadership development is concentrated on the efficacy of specific leadership development practices (e.g., action learning, feedback programs), and historically, very little scholarly attention has been directed at describing or explaining the dynamic change processes that take place during leadership development (Day, 2000; Day & Lance, 2004). Part of the problem is historical. Much of the research on leadership development has concentrated on rich descriptions of leadership behavior at different points in time (Conger & Kanungo, 1988), cross-sectional designs that connect individuals' current leadership behaviors to prior life experiences (Arvey, Zhang, Avolio, & Krueger, 2007; Zacharatos, Barling, & Kelloway, 2000), or pre–post designs that examine the efficacy of leadership development interventions (Collins, 2004; Tourangeau, Lemonde, Luba, Dakers, & Alksnis, 2003). Despite the value of such research, the result is essentially a gallery of studio portraits or before and after snapshots of leaders at different developmental stages that offer little insight into the process of leadership development itself.

The leadership development process is complex and multifaceted, but one important aspect of the process that warrants scholarly attention is the trajectory or cycles of developmental change (Day & Lance, 2004; Halpern, 2004). Building on recent theory in developmental psychology that suggests the development process unfolds along different trajectories (Adolph, Robinson, Young, & Gill-Alvarez, 2008), the holy grail of leadership development is the construction of a positive cycle of development whereby prior learning sets the foundation for future learning, and future learning builds on and reinforces prior learning. DeRue, Ashford and Cotton (2009) offer one illustration of a positive development cycle in their theory of how individuals come to see "leader" as part of their personal identity. In the construction of a leader identity, a positive development cycle emerges when an individual behaves in ways that are consistent with a leader identity, and in turn, others within the social context respond to that person's behavior in ways that support and reinforce the individual's leader identity. In contrast, when an individual's claim of a leader identity is not supported and reinforced by others, for example by others openly challenging that person's right to leadership, then a positive development cycle is not created—and in fact, a negative development cycle can be created. What is unclear from the existing literature, however, is an understanding of what organizational

structures and processes foster positive development cycles. The literature on POS helps inform current theories of leadership development by illuminating these organizational structures and processes.

Positive organizational scholarship seeks to understand how organizational structures and processes establish the foundation and conditions for the emergence of generative and capability-enhancing processes (Cameron et al., 2003a), and leadership development is one such process. Drawing from POS, we posit that three conditions are essential to creating a positive development cycle in leadership development. The first condition is that there must be a reinforcing nature to development experiences, such that current developmental experiences build on and reinforce the learning that took place in prior developmental experiences. Consistent with our earlier arguments about how developmental experiences need to leverage and build on individuals' strengths, in this case, we are proposing that (p. 790) experiences need to also leverage and build on individuals' prior experiences and the lessons from those experiences (not just their own individual strengths and talents). To fully internalize the lessons of experience and create a positive development cycle, it is important that the lessons of experience be reinforced through repetition over time and across experiences (Ericsson & Lehmann, 1996). In other words, it is when experiences are linked and reinforce each other that a positive development cycle will emerge. To this point, research that specifies how positive experiences can be sequenced with negative experiences to create a positive development cycle would be particularly noteworthy. Negative experiences are a fact of life in organizational settings and can often have harmful emotional and psychological consequences that impede the learning process. Yet, the presence of positive experiences or sequencing of positive experiences with negative experiences might offset those negative consequences and help facilitate the leadership development process. It is probable, therefore, that positive and negative valence experiences are both necessary for making people aware of their need to learn and for stimulating their motivation to learn, while also remaining hopeful and inspired by the possibilities for personal growth and development.

The second condition that is likely important for creating positive development cycles is related to the emotional experience of leadership development. Drawing from Fredrickson's (1998, 2001) broaden-and-build theory of emotions, we posit that the presence of positive emotions will be important for enabling positive development cycles to occur. The broaden-and-

build theory suggests that positive emotions broaden people's momentary thought–action repertoires, thereby widening the array of thoughts and actions that come to mind and are considered in any given situation. For example, positive emotions such as joy create an urge to challenge existing routines, norms, and organizational boundaries, and can often lead to increased creativity (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987). In the context of leadership development, these positive emotions should promote experimenting with new ways of leading or novel approaches to dealing with leadership challenges, and experimentation with new behavioral methods and approaches is central to learning and development (Kolb, 1984). Likewise, positive emotions such as interest create an urge to explore, take in new information and experiences, reassess current belief and knowledge structures, and increase people's preferences for variety and broaden their array of acceptable behavioral options (Estrada, Isen, & Young, 1997; Kahn & Isen, 1993)—all of which should promote learning and development. In this sense, positive emotions are resources that can be drawn on to facilitate positive cycles of development.

It is also possible that positive emotions can lead to positive cycles of development by regulating the negative emotions that can emerge from negative experiences such as hardships or dealing with adversity (Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998; Frederickson, Mancuso, Branigan, & Tugade, 2000). Given that many developmental experiences create discomfort and anxiety for the individuals involved (McCall et al., 1988; Ohlott, 2004), positive emotions can broaden the capacity for learning by building up resilience to any negative emotions that interfere with the learning process, and thereby help generate positive cycles of leadership development.

To explore the role of positive emotions in leadership development, it is important that future research investigate the extent to which positive emotions can shield people from the negatives associated with adversity and hardship, as well as the mechanisms through which this shielding occurs. Moreover, future research needs to illuminate the array of emotions that are created during developmental experiences, and the processes through which those emotions carry forward to affect learning and development. On the one hand, we do not want people to be overly positive and miss the stimulus for learning that is associated with negative emotions (e.g., discomfort), but at the same time, we do not want people feeling hopeless and lacking a motivation to learn. Thus, it might be that a complex balance of positive and negative emotions is needed to facilitate positive cycles of leadership development.

The third condition that we propose is essential to creating a positive cycle of leadership development is a climate of compassion in the organization. In the POS literature, a climate of compassion has been associated with a wide range of positive attitudes, behaviors, and feelings in organizations (Dutton, Frost, Worline, Lilius, & Kanov, 2002; Lilius, Worline, Dutton, Kanov, Frost, & Maitlis, 2008) and has been shown to foster stronger, more positive relationships between people (Frost, Dutton, Worline, & Wilson, 2000). Drawing from these findings, we contend that a climate of compassion will also have positive effects on learning processes and help sustain positive development cycles. In the service of learning and development, (p. 791) people will inevitably experience moments in which they stumble, mistakes are made, and failures occur. During these challenging times, people will experience a range of negative attitudes and feelings such as embarrassment and shame, and for many, levels of psychological stress will increase. Even though hardships, setbacks, and failures can be the source of much learning and growth (McCall et al., 1988), people have a tendency to focus on the negatives of difficult experiences and overlook the possible lessons that could be derived from these situations (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). By constantly focusing on the negatives, people begin to define themselves according to their mistakes and failures, their efficacy for leadership decreases (Paglis & Green, 2002), their identity as a leader weakens (Day & Harrison, 2007; DeRue & Ashford, 2010b; DeRue et al., 2009), and a negative development cycle is created.

According to POS, however, a climate of compassion can help offset the negative effects of challenges at work. A compassionate climate is characterized by people who recognize that others are experiencing some sort of negative state, can empathize with their negative attitudes and feelings, and then respond in ways that help people not only overcome the negatives but also strengthen individuals' functional capacity (Dutton et al., 2002; Frost et al., 2000). In this sense, compassion is not simply about empathizing and showing concern for others. Compassion is also about enabling individuals to excel despite their hardships and engaging in actions that help develop a greater capacity for resilience and learning from challenging experiences (Dutton et al., 2006). Thus, when people encounter a developmental opportunity that is comprised of adversity and hardship, in a compassionate organization, these people are more likely to have colleagues who recognize their struggles and are ready to support and respond in ways that help facilitate learning and growth (e.g., through feedback, mentoring, coaching, training, provision of

needed resources). In addition, people who receive compassion from others tend to experience more positive emotions (Dutton, 2003; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Frost, 2003). These positive emotions can enhance resiliency and help foster the creation of positive development cycles. In this sense, a climate of compassion provides individuals with a resource that they can draw upon, in order to build upon and reinforce their developmental experiences, and in doing so, create a positive cycle of development.

Although the existing POS literature provides a solid theoretical basis for how a climate of compassion might help foster positive development cycles, there remain several important questions about the role of compassion in leadership development. For example, the concept of forgiveness (Bright, 2006) is often discussed in conjunction with compassion, and existing research shows that forgiveness can be instrumental in recovering from organizational hardships and setbacks (Cameron & Caza, 2002). Given that failures play such a meaningful role in leadership development (McCall et al., 1988), it would seem important that individuals be forgiven for their failures first, and only then will learning from mistakes occur and opportunities to demonstrate that learning be granted. Research that examines the role of forgiveness in relation to compassion and leadership development would be particularly noteworthy. In addition, we have conceptualized compassion in terms of an organization-level climate, but compassion is ultimately enacted within the context of dyadic relationships. Research that examines the process by which compassionate acts between people affect the learning process would go a long way toward advancing our understanding of how positive development cycles emerge and sustain over time.

High-quality Relationships and Connections

As stated in our introductory comments, leadership is not an individual act but rather an exchange relationship whereby social actors engage in a process of mutual influence (Hollander, 1978; Parry, 1998). Thus, to understand the development of leadership capacity in organizations, it would follow that we need to understand how leadership relationships emerge and develop in organizational settings. Yet, the leadership literature concentrates primarily on the influence tactics of the leaders to the exclusion of those enacted by followers. For instance, the relational dimension of transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978) includes only leaders'

behaviors toward followers (e.g., attending to follower needs, listening to their concerns), but it does not describe or explain follower behaviors or dynamic leader–follower interactions. Likewise, much of the leadership development literature focuses on individual-level development and does not fully explain the emergence or construction of leader–follower relationships.

In contrast, the literature on POS "examines the conditions, processes, and mechanisms in organizational relationships that increase the capacity for (p. 792) growth, learning, generativity, and resilience in individuals, groups and organizations" (Ragins & Dutton, 2007, p. 3). In particular, POS aims to understand how people construct relationships that are mutually beneficial, filled with positive emotions and regard for others, resilient to interpersonal strains and challenges, and open to new ideas and ways of interacting (i.e., high-quality connections; Dutton, 2003; Gittell, 2003). Not surprisingly, these attributes of interpersonal relationships are reflective of how Graen and colleagues (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) describe high-quality relationships between leaders and followers. In this sense, high-quality leadership relationships are one form of high-quality connections discussed in the POS literature. Drawing from these ideas, we contend that adopting a POS perspective on leadership development can help illuminate how high-quality leadership relationships emerge and develop over time.

One mechanism through which positive relationships might facilitate leadership development is by establishing a context that enables people to learn about themselves, creates a safe environment for experimenting with new forms of the self, and provides a secure base for mutual learning and development (Roberts, 2007). A positive relationship is one in which there is a true sense of mutuality and relatedness, such that people experience mutual giving and receiving, caring, and safety in challenging times (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This sense of mutuality and relatedness provides the psychosocial support and motivation for the construction and growth of positive relational identities that ultimately serve as a foundation in the construction of leadership relationships. Likewise, mutuality can reduce the likelihood that people in a leadership relationship experience identity threats or conflict over leader and follower identities. Rather, a sense of mutuality will enable people to co-create reinforcing identities as leader and follower, and through this identity construction process, generate a mutually reinforcing cycle of development that leads to high-quality leadership relationships.

Another way in which positive relationships can enable leadership development is through the provision of meaning and purpose. For many, leadership is the requisite source of meaning in organizational life (Podolny, Khurana, & Hill-Popper, 2005), but we contend that it is also the case that the purpose and meaning originating from positive relationships can also help enable and facilitate leadership development in organizations. A long history of research shows that individuals look to other people for validation in relation to the importance of the tasks they perform and the roles they assume (Aldefer, 1972). Such validation offers reinforcement that one's role in the organization is valued and that individuals are contributing to a meaningful and socially valued purpose (Kahn, 2007; Mitroff, 1993). In the context of leadership, positive relationships that provide such validation and reinforcement will link people to a larger purpose and motivate them to take on more leadership-like identities and roles in service of that purpose. To the extent organizations consist of a network of mutually reinforcing positive relationships that communicate purpose and meaning, we would expect to see the emergence of clear, well-defined leadership identities and relationships, which, in turn, will facilitate growth and development in the organization's leadership capacity.

Toward a Research Agenda on Positive Leadership Development

Table 1 provides a summary of the key propositions and research questions put forth in this chapter. In this section, we build on these propositions and research questions to offer several guidelines and suggestions for incorporating POS-based theories and models into the study of leadership development. First, our emphasis on strengths-based leadership development highlights how important it is that scholars explicitly consider where a person's current leadership knowledge, skills, abilities, and self-concept are when she begins the development process, and how these starting points shape the leadership development process going forward. Every individual will come to the development process with different levels and types of strengths and talents. Historically, leadership development research has used individuals' starting points simply as a baseline measure upon which to assess growth and change—that is, if the starting point is considered at all. In adopting a strengths-based approach, an individual's starting point in terms of leadership skills, for example, will affect the form and/or type of leadership development that occurs, as well as the role or trajectory of that development over time. Thus, an

individual's starting point is a viable predictor of leadership development and not simply a baseline control measure. In addition, a strengths-based perspective on leadership development highlights how important the framing of developmental experiences might be to understanding why some people learn from hardships and others do not. In future research, scholars could design experimental (p. 793) or quasi-experimental studies in which the developmental experience is held constant but the cognitive framing of that experience for people is manipulated to focus on either the opportunity to build upon current strengths and talents, or in contrast, to address deficiencies in skills or knowledge. Studies such as these would go a long way toward building the empirical evidence necessary for establishing the validity of a strengths-based perspective on leadership development.

Adopting a POS perspective on leadership development also helps illuminate the need for multilevel theorizing and research designs. Developmental experiences are essentially events that occur and vary within people (DeRue & Wellman, 2009). Individuals' strengths and talents are at the individual-level and vary between people. The high-quality connections that we propose are important for facilitating the development of leadership relationships are dyad-level, relational connections between people (Ragins & Dutton, 2007). Finally, the context and climate for compassion that we discuss could operate at the group or organizational level (Cameron, 2008). Scholars have recently emphasized the need (p. 794) for more multilevel theory and research on leadership development (Avolio, 2005), and this chapter further illustrates that need. By identifying a set of POS-based factors that influence leadership development processes across multiple levels of analysis, we hope that this chapter continues to advance leadership research toward a more multilevel perspective in both our theorizing and empirical research.

Finally, we have presented leadership development as a relational and highly dynamic process that can take on different trajectories over time. With this in mind, it is essential that leadership development research adopt a more longitudinal and processual approach. For example, studies that measure leadership over multiple time periods, and then use latent-growth modeling to model the patterns and trajectories of leadership development, would go a long way toward providing insights into the leadership development process (Day & Lance, 2004). Likewise, research that employs observational and ethnographic methods would enable scholars to generate rich descriptions of individuals and groups learning leadership, and thus provide

greater insight into the dynamic cycles of individual and relational development that comprise the leadership development process.

Conclusion

After Day argued that interest in leadership development had reached its "zenith" approximately 10 years ago (Day, 2000), we are observing a resurgence of people interested in the science of leadership development. Organizational scholars are now employing a variety of theoretical perspectives and research methods to study leadership development processes in organizations. In this chapter, we sought to build the case for a POS-based perspective on leadership development and identified several ways in which existing theories of leadership development could be enriched by incorporating POS theories and models. Specifically, we highlight the need to move from a deficit approach to also considering the importance of building on people's strengths in leadership development. We also emphasize how POS can inform our understanding of the dynamics in leadership development through the emergence and construction of positive development cycles. Finally, we underscore the importance of considering high-quality connections and relationships in the leadership development process. We ultimately hope that this chapter serves as the basis for new theory and research on how to cultivate extraordinary leadership capacity in organizations.

Table 1. Positive leadership development: Key propositions and research questions.

	Propositions	Research Questions
Strengths-based Leadership Development	• Positive developmental experiences will explain variation in leadership development above and beyond any effects associated with challenges and hardships.	• What types of positive development experiences are most developmental? What types of positive development experiences are most developmental? • What are the mechanisms through which positive experiences facilitate leadership development?
	• Leveraging one's talents in progressively more complex and significant tasks will facilitate leadership development.	• What is the relative validity of a strengths-based approach, above and beyond a deficit-based approach of leadership development? • How can an individual's strengths and talents be used to identify appropriate developmental experiences?
	• Framing negative-valence experiences as positive opportunities to capitalize on existing strengths and abilities will facilitate leadership development.	• How do different positive and negative frames influence leadership development processes and outcomes?
Positive Cycles of Leadership Development	• Positive development cycles of leadership development occur when developmental experiences build on and reinforce the lessons of prior experiences.	• What characteristics of experiences determine how those experiences should be sequenced? • What is the optimum ratio and sequence of positive and negative valence experiences?
	• Positive emotions enable positive development cycles of leadership development to occur.	• To what extent and how do positive emotions shield people from the negatives associated with adversity and hardship? • What mix of positive and negative emotions best facilitates leadership development?
	• A climate of compassion leads to positive cycles of leadership development.	• How do compassionate acts between and among individuals affect the learning process? • When and how can forgiveness within the context of a compassionate organization facilitate leadership development?
High-quality Relationships and Connections	• Mutuality and relatedness among individuals provides a relational context for leadership development.	• Do mutuality and relatedness promote the development of more relational and shared forms of leadership?
	• Positive relationships facilitate leadership development through the provision of meaning and purpose.	• How does the structure of positive relationship networks influence the degree to which people seek out and take on leadership identities and roles in the organization?

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