

Coaching and Leadership Fitness: An Adlerian Holistic Approach to Leadership Effectiveness

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Abstract

This article presents current research on holistic coaching techniques, including a review of basic concepts of Adlerian therapy. We applied them to today's coaching techniques, which focus on individual growth rather than on correcting deficiencies. We discuss the central concepts of positive psychology, identifying parallels between Adlerian therapy principles and positive psychology constructs. The article then addresses aspects of leadership fitness, both physical and psychological, to establish correlations between leadership fitness and leadership effectiveness. Lastly, we offer a comprehensive model that integrates the subject constructs and then set forth a call for future research on group coaching.

Introduction

Leadership studies often neglect the physiological aspects of a leader's arsenal, focusing mainly on psychological facets. Recent research, however, examines the nature and relationship between the physiology of leadership and behavioral outcomes and effectiveness (Neck and Cooper, 2000). Goldsby and Neck (2001), for example, discuss physical regimens and nutrition guidelines linked to stress reduction for executives, particularly middle-aged leaders; they note that executives draw on the experience of athletes in establishing and maintaining physical fitness, emphasizing that executives who return to a more sedentary lifestyle see performance reductions. In another study of senior executives, McDowell-Larsen, Kearney, and Campbell (2002) suggest that bosses who exercise regularly are rated higher on effectiveness scales on various leadership assessment instruments. This research collected data on the exercise programs, measured

participants' body fat and blood pressure, and reviewed overall appearance. Findings showed that regular exercise was positively correlated with reduction in body fat, healthier blood pressure readings, and executives' ratings on various leadership criteria.

We address three main constructs in this article. First, holistic coaching techniques, based on central concepts of Adlerian therapy, are explored as a method for promoting individual growth through intervention, instead of correcting weaknesses or deficiencies. Second, principle concepts of positive psychology are compared to Adlerian therapy constructs. Third, various aspects of leadership fitness, both physical and psychological, are described in order to link leadership fitness to leadership effectiveness.

The concept of leadership fitness is not new; however, there is a more recent emphasis on how it may impact the effectiveness of leaders in their jobs. For example, the non-profit Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) collected data suggesting that leaders who exercise and improve physical fitness are rated higher on skills such as leading others, creating team synergy, emotional intelligence and credibility with followers (Editor, 2006). With this data in hand, Sharon McDowell-Larsen, an exercise physiologist with CCL, reported that some participants in CCL's week-long leadership education program started off being skeptical about the effects of exercise/fitness on leadership, but exit interviews indicated that virtually all participants were convinced that fitness had a positive impact on leadership effectiveness. Such findings are not new to CCL. A separate study by McDowell-Larsen (2003) linked fitness to increased time efficiency and improved effectiveness ratings for executives.

The purpose of this article is to examine the interrelationships between the principles of Adlerian holistic therapy and key constructs from positive psychology, and to link them to leadership fitness and effectiveness. One particular mode of coaching will be emphasized – the holistic coaching trend that has emerged from Adlerian psychotherapy. A central argument infers that coaches trained in Adlerian therapy are well equipped for moving executives toward greater fitness levels. This article then contrasts how leadership fitness does and does not relate to pre-existing assets essential to effective leadership. In addition, we urge the field to expand research into the use of group coaching, as an outgrowth of executive coaching, to move leaders toward higher levels of fitness with increased effectiveness in leadership behaviors.

Adlerian Holistic Coaching

Leadership Coaching

Leadership has been viewed as both a necessity for survival and as a strong competitive advantage for organizations (Petrick and Quinn, 2001). Until recently, most development approaches concentrated on the individual leader, missing the larger ramifications of the social context of leadership (Day and Halpin, 2004). When executive coaching began to apply the 360-Degree Assessment Tool, researchers discovered the impact of bi-directional relationships between leaders and followers. As a result, executive coaching began to resemble the tenets of Adlerian psychotherapy.

Adler's seminal approach to psychology and psycho-emotional intervention began with the principle that human behavior is goal oriented and framed by social awareness. Adlerian therapists typically interview clients to understand existing patterns and how these patterns define the clients' lifestyles. Early work supports the notion that interventions for change cannot be initiated until the clients' situational contexts and social filters are fully understood. Page (2005) discusses this principle within a framework published by the Adlerian School of Professional Coaching, a Canadian association of Adlerian coaches; Page points out that the Adlerian model proposes that all humans are creative. Further, people can be bound by their subjective views of reality, where beliefs about themselves and the world often influence and confine creative juices, upon which sound decision-making and behavior are based.

Three fundamental principles provide the framework for understanding Adler's contribution to the field of psychotherapy. They show the practical side of man, since Adler saw therapy in terms of practical solutions. The first principle is known as *self-mastery*. Williams and Davis (2002) described this as Adler's view of individuals as the creators or artists of their own lives. Adler would work to have clients understand this principle as the starting point in their therapeutic relationships; he believed that all work necessary to address intra-psychic conflict and pain emanated from his clients' belief that they could forge their own destinies. This Adlerian paradigm of self-mastery has been adopted in many modern therapeutic modalities.

The second fundamental principle is *striving for superiority*. This principle suggests that humans exist in a vertical world where, in comparison to themselves, another person or group has superior status. As Dreikurs (1998) indicates, Adler likened this principle to the law of gravity, where anyone put in an inferior position will strive to push back, swimming upstream if necessary in order to take the high ground. In fact, Adler believed this was basic human nature – people want and will work to become superior.

The third principle is that there are *overriding social aspects* to human development. Adlerian therapy largely focuses on the present, with an eye toward future outcomes related to the present. Clients are encouraged to be goal oriented and to act purposefully to set up desired outcomes that will enhance their future lives. Adler also considered Freud's tenet that everything is composed of work and love, meaning that the future would be uninhabitable without friendship, social networks, or love. Dreikurs and Moask (1967) explained Adler's principle of social interest by saying that one's relationship to self was meaningless without a relationship to others. This third principle operates with the first two to enable Adlerian therapists to engage each client in an assessment process and follow-on therapeutic intervention process.

Adlerian therapists are trained to assess and understand the client's underlying beliefs and determine the interplay between these beliefs and different systems of relationships within the client's world. This assessment process is performed in both family and work settings. In this regard, Adlerian assessment may have been the forerunner of the 360-Degree Assessment Process, a staple in today's executive coaching circles.

The holistic aspects of Adlerian tenets have certainly influenced the field of modern coaching. This assertion is not new and is based on the literature that depicts the humanistic roots of coaching. For example, Page (2003) pointed out that coaching is a process that seeks to understand people within their field of social influence, and across every related and relevant dimension in their social lives. Moreover, coaching as an intervention hones in on a person's emotional self-awareness (Sherman and Fries, 2004) setting the stage for what Lord and Hall (2005) described as the identity grounding that enables human development as a step toward leadership development. It is this humanistic outlook that narrows the differences between therapy and modern coaching (Davison and Gasiorowski, 2006).

Both coaches and Adlerian therapists emphasize their clients' social relationships and work to improve those relationships to advance their clients' highest priorities and progress toward their ultimate goals. Both interventions hold that client growth and desirable outcomes from treatment are maximized if and when the most important players (family members and/or work team members) see benefits from the individual client's growth. The belief that no man is free until all men are free is supported by Adlerian therapy principle that no one benefits until (almost) every one benefits. As Davison & Gasiorowski (2006) suggest, this can be seen in the relationship between the Adlerian therapist and the client as well. Adlerian therapists consider themselves as equal participants in the helping relationships with their clients. Not surprisingly, it is comparable to the relationship between an executive coach and a client, in that the coaching model considers learning and growth to be bi-directional. Building social foundations both at the therapist/client level and within the client's social system is part of the positive behavior support viewed as driving quality of life (Carr, 2007).

Adler, as Davison & Gasiorowski (2006) point out, was a pragmatic therapist who treated the individual while concurrently engaging all key players around that individual. The larger purpose in life, and fulfillment of that purpose, were inextricably tied to an individual's social network. Adler's concept of total self mastery has been applied generously to executive coaching and can be seen as a holistic approach to leadership development. Today, coaches engage executives in a variety of topics that promote Adlerian self mastery. For example, coaches will ask their clients to work through personal development along with career-wide development. This is done in a sequential process that incorporates team dynamics, organizational development, money, finance, recreation, family, friends, spirituality, and last but not least, physical fitness. Like Adlerian therapists, executive coaches highlight practical, positive solutions that expand an individual's vision of the future. Executive coaches and Adlerian therapists also utilize available internal and external assets with the over-arching objective of helping clients with all aspects of their lives.

Williams and Davis (2002) argue that Adler's work was a precursor to modern day executive and group coaching. It can be stated that the growth of coaching is directly linked to Adlerian principles and the brief interventions that Adler advocated. Coaching engagements are usually short-lived, averaging six months in duration or less. This

solution-based therapy, proposed by Adler and embraced by coaching, completes the circle of evidence that coaching is an outgrowth of Adlerian holistic therapy and the principles currently utilized in coaching for leadership development.

The following section introduces selected constructs of one of the most important recent developments in psychology – the positive psychology movement. Discussion focuses on constructs relevant to both leadership fitness and leadership effectiveness, which are also implicitly embedded in Adlerian therapy, and contribute to holistic coaching by touching on mind, body, and spirit.

Positive Psychology

The second theoretical framework that informs this research is positive psychology. It is a mechanism for fitness that represents a major shift that transformed psychology from a deficit discipline (focusing on individual weaknesses and pathologies) to one which emphasizes human strength. The deficit orientation of psychology is perhaps best evidenced by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders published by the American Psychiatric Association, which provides diagnostic criteria for mental disorders ranging from schizophrenia and depression to gender identity disorders.

Positive psychology, on the other hand, emphasizes the processes and conditions that contribute to optimal functioning of individuals, teams, and organizations. According to Seligman (2002), positive psychology concentrates on the attributes in organizations that assist in the development of human strengths, foster resiliency in organizations, and make restoration and growth possible. It examines meritorious organizational elements, such as empathy, forgiveness, dignity, courteous engagement, optimism, positive emotions, integrity, and wisdom. Thus, positive psychology looks at how people thrive, clearing a path to the “good life” while fostering talent. Positive psychology also provides the theoretical foundation for a positive approach to leadership (Luthans, 2000; Luthans, Luthans, Hodgett, and Luthans, 2001), prompting psychotherapists to utilize a more open, value-based perspective regarding human possibility, motivating intentions, and capacities (Sheldon and King, 2001). Positive psychology is also consistent with the strength-based emphasis of Adlerian therapy, crucial to both individual and group coaching.

In contrast to the negative approach of many psychotherapists, positive psychology is itself a mechanism for fitness that tries to re-focus attention away from what is wrong with people to what is right with people. Examples of this change include reviewing recuperative skills, rather than vulnerabilities, or enhancing/developing a capacity for wellness, effectiveness, and winning, as opposed to the treatment of pathology (Luthans, 2000). Despite its rapid evolution, however, positive psychology is not without challengers and critics. Gable and Haidt (2005), for example, argue that “people who study positive psychology fail to recognize the very real negative sides of life, preferring a Pollyanna view of life” (p. 107). These authors also point out that the aim of positive psychology is “not to erase or supplant work on pathology, distress, and dysfunction. Rather, the aim is to build up what we know about human resilience, strength and growth

to integrate and complement the existing knowledge base” (p. 107). Likewise, according to Seligman (2002), the original three mainstays of positive psychology are positive (albeit non-objective) *experience*, positive *individual traits* in the form of the strengths and moral rectitude, and a positive (affirming) *constitution*. So far, much of the research in the first two areas tap individual levels of analyses, and very few studies address the third, which requires macro levels of analyses. Finally, positive psychology needs to fully define the boundaries of human optimal functioning. Only by attaining this goal will positive psychology generate an understanding of how all of these dynamics enable a physical province of health, subjective well-being, functioning teams, positive organizations, and leadership fitness.

In describing positive psychology as a mechanism for fitness, this article singles out a limited number of positive psychology constructs that are congruent with principles of holistic Adlerian therapy, including optimism, resilience, meaning/purpose, and humor. Not only are many positive constructs embedded in Adlerian therapy, they are also central to conceptualizations of leadership fitness/effectiveness. For example, like positive psychologists, Adler (1958) believed that self-awareness (the creative self) is a significant factor in the development of personality. This aspect of personality is both self-aware and actively involved in striving to overcome challenges and develop the individual’s full potential to form a healthy personality built on human strength (Ansbacher and Ansbacher, 1956).

The following sections define positive psychology as a multi-legged stool and address the main mechanisms used in this definition, including: *Optimism; Resilience;*

Meaning/Purpose; and Humor.

Optimism

Seligman (1998) defines optimists as people who articulate self-directed, stable, and global attributions regarding positive events (e.g., task achievements) and interpret external, unstable, and specific explanations for negative events (e.g., a failed time limit). Snyder (2002, p. 257) notes that “optimism is a goal-based cognitive process that operates whenever an outcome is perceived as having substantial value.” Optimists firmly believe good things will happen in their lives, anticipate positive outcomes, even when things are challenging (Carver and Scheier, 2002), and believe their goals can be achieved despite difficulties. Optimists assume that whatever problems they encounter will be managed and resolved successfully (Paulik, 2001).

Scientific approaches to optimism as a positive psychology construct rest on expectations of the future. A growing body of research confirms that expectations for the future have an important impact on how people react in times of hardship, linking optimism to a long practice of expectancy-value models of intrinsic motivation (Carver & Scheier, 2002). Positive expectations have important implications with regard to an optimist’s ability to be motivated to achieve goals and the related ability to perform successfully on the job. Optimism has also been found to lead managers undergoing change to see more possible interventions, view the change optimistically, and focus on the positive aspects of change (Wagner, 1995). However, as Peterson (2000) notes, optimism can also have drawbacks

and costs. For example, optimism as it establishes a framework of wishful thinking can divert people from formulating full plans to attain their goals (Oettingen, 1996). Unyielding optimism can also prohibit the cautious conservation of resources that naturally attend sadness as a healthy and adaptive response to frustrations and setbacks (Nesse and Williams, 1996).

Resilience

Resilience has been defined as “the motivational force within everybody that drives them to grow through adversity and disruption” (Richardson, 2002, p. 307). Much of the research on resilience has shown that optimistic, hopeful, active individuals with active life goals have high immune levels (Kobasa, Maddi, and Kahn, 1982). Conversely, those who consider themselves hopeless, without options, and moderately to severely depressed, demonstrate weaker immune systems. Kobasa and colleagues conducted the foundational research on stress and resilience or “psychological hardiness,” identifying three constructs that define a hardy orientation: *commitment*, *control*, and *challenge*. For Kobasa, cognitively hardy individuals have a higher involvement in activities and interpersonal relationships and a commitment to self, particularly as they focus on their own unique values and prioritized objectives in life. Control involves an ability to cope with the variety of life events, including the intuitive sense to know what can and cannot be controlled. The third variable, challenge, involves the view that change can be anticipated and perceived as an opportunity for self-understanding and personal growth.

Resilient people define their sense of identity and success by internal standards. Masten (2001) argued that “resilience does not come from rare and special qualities, but from the everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of individuals, their families, and communities” (p. 235). According to most resilience theories, “resilient people possess three characteristics: (1) a staunch acceptance of reality; (2) a deep belief, often buttressed by strongly held values, that life is meaningful; and (3) an uncanny ability to improvise” (Coutu, 2002, p. 48).

Meaning/Purpose

Personal meaning is often described as whatever makes someone’s life valuable, aligned in a way that is coherent and memorable. Meaning and purpose played an important role in Adlerian therapy, which is designed to help the client determine the greater purpose in life and the fulfillment of that purpose by drawing on the client’s social network. Meaningfulness in positive psychology has been defined as the value of a stated goal or intention, judged in relation to a person’s visionary models or qualifying standards (May, 2003). Baumeister (1991) described meaning as “a shared representation of possible relationships among things, events, and relationships, and that, without a sense of meaning, the world would appear as a random and chaotic bombardment of inputs” (p. 15). Meaning categorizes these inputs so that the individual can readily cope with increasingly complex and turbulent environments. Having a sense of meaning and purpose also instills self-control, because without it, behavior would be guided by

impulse and instinct; contrariwise, lack of sense-making in a person's work life can lead to feelings of alienation.

Frankl (1963), a holocaust survivor and existential philosopher, identifies meaning as a key component which endows people with the skills needed to endure torture, injury, and the unjust acts of others. Frankl concludes that true meaning is found in virtually every moment of living, even during suffering and death, and that an individual's deepest desire is the personal search for meaning and purpose. In the midst of unimaginable suffering, Frankl developed "meaning therapy," a humanistic therapy that enables people to work through decisions that will create significant value in their lives. Today Frankl's theory is a common theme of resilience coaching within the business community (Coutu, 2002).

Work, as a source of meaning, has been of particular interest to organizational scholars, as it is commonly believed that finding meaning through career endeavors is expected and the significance of work is as valued as compensation and safety (O'Brien, 1982). As work life (or any domain of life) unfolds, individuals endeavor to satisfy needs for higher purpose, values, self-efficacy, and self-worth (Baumeister, 1991). While the shape of the elements that satisfy those needs may differ (e.g., making money, helping others), according to Wrzesniewski (2004), "the basic tenet remains that people everywhere need to find some way of interpreting the deeper purpose, or meaning, of what they do" (p. 298).

Again, we find a parallel between meaning/purpose in positive psychology and Adlerian therapy – both help the client determine a greater purpose in life and achieve fulfillment of that purpose by drawing on the client's social network.

Humor

Today's workers, especially younger employees, expect to have fun at work. Companies like Google[®], Microsoft[®], and others exemplify the importance of addressing the demand for a fun, relaxed workplace and have structured their organizations accordingly. In fact, humor has been described as an important aspect of the organizational cultures of profitable/successful companies like Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream Company[®] (Castelli, 1990) and Southwest Airlines[®] (Barbour, 1998).

Humor in general has been the subject of academic inquiry for many years, leading to numerous definitions of humor (Romero and Pescosolido, 2008). However, as Cooper (2008) notes, humor does not lend itself to a single, generalized definition. Romero and Cruthirds's (2006) definition of humor is surely relevant when humor is viewed as a human strength and positive psychology variable; they define humor as any communication, formal or informal, that produces lighthearted, positive emotions and cognitions for the individual, team, or organization.

In management and leadership literature, a body of research investigates humor and interpersonal relationships in conjunction with positive organizational outcomes. For example, Morreall (1983) suggests that humor in the workplace promotes both

physiological and mental/emotional health, fostering intellectual flexibility and serving as a relational lubricant. Davis and Kleiner (1989) add that humor is and should be utilized by leaders to accomplish three distinct objectives: (1) as a means to manage and/or reduce stress in the office; (2) to assist employees as they seek to understand management concerns by broadening communication signals and pattern effectiveness; and (3) to motivate workers to achieve the organizational mission. Orben (1985) also suggests that humor can have a direct impact on job satisfaction. Arvey, Rotundo, Johnson, Zhang and McGue (2006) find that managers who use humor well are perceived by their employees as more relationship oriented. Similarly, Priest and Swain (2002) report a positive relationship between leadership effectiveness and humor in two West Point cadet sample groups at the United States Military Academy. Humor can nevertheless be a double-edged sword according to Collinson (2002), because what is funny to one person is not necessarily funny to another.

Humor was included in this discussion of positive psychology because it provides a link to leadership fitness by managing or reducing stress, empowering effective leadership, augmenting group cohesiveness, improving communications, igniting creativity, and optimizing organizational culture. According to Romero (2005), humor enhances a positive cognitive state, working as a relational lubricant while facilitating more efficient and effective social process (p. 396).

Clearly, the presence or absence of these positive psychology variables (optimism, resilience, having meaning/purpose in life, and sense of humor) in someone's personality affect both the real and perceived ability of that person to lead. These positive features of leaders' mental landscapes apparently go hand in hand with their outward projections of physical fitness and appearance, as discussed and detailed below in Figure 1, the *Research Model of Adlerian Holistic Coaching for Leadership Fitness and Leadership Effectiveness*.

Fitness and Leadership

It is widely accepted that physical fitness and exercise benefit health and general well-being. It may also positively affect psychological wellness and emotional state. Therefore, researchers can assume that the physical and psychological factors within the leadership skills framework can be altered by fitness levels. In this section, the following aspects of fitness and leadership are discussed: *Leaders Who Exercise; Exercise Physiology; Rest & Meditation; Self-Mastery/Self-Leadership; and Social Interests & Wellness Programs*.

Leaders Who Exercise

While researching the relationship between fitness and leadership among top executives, McDowell-Larsen, Kearney, & Campbell (2002) found that consistent exercise routines allow leaders to better manage their positions' stress and other challenges. Exercise routines also improve the executives' public images, prevent disease, and provide an overall platform to extend perceived and self-reported leadership effectiveness. While

fitness levels fall short of shaping leaders in all aspects of effectiveness, health and well-being clearly have a significant relationship to job performance. Such a compelling connection makes it easy to understand how and why organizations devote time, energy, and money to promoting health and fitness among employees.

The role of a leader in today's global marketplace has changed since the days of the industrial era. As Kur and Bunning (2002) opine, leaders can be heroes to their followers, with the ability to achieve great feats of courage with corresponding mental, physiological and spiritual boldness. These authors also suggest that leaders from past generations often achieved success through intrinsic tenacity and emotional/physical brute strength, though sometimes at the expense of their followers' well-being and development. Certainly this model presents new challenges to leaders who, to remain effective in today's fast-paced, global economy, require broader skill sets to achieve stress management and a balanced lifestyle. Twenty-first century leaders must foster a sense of flexibility and both mental and physical stamina within their organizations to sustain a productive workforce. In fact, with the globalization of the economy and rising complexity of international management, a greater number of interruptions and higher stress levels invade a leader's daily life. As Martin (2007) pointed out, modern stress levels force leaders to muster every available option to form a foundation of health. In other words, challenging times require higher, sustained energy levels. The modern marketplace cannot be managed merely through the brute strength and energy of one powerful individual. New leaders must build upon the strength of many and be able to manage the stress and physical challenges inherent in modern tasks. Kur & Bunning (2002) propose that the leaders of today must maintain a work/life balance, looking for and recognizing blind spots, ready to identify any limitations that can be managed, while developing an operating ability to adapt quickly. Such nimbleness mitigates stress and maintains a physically healthy lifestyle; those who lack it will certainly suffer the consequences. Various mechanisms exist with which leaders can improve their physical/emotional fitness and potentially enhance their leadership capabilities. The next section defines some key mechanisms in this process.

Exercise Physiology

Proven leaders have been studied in order to gain insight into the critical components of the personalities/abilities impacting performance. Studies show that many proven leaders incorporate exercise into their lives in some shape or form (Goldsby & Neck, 2001; McDowell-Larsen, 2003). As mechanisms for physical fitness, a leader and successful athlete share a common value – the acceptance that a compelling element of goal attainment is hard-work, follow-through and completion of tasks, despite obstacles. As Goldsby and Neck assert, the preferred methodology for attaining and sustaining wellness via physical conditioning is through a functional mindset that embraces the benefits of hard work. When leaders respect their physical health as much as their financial and professional well-being, most of them achieve states of remarkable physical conditioning. This suggests that when individuals harness the physical benefits of fitness and exercise, they embrace the skills of effective leadership, such as goal-attainment, follow-through, and personal accountability. According to a study of presidential candidates (Neck and

Cooper, 2000), successful leaders do just that – they prioritize physical fitness as a framework for leadership fitness.

In the hectic atmosphere of presidential campaigning, candidates Al Gore and George Bush prioritized exercise in their daily lives. Neck & Cooper (2000) examined these presidential candidates' schedules during the campaign and found that, despite their extremely busy days and constant traveling, these men managed stress by regularly exercising and eating well-balanced diets. The candidates' behaviors reflected the belief that the physiological component to leadership effectiveness is stress management in the midst of great pressure and accountability. On-the-job stress can be more readily handled when exercise is viewed and utilized as a tool for maintaining a healthy balance between stress and productivity. Without rigorous exercise routines, these candidates, as well as many top corporate executives, would lose their outlet for releasing stress. Goldsby & Neck (2001) identify this executive health component as vital to effective leadership.

Various benefits of exercise include promoting peak performance, increasing the speed at which data is processed, decreasing obesity and disease, and enhancing feelings of well-being. When leaders experience these benefits, their job performances are positively affected. Being better equipped to handle what Goldsby and Neck call the “hypercompetitive nature of the global marketplace” is a vital part of the contemporary leadership skill set. When people are faced with disease and other life threatening problems, they face negative effects on their jobs as well. For instance, coping with a chronic condition not only draws from a person's physical bank of energy, but also taps their psychological well-being. Since exercise can assist in preventing disease, it must also have a positive impact on job longevity and the ability to perform tasks.

In a study by McDowell-Larsen, Kearney & Campbell (2002), leaders completed a health questionnaire that compiled information on their exercise schedules, behaviors, smoking and eating habits, as well as their overall health, such as blood pressure and body-fat indices. The study also collected data regarding leadership skills from people who worked directly for or with the leader. Results suggest that leaders who make exercise a priority in their lives experienced higher ratings in leadership effectiveness than those who refrained from exercise.

Rest & Meditation

While exercise is a physically active form of stress management, rest and meditation are also mechanisms for developing fitness, and are additional physiological practices used to reduce stress and enhance health. When the mind and body work in harmony, reduced overall stress, increased well-being, and balance are attained. Coping in a competitive marketplace requires the body to activate psychological and chemical defenses, as in a trauma situation. Goldsby & Neck (2001) explain that a natural reaction to stress occurs as biology seeks to protect the body by reestablishing a natural chemical balance via coping mechanisms such as stiffening of hairs, rapid breathing, and adrenaline output. Adrenaline causes the reaction known as the “fight or flight response” to occur. A productive, healthy way to counteract this phenomenon is to use relaxation and

meditation to assist the body in slowing and/or halting the production of adrenaline. As a counterpoint to the vigorous nature of exercise as a stress reducer, rest can enhance a sense of balance and peace to both body and mind. Effective leaders are able to harness this powerful tool at will when dealing with crises or chaos. Conversely, when these pressures overcome daily functioning, leaders can become dysfunctional.

The Transcendental Meditation (TM) technique also promotes effective leadership practices. Schmidt-Wilk (2003) launched a case study of Swedish managers who practiced TM at least 20 minutes, twice a day. These managers experienced positive growth in cognitive and behavioral performance characteristics of successful leaders (such as creative thinking and problem solving), were more open-minded in job-related dialogue, and were better able to take initiative.

Similar studies in the United States show comparable results. In a study of an American firm's upper management (McCollum, 1999), practicing TM improves leadership behaviors assessed by the leaders practice inventory. McCollum looked at several categories, including: flexibility in process challenging; inspiring a collaborative vision; empowering followers to act, modeling the path to vision achievement; and encouraging the emotions of all stakeholders. Managers who practice TM on a regular basis increase overall in the variables measured. This meditation was related to other organizational well-being and performance effects as well. For example, positive feedback related to general organizational morale was discovered along with significant growth in sales recorded over the 18 months following the study. No major confounding variables that might have skewed this data were identified.

Self-Mastery/Self-Leadership

Self-discipline as part of self-mastery is the foundation for exceptional performance. Top athletes maintain vigorous workout regimens often designed to maximize their bodies' strength. This requires dedication to consistently meet short-term goals in order to achieve long-term success in competition. Braddock (2006) describes this intense motivation, indicating that at the highest levels, competitive sports demand Olympian fitness, biblical endurance, and a near-Nietzschean will to succeed. Like Olympic athletes, organizational leaders must also practice and perfect self-discipline, applying high expectations for goal attainment and accountability. Self-discipline may help to explain why many effective self-leaders emerge as effective group leaders and coaches. In this regard, self-discipline, as it relates to fitness regimens, is a mechanism for enhanced fitness and closely parallels a pertinent facet of leadership.

In a study of West Point cadets, researchers found that physical fitness levels relate to predicting leader emergence (Atwater, Dionne, Avolio, Camobreco and Lau, 1999). Before beginning their four-year training program, cadets were rated on various characteristics, including physical fitness, cognitive ability, and self-esteem. Study results show that cadets who are more physically fit are more likely to emerge as leaders than those with lower levels of fitness. Moreover, the self-coaching these cadets practice prior

to attending the academy positively affects the way they relate to others, and ultimately, their leadership roles among peers.

One of the strongest components of leadership effectiveness is how leaders use their skills to motivate others to act in ways that benefit the overall organization. Examining how the personal fitness of leaders directly affects the people they are leading is a critical component of this study. For instance, the physical fitness of the presidential candidates described earlier may have made an impact on the way voters (and others) perceived them as potential leaders and influential figures. Exercise and physical fitness may not be the most significant indicators of effective leadership; they do, however, represent characteristics of effective leadership, such as self-discipline as part of self-mastery, a competitive nature, and goal orientation.

Social Interests & Wellness Programs

According to Wolfe and Parker (1994), the human capital of organizations is worthy of financial investment, benefiting not only the employees, but also having a direct impact on job performance and organizational success. Many organizations have invested in employee wellness or health management programs in order to maximize performance and efficiency. Companies large and small design their Employee Health Management Programs (EHMPs) to reap the benefits of increased fitness and mind-body wellness. Wolf and Parker note that EHMPs can range from smoking cessation programs, to exercise and fitness goals, to accident prevention programs and more. In addition to employee performance benefits, companies hope that EHMPs will help control health care costs, job-related injuries, and related liability claims. A study of these programs by Wolfe, Parker, and Napier (1994) suggests that individuals who participate in EHMPs perform better, are absent less, and have lower health care costs than non-participants. For effective leaders, wellness initiatives in the workplace capitalize on established aspects of their leadership skills and further benefit the performance of subordinates. All of the above-described aspects of fitness and leadership are critical to both the reality and perception of a leader's effectiveness, and these aspects are incorporated into the *Research Model of Adlerian Holistic Coaching for Leadership Fitness and Leadership Effectiveness* shown in Figure 1, below.

Linking Leadership Fitness to Leadership Effectiveness

This section is in response to the question, “Is a fit leader necessarily an effective leader?” First, “effectiveness” is defined, and then dimensions of how it can be gauged are discussed.

Effectiveness can be viewed and measured with respect to the “appropriateness” of the goals of an organization, and the degree to which these goals are achieved. **Figure 1** depicts a comprehensive model linking foundational principles of holistic Adlerian coaching to key constructs of positive psychology; they are treated as antecedents to leadership fitness and leadership effectiveness as outcome variables. The model illustrates three key Adlerian dimensions: the desire for self-mastery, social interests, and

striving for superiority. Leadership fitness is viewed as having three main components: physical, psychological, and emotional.

Insert Figure 1 Here

To gauge the effectiveness of leadership as a “consequent” factor in the model, both quantitative and qualitative dimensions have been mentioned; these may serve as measures, whether represented with actual data collected in an empirical fashion, or through deployment of an index meant to act as a surrogate for the dimensions.

Such dimensions can be aggregated into three main categories, which form a “three-legged stool” approach for gauging the effectiveness of leadership: *self management*; *work management*; and *health management*. For example, under *self management*, the following six sub-dimensions might be considered for assessing effectiveness: 1) time efficiency (McDowell-Larsen, 2003); 2) higher level of task satisfaction by exposure to group coaching (Zeus & Skiffington, 2002); 3) speed of processing data as enhanced by exercise (Goldsby & Neck, 2001); 4) self confidence stimulation of external competencies as an example of the inner-to-outer developmental strategy model (Wales, 2003); 5) self awareness of the coachee being enhanced by group/executive coaching (Peltier, 2001), and contextual self awareness stimulated by group coaching intervention (Manz and Sims, 2001); and finally, 6) the enhanced feeling of well-being created through exercise which promotes peak performance (Goldsby & Neck, 2001).

The second assessment category is *work management*. The following five sub-dimensions might be considered to gauge effectiveness: 1) on-the-job performance, which is reduced by returning to a sedentary lifestyle (Goldsby & Neck, 2001); 2) labor productivity, where one study (Olivero & Bane, 1997) shows how group-level training increased the productivity of municipal workers by a factor of four; 3) task completion, where studies (Goldsby & Neck, 2001; McDowell-Larsen, 2003) show how leaders and athletes share the common value of enhanced task completion through goal attainment and personal accountability; 4) the ability to manage conflict, where a study (Zeus & Skiffington, 2002) shows how group coaching can lower the level of conflict; and 5) team cohesiveness, which is enhanced by group coaching (Zeus & Skiffington, 2002).

The third assessment category is *health management*; its five sub-dimensions are illustrated as follows: 1) body fat and blood pressure, in which regular exercise positively correlates with reduced body fat and healthier blood pressure readings (McDowell-Larsen, Kearney, & Campbell, 2002); 2) reduced health care costs and job-related injuries through implementation of EHMPs (Wolf & Parker, 1994); 3) days absent due to sickness, where participants in EHMPs are absent less often and perform better (Wolf, Parker and Napier, 1994); 4) the ability to cope with stress, where presidential candidates handle stress by giving high priority to physical fitness (Neck & Cooper, 2000); and 5) the avoidance of chronic disease, in a study that reveals how exercise, reduced smoking,

and better eating habits help with the avoidance of chronic disease (McDowell-Larsen, Kearney & Campbell, 2001).

These three assessment categories can be used separately, or as an aggregate index, to measure changes in leadership effectiveness over time, or to measure effectiveness differences between two test groups. By comparing and analyzing results, coaching techniques can be modified to optimize a holistic approach to improvement. Additionally, 360-Degree Assessment Tools, used by many practitioners, can be modified to take into consideration some of the constructs presented in Figure 1. Qualitative researchers can employ individual or focus group interviews of executive coachees and their coaches to determine how and why principles of Adlerian holistic coaching and positive psychology constructs contribute to leadership fitness, and ultimately, leadership effectiveness.

Conclusion

In this article, we presented a comprehensive model of executive coaching incorporating foundational tenets of Adlerian holistic therapy and several positive psychology constructs that hypothetically predict leadership fitness and thus effectiveness. Adler argued for holism, viewing the individual holistically rather than reductively, which was the dominant paradigm at the time he developed his theories of personality and psychotherapy. Positive psychologists argue that individuals who are optimistic, resilient, and have a sense of purpose and humor will experience positive work and health-related outcomes such as improved job performance and reduced stress.

The model proposed herein contributes to the extant literature on executive coaching by introducing strength-based Adlerian and positive psychology constructs into the context of research and theory on executive coaching. Both theoretical traditions focus on positively-oriented human strengths which can be deployed to enhance leadership fitness and leadership and organizational effectiveness. More specifically, our research contributes to the overall theoretical base in several ways: to the best of our knowledge, this is the first research effort that posits a relationship between Adlerian holistic therapy, positive psychology, leadership fitness, and leadership effectiveness. We also believe this research effort demonstrates, for the first time, the applicability of these two theoretical frameworks to executive coaching research and theory; the related model in is best viewed as a strength-based approach to executive coaching that can be applied in numerous organizational contexts, including private and public sector companies, start-up and established firms, hierarchical and team-based organizations, manufacturing, and technology-driven companies.

In practical application, our model suggests that organizations and their leaders can seek opportunities to develop and cultivate strength-based capabilities to enhance individual effectiveness and improve the adaptive capacity. Individuals and organizations that have most to gain from developing coaching interventions based on Adlerian and positive psychology principles are those that operate in turbulent, volatile, and highly-competitive environments.

The model described in this article can serve both as a theoretical analysis and as a road map for empirical research; specifically, group coaching needs to be understood as it relates to, or stands apart from one-on-one executive coaching in the model. In addition, the true value of the proposed model will be in its future application to personal growth, leadership development and fitness, and performance improvement of executives in a wide range of organizational contexts.

Call for Research

Using the Adlerian holistic approach to leadership development, group coaching appears to have evolved as an adjunct intervention to the executive coaching movement. Research indicates that it is the fastest growing modality in the coaching profession (Morgan, Harkins, and Goldsmith, 2005). Zeus and Skiffington (2002) postulate that group coaching has grown in popularity due to the increasing importance of building teams that are self-managing, cross-functional, and multi-skilled, suggesting that creating teams which can both coach and be coached differentiates an organization from its competitors.

According to Goldsmith, Lyons and Freas (2000), the coach-the-coach model employed in most group coaching interventions is intended to develop the coaching skills of all participants so that better coaches/leaders emerge. Like executive coaching, group coaching is rooted in psychotherapy (group therapy in particular) and is an outgrowth of Schein's (1969, 1988) theory of process consultation. In Schein's model, the practitioner observes and elicits information from the group, and subsequently initiates interventions that challenge and illuminate group awareness, improve group interpersonal relationships, and enhance group performance. Group coaching can thus be either an alternative or an adjunct intervention to one-on-one executive coaching for leadership effectiveness (Kets de Vries, 2005). Prior research by Ludeman and Erlanson (2004) also suggests that group coaching can positively impact organizational wellness, benefiting both leader and followers. It does so by offering techniques and skills that expand the leader's emotional competencies, which are essential to emotional intelligence.

Zeus & Skiffington (2002) introduced a coaching model with three primary elements: *self-awareness*, *self-understanding*, and *goal setting* (with an action plan). This model posits that with effective coaching, leaders gain self-knowledge, becoming more flexible and versatile. When all three components of this model are in place, management of emotions is improved, promoting leadership fitness. The concept of fitness is used here in a more holistic manner, to include not only physical fitness, but also emotional and mental aspects. Researchers assert that this model works well in group coaching endeavors designed to enhance group cohesion, group and individual leadership development, and productivity (Goldsmith et al., 2000; Kets de Vries, 2005). However, more empirical research needs to take place related to this particular coaching model to understand a more comprehensive Adlerian holistic group coaching model, incorporating key constructs of positive psychology, and in which leadership fitness may serve as a proximal precursor to leadership effectiveness.

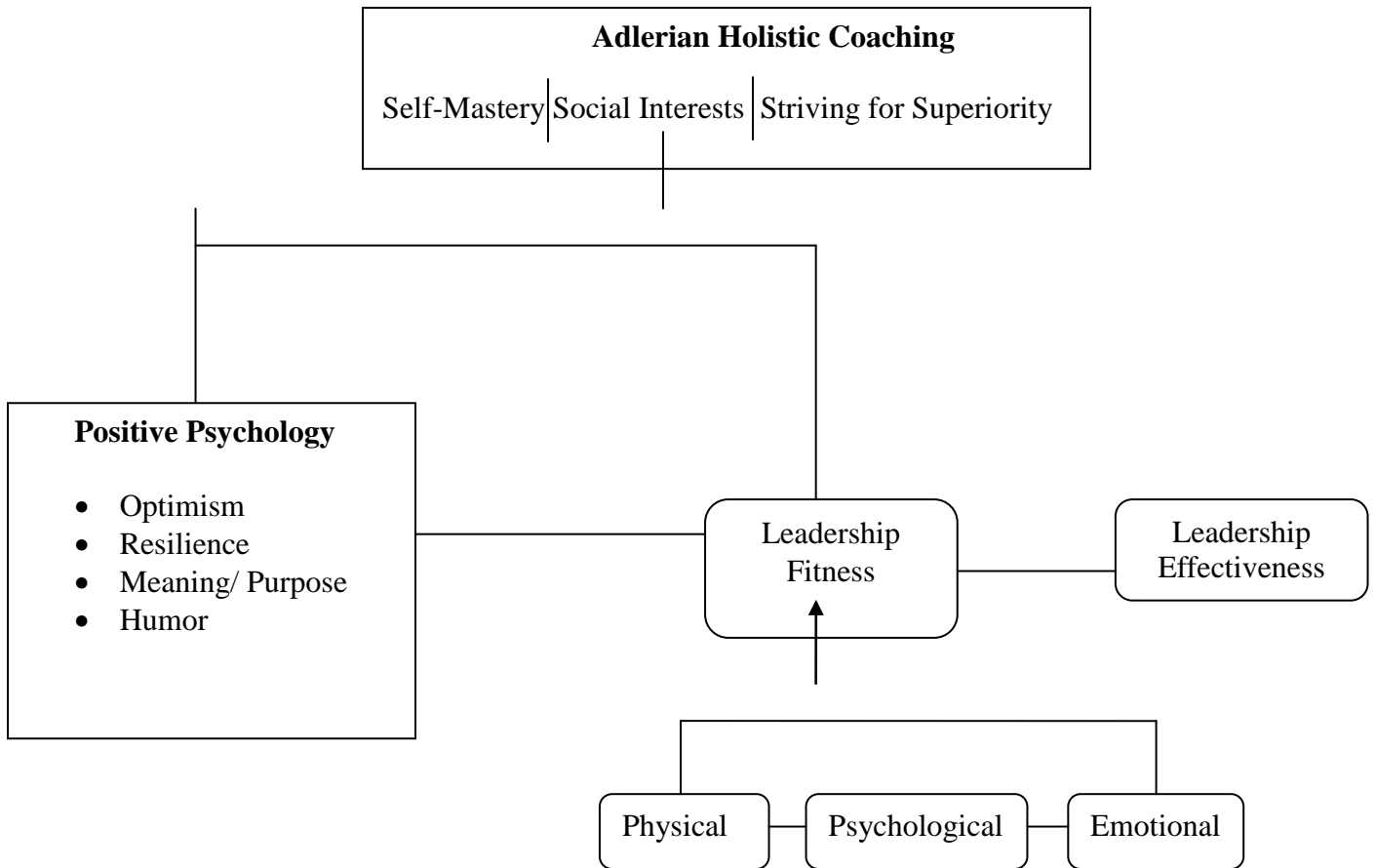
Certainly, there is no dispute that the clinical roots of group coaching and group/family counseling are supported by numerous empirical studies (Bazzacco, 2003; Beyers, 1989; Garcia, 2005; Sohn and Hunig, 2004; Yi-Qi, 2005), which support the value of group coaching as a coaching intervention; however, while researchers agree that group coaching facilitates organizational knowledge management (Mudge, 1999), only a few quantitative studies to understand its effects in this area (Goldsmith, Morgan and Ogg, 2004) have been launched to date. Nonetheless, data from even a restricted number of studies indicate that a group coaching intervention, when compared to executive coaching, is advancing organizational and leadership development benefits at a much lower cost-to-benefit ratio.

For example, one quantitative coaching study examined the effects of group coaching in a municipal agency setting. Olivero and Bane (1997) report that when participants completed a group-level managerial training program plus eight weeks of one-on-one executive coaching, productivity increased by a factor four times greater than when participants attended the training program alone. These researchers indicate that coaching ensures that knowledge acquired in training actually emanates into applicable skills. In a more recent field study, Barrett and Klenke (2007) report that group coaching had a positive impact by reducing leadership burnout and increasing executive health.

Similarly, additional studies have produced data applicable to other holistic group coaching issues. For example, studies indicate that when groups are left without a facilitator (i.e., coach), they tend to flounder and perform less effectively (Frey, 1995; McKenna, 1996; Nunamaker, Dennis, Valacich, Vogel, and George, 1991). Further, facilitators act to harness group assets, coordinate group members' thinking, protect the group from its own poor behavior patterns, and empower the group for better performance (Anson, Bostrom and Wynne, 1995; Lewe, 1996; Phillips and Phillips, 1993; Wheeler and Valacich, 1996). Group facilitator concepts (McFadzean and O'Loughlin, 2000) are remarkably similar to group coaching methods (Goldsmith, et al., 2000), and lessons learned in one area can be useful to the other.

Like executive coaching, the Adlerian holistic approach in group coaching takes advantage of the theory of self-leadership (Manz and Sims, 2001), where true leadership emerges from within the individual. By drawing on the resources of both the individual (coachee) and the team, group coaching interventions stimulate contextual self-awareness with potential effects on leadership fitness that Kinloch (2004) suggests is part of leadership capacity and a precursor to leadership effectiveness. Additional research could provide a more full understanding of Kinloch's assertion.

Figure 1
Research Model of Adlerian Holistic Coaching for Leadership Fitness and Leadership Effectiveness



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