

Resilient Leadership: A Partial Replication and Construct Validation

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ABSTRACT: *In this study, presidential leadership is used as a proxy for the examination of factors predictive overall leadership effectiveness and leadership under adversity. C-SPAN data spanning 19 years were aggregated and analyzed to identify the best predictors of resilience-focused leadership. The current findings replicate and extend previous findings. Once again, we find four predictive factors of successful presidential leadership: 1) having a vision for success, 2) decisiveness in bringing that vision (mission) to life, 3) creating an environment of open, honest communications, and 4) following a moral compass that yields trust. These factors may be reframed in the context of a promise, or covenant, that leaders extend and those who follow intrinsically accept in order to maximize leadership effectiveness.*

Key Words: *Resilient Leadership, presidential leadership, C-SPAN leadership surveys, strength and honor, covenant of leadership, crisis leadership*

Introduction

Year ago, Peter Drucker (1955) put forth that the success of any organization depends upon leadership. A report from the National Academies' Institute of Medicine, (IOM, 2013) suggests that traditional leadership practices may prosper from a re-examination through the lens of human resilience. In this paper, we describe a replication and functional extension of previous work on resilience and leadership (Everly, Strouse et al., 2010; Everly, Smith et al., 2013) to provide updated prescriptive guidance and construct validation for resilience-focused leadership.

What Is Human Resilience?

“More than education, more than experience, more than training, a person’s level of resilience will determine who succeeds and fails. That’s true in the cancer ward, it’s true in the Olympics, and it’s true in the boardroom.” (Coutu, 2002, p. 47). The denotation of the word resilience is the ability to bounce back, or to rebound. In the current context we take that to mean to bounce back or rebound from adversity. More recent formulations have caused us to expand the

construction of resilience to include the notion of resistance, or immunity (Kaminsky, et al., 2007). This dual factor construction of human resilience has recently received empirical validation beyond prior case study empiricism (Ong, et al., 2006; Smith et al., (2018). Thus, when leaders consider developing programs to foster individual and organizational resilience in relation to adversity, they must be mindful of developing not only the ability to rebound from adversity but the ability to resist or mitigate the untoward effects of inherently challenging conditions such as increased accountability, increased demands, shrinking resources, market fluctuations, and competition.

Can Leaders Foster Resilience?

Emerson once said, “Our chief want in life is somebody who will make us do what we can” (Emerson, 1872, 460). It has previously been noted that leaders can foster the resilience of those they lead (Everly, Strouse et al., 2010; Everly, 2013; Everly, Smith et al., 2013). According to the IOM report, “Resilient leadership practices serve as the catalyst that inspires *others* (the human resource) to exhibit resistance and resilience, and to exceed their own

RESILIENT LEADERSHIP: A PARTIAL REPLICATION AND CONSTRUCT VALIDATION

expectations" (IOM, 2013, p. 104). "Developing resilient leaders will increase the resilience of the workforce that they lead" (IOM, 2013, p. 99). "Resilient leaders can create the 'tipping point' that changes an entire culture" (IOM, 2013, p.90). The organizational culture of resilience is more than an *esprit de corps*, it is an environment wherein human resilience (the ability to withstand, or rebound, from challenges and adversity) is not only fostered, but is within the core fabric of the organizational culture itself. The culture is defined by cohesion, collaboration, pride in identification, and possesses an organizational climate wherein growth is promoted, support is abundant, crisis is viewed as an opportunity, and innovation is not an outcome but rather an integral ongoing process.

Everly, Smith et al. (2013) reported the results of an analysis of the C-SPAN presidential leadership surveys released in 2000 and 2009. In the present study, we have integrated the C-SPAN 2017 data and conducted a new analysis of the combined data from all three surveys. Using presidential leadership as a proxy for leadership in challenging situations, our goal is to empirically define the core predictors of resilience-focused leadership. In addition, this study reports the results of an analysis in which we contrast the most reliable predictors of the highest performing presidents against those for the lowest performing presidents.

The following section outlines the methods utilized to examine the CSPAN data, followed by a presentation of the results. Afterward, we discuss the implications of our findings with respect to resilience-focused leadership. The final section notes the limitations of our study and provides concluding remarks.

Methods

Procedure

Of the various means to study leadership, the most common are prescriptive maxims, historical reviews, empirical (observations) methods, and survey analyses. In the present study we employed retrospective analyses of three primary sets of C-SPAN survey data. C-SPAN has investigated leadership for two decades using presidential leadership as its focus. The noted author John Steinbeck once said, "We give the President more work to do than a man can do, more responsibility than a man should take, more pressure than a man can bear" (Wilson, 2007, p. 2). Arguably, the study of American Presidential leadership serves as a virtual proxy for all leadership roles, but especially leadership under stress and adversity. The study of Presidential leadership can

teach powerful lessons about effective (and ineffective) leadership at all levels.

In 2000, the C-SPAN described its data collection methodology as follows:

"C-SPAN conducted a Survey of Presidential Leadership, in which historians & viewers participated online. The survey rated 10 qualities of presidential leadership established by our advisory team, including each president's effectiveness within the context of our nation's changing expectations of the presidency...The C-SPAN Survey of Presidential Leadership was crafted by a team of four historians and academics who have been deeply involved in the American Presidents series...The four survey advisors devised a survey which asked participants to use a one ("not effective") to ten ("very effective") scale to rate each president on ten qualities of presidential leadership...The survey was sent by mail in December to 87 historians and other professional observers of the presidency... Fifty-eight agreed to participate. Survey responses were tabulated by averaging all the responses in any given category for each president."

In 2009, C-SPAN repeated the survey. It was described as follows:

"Surveys were distributed to 147 historians and other professional observers of the presidency, drawn from a database of C-SPAN's programming, augmented by suggestions from the academic advisors. Sixty-five agreed to participate. Participants were guaranteed that individual survey results remain confidential. Survey responses were tabulated by averaging all responses in a given category for each president."

The most recent C-Span survey was published in 2017. The methodology was described as follows:

"C-SPAN's academic advisors devised a survey in which participants used a one ("not effective") to ten ("very effective") scale to rate each president on ten qualities of presidential leadership: "Public Persuasion," "Crisis Leadership," "Economic Management," "Moral Authority," "International Relations," "Administrative Skills," "Relations with Congress," "Vision/Setting An Agenda," "Pursued Equal Justice for All," and "Performance Within the Context of His Times." Surveys were distributed to historians and other

RESILIENT LEADERSHIP: A PARTIAL REPLICATION AND CONSTRUCT VALIDATION

professional observers of the presidency, drawn from a database of C-SPAN's programming, augmented by suggestions from the academic advisors. Ninety-one agreed to participate. Participants were guaranteed that individual survey results remain confidential. Survey responses were tabulated by averaging all responses in a given category for each president. Each of the ten categories was given equal weighting in arriving at a president's total score."

Data Analysis

Having obtained the scored data for all three surveys, the next step was to reduce the data to meaningful units for more in-depth analysis. Combining all presidential data would result in a needless dilution through an increase in variance. Therefore, rather than analyze all presidents on the leadership constituents, we chose to limit our analyses to the most homogeneously meaningful subsets, using a variation of regression attenuation as rationale. To attenuate the data in this instance, we relied upon the empirical truism that there can be no such thing as validity without reliability. The 2000, 2009, and 2017 C-SPAN results were most highly reliable for the top four presidents and the lowest three presidential leaders. Therefore, we initially chose to analyze the C-SPAN data with the goal of revealing the leadership constituents that were most reliably deterministic of the highest rankings. In essence, we sought to discover

what specific leadership behaviors determined the most effective leadership. To do so, we simply averaged the scores obtained by the top four leaders for the 2000, 2009, and 2017 surveys on each of the nine core constituents of leadership (having removed crisis leadership which we viewed as an outcome variable). We drew a cutting line between the fourth and fifth constituents, as the first four constituents were highly reliable across surveys and had universal applicability, whereas the fifth through ninth constituents possessed situational but not universal applicability, and lower reliability. We then contrasted the four most reliable high performing American presidents against the three most reliable low performing American presidents. The highest performing subset was consistently the highest across all surveys, while the lowest performing subset was consistently the lowest across all surveys. Therefore, we were able to compare behaviors predictive of being both the most effective and least effective presidents whom were chosen with the highest reliability across all respondents, across all three surveys. We used t-tests with subsequent effect size magnitude analyses as a means of contrasting the groups.

RESULTS

In this section, we report on the findings of our analyses. Table 1 below lists the presidential groupings with the highest reliability rankings across all surveys.

Table 1: Most Reliable Presidential Cohorts

Most Highly Rated Presidents	Lowest Rated Presidents
Lincoln	Pierce
F.D.R.	Buchanan
T.Roosevelt	A. Johnson
Washington	

Table 2 lists the mean scores for overall effectiveness for the highest and lowest rated presidents for all

leadership constituents, across all three C-SPAN surveys

RESILIENT LEADERSHIP: A PARTIAL REPLICATION AND CONSTRUCT VALIDATION

Table 2: Overall Mean Effectiveness Scores for Highest and Lowest Rated Presidents

Highest Rated Presidents	Overall Effectiveness	Lowest Rated Presidents	Overall Effectiveness
Lincoln	903	Pierce	296
F.D.R	856	Buchanan	271
T.Roosevelt	855	A. Johnson	244
Washington	799		

Table 3 lists the mean scores for nine leadership constituents for the four highest rated presidential leaders. These scores were used to identify the best

predictors of overall leadership effectiveness amongst the nine constituents.

Table 3: Mean scores for Four Highest Rated Presidents in Nine Leadership Constituents across All Survey Years

Constituent	Mean Score
Performance	92.9
Positive Vision	92.7
Communication	92.1
Moral Authority	90.6
Administrative Skills	80.9
Economic Policies	78.5
Relations with Oversight	71.9
Pursued Equal Justice Policies	70.0
International Relations	86.0

Table 3 reveals performance (decisiveness), forward oriented (optimistic) vision, public persuasion (communications), and moral authority to be the constituents that were empirically deemed the best predictors of overall leadership effectiveness by the C-SPAN experts over all three surveys. This raises the

issue as to whether these four constituents discriminate effective from ineffective leadership in practice according expert consensus.

Table 4 below provides the results of analyses for statistical differentiation and respective effect sizes.

Table 4: Discriminant Power for Four Leadership Constituents

Constituent	Highest Rated Presidents		Lowest Rated Presidents		t- value	Significance	Effect Size Hedge's g
	\bar{x}	s	\bar{x}	s			
Performance	92.9	/ 5.5	24.2	/ 3.2	32.7	$p < .001$	14.1
Vision	92.7	/ 3.8	22.8	/ 3.4	43.5	$p < .001$	18.1
Communications	92.1	/ 3.1	26.3	/ 3.5	46.2	$p < .001$	17.5
Moral Authority	90.6	/ 6.7	22.1	/ 4.4	26.6	$p < .001$	10.8

Table 4 provides evidence that the four indicia of performance (decisiveness), forward oriented (optimistic) vision, public persuasion (communications), and moral authority do indeed

significantly differ from the highest to the lowest presidential cohorts. The magnitude of discriminant effect is extremely high, as effects sizes of .8 or larger are routinely considered high (Fritz et al., 2012).

RESILIENT LEADERSHIP: A PARTIAL REPLICATION AND CONSTRUCT VALIDATION

Discussion

This investigation has uncovered four powerful predictors of effective long-term leadership. In doing so it confirms prior research which uncovered the same four predictors (Everly et al., 2013). What meaning do we derive from these extant data? *Leadership resides in those who follow*. It is not something that is forced upon others, rather it is something that is accepted, or not. As such we believe there must be a bond, a promise of sorts, between leaders and followers, albeit frequently unspoken, but consistently demonstrated to sustain successful long-term leadership. The four predictive factors of successful presidential leadership: 1) having a *vision* for success, 2) *decisiveness* in bringing that vision (mission) to life, 3) creating an environment of *open, honest communications*, and 4) following a *moral compass* that yields trust may be reframed in the context of a promise, or covenant. To further distill those four factors, we might say the promise that successful leaders make and that followers desire, is simply strength and honor. General George Patton once stated that the job of a leader is to actively lead with the goal of the mission in mind (Williamson, 1979). It is not to lead passively so as to protect one's job by avoiding failure (Farson & Keyes, 2006). It is not to lead to achieve one's personal goals or agenda. Exhibiting strength in leadership requires courage, however. It takes courage to make a decision to take a risk. It takes courage to confront the toxic employee, even though everyone knows who that is (First, 2017). Over cautiousness may protect one's career, but it stifles and sometimes destroys motivation, innovation, and entire organizations themselves. Dwight Eisenhower commented that the supreme leadership quality is integrity and honor. Honor engenders safety and trust. It's easy to follow someone who is trusted. It's hard to follow a leader who cannot be trusted as one wastes valuable time scanning for signs of betrayal and planning defensive maneuvers. History teaches us that the four factors identified in this paper: 1) having a *vision* for success, 2) *decisiveness* in bringing that vision (mission) to life, 3) creating an environment of *open, honest communications*, and 4) following a *moral compass* are highly associated with extraordinary magnitude of effect with successful tenures of leadership.

Investigations of leadership in life and death situations reinforce the importance of *strength and honor*. Authentic leadership is the term used to describe leadership in high risk situations. It has been described by Thomas Kolditz (2007) based on work by Kolditz and Donna Brazil. Authentic leaders are confident, optimistic, and provide purpose, motivation, and decisive direction "in extremis"

(highly stressful) conditions (strength). "To be a leader is not to hold down a position or perform a job: it is to develop a character that is inextricably linked to giving purpose, motivation, and direction to others" (Kolditz, 2007, p. 71). That being said, the author notes authentic leaders must also possess high moral character and ethical reasoning (honor). These leaders are most likely to create loyalty, obedience, admiration, and respect. Authentic leaders seem to exert much of their effectiveness by making their followers feel safe. They ease fear and provide hope for those who follow; safety is based in trust, and trust in honor and integrity. The importance of trust based in honorable actions is underscored by Patrick Sweeney (2007). He argues that effective leadership is predicated upon trust that is actively earned by the leader. Zak (2017) has shown that workers in high-trust organizations report 74% less stress, 106% more energy at work, 50% higher productivity, 13% fewer sick days, and 40% less burnout compared to workers in low-trust organizations. Effective leadership under the most stressful of conditions, according to these authors, emphasizes the development of trust, hope, resilience, and an optimistic mission-focused vision within a highly ethical environment. Leaders like these need to work on putting themselves last and their followers first, being able to lead their people in a comprehensive, modest manner, while achieving the mission. Kolditz notes that his construction is not theory, but rather is a result of case study and survey empiricism.

Limitations and Conclusions

The present study has two potential limitations that should inform future research. First, there is a potential for representation bias. The major premise of this paper is that presidential leadership serves as an effective proxy for many forms of leadership. Inherent in its very nature it possesses virtually all of the critical processes of leadership one might encounter across situations and settings, certainly the most challenging of leadership situations. Despite this, generalizability of presidential leadership across a multitude of settings may not be less valid than we propose. Second, there is a potential for systematic selection bias. The quantitative data obtained for analysis in this study were obtained from a single source conduit, C-SPAN, and were thus potentially influenced by the polling biases that might be inherent to C-SPAN itself. To counter this potential criticism, however, it should be noted that the C-SPAN conduit consisted of data sampled from three different temporal epochs culminating in three different publication years, 2000, 2009, and 2017. The likelihood that systematic error was evidenced in these three samples spanning 17 years is unlikely, but nevertheless possible. Also,

RESILIENT LEADERSHIP: A PARTIAL REPLICATION AND CONSTRUCT VALIDATION

offsetting the potential for systematic selection bias was the pool of subject matter experts in leadership and presidential history varied across sampling procedures over the three samples.

The above-referenced limitations notwithstanding, the present findings are noteworthy. John Dickerson's (2018) article in *The Atlantic* entitled "The Presidency: The Hardest Job in the World," is a review of the tasks and challenges facing the President of the United States as a leader. Dickerson concludes the president must integrate and handle a wider variety of experiences than perhaps any other leader on the planet. Consonant with that conclusion, we believe that the role of the president serves as an effective proxy for leadership in general. The essential functions of presidential leadership, as determined by the C-SPAN subject matter experts in leadership and presidential history were the criteria used in the present analysis to assess overall effectiveness. Our findings that performance, vision, communications, and earned moral authority are essential predictors of overall leadership success echo previous findings (Kolditz, 2007; Everly, Strouse et al., 2010). As such, they add to the extant literature supporting the importance of these factors for present and future leaders as well.

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