

# Exploring The Role Of Ego Development On Students' Perceptions Of Leadership Efficacy In Sport Management Programs

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## Aim of the research

As part of a longitudinal study, the purpose of this research is to assess the association between ego development and leadership efficacy (LE) across the first year of an undergraduate sport management program. The utility of this research to the sport management and education literature is two-fold; first, theoretically, while the link between ego development and LE is intuitively valid, this association has yet to be empirically assessed. Second, given that DeLuca and Braunstein-Minkove (2016) highlight the need to understand "development" of sport leaders in a competitive and rapidly changing sport industry, the findings help sport management educators to directly and consciously meet this need through the advancement of research informed curricula.

## Literature review

Loevinger's (1976) describes the concept of ego development as one's overall framework for making sense of the self and the world. Given higher — also called later — ego development level relates to one's overall development as a mature human being, one may view him or herself as more self-efficacious. That is, one may hold strong and positive beliefs toward his or her ability to obtain a career goal compared to another who may not have developed to commensurate higher ego developmental levels (e.g., Cook-Greuter, 2004). Given these associations, we suggest higher levels of ego development will influence LE.

Notably, Quigley (2013) found students' cognitive ability, as measured by their GMAT scores, was positively related to their level of leadership efficacy. While Quigley's (2013) findings have merit, scholars have failed to explain the mechanisms that cause individuals' cognitive ability to influence their perceptions of efficacy. Thus, in this paper, we suggest that level of ego development (i.e., students' cognitive capacity and perspective-taking ability, beyond standardized testing) plays a significant role in influencing sport management students' perceptions of LE and may help to further explain the mechanisms underlying such positive relationships. Within these relationships, we focus on vertical development. That is, we explore how one's interpretation of experience and views of reality transform through development of ever-expanding and deepening capacities to take on more perspective (Cook-Greuter, 2004), rather than lateral development (e.g., one's acquisition of new skills).

## Methodology/research design/analysis

We adopted a mixed-method single-case case study design, such that quantitative surveys served as a baseline for analysis related to qualitative interviews assessing ego development and LE within an undergraduate sport management student population. The data for this presentation is longitudinal and exploratory in nature. Specifically, participants ( $n = 15$ ) were surveyed at T1 (i.e., during the first two months of their undergraduate program), T2 (i.e., post-first academic year of their undergraduate program), and T3 (start of their second academic year). Further, participants were interviewed at T3 to discuss their perceptions of LE, leadership development, and aspects of ego development. At T3, the interviewer specifically asked participants to provide rationale that could address changes or shifts measured in LE scores.

Quantitative survey data were analyzed through analysis of variance to identify changes in participant LE scores from T1, T2, and T3. Further, participant ego development scores were generated by an expert scorer and contributed to a classification of ego development level for each participant. Qualitative data were analyzed based on open coding (e.g., identifying codes which highlighted leadership efficacy), followed by axial coding (e.g., collapsing codes and identifying emergent codes within the data), which were in sum related to developing an understanding of if and/or how ego development influences LE.

## Results, discussion, and implications/conclusions

The results indicate that LE may fluctuate in a nonlinear fashion across an undergraduate program. Specifically, participants' belief in his or her ability to be in a leadership position and perform the tasks of a leader at T1 ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ) were slightly higher than T2 ( $M = 4.13$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ); where these two times were lower than the T3 scores ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = 0.44$ ). These results support Komaraju and Nadler's (2013) work, who note that factors within education such as peer comparison and programmatic elements link to components of Bandura's (1977) conceptualization of self-efficacy. Further, from the interview data, we uncovered themes that highlight fluctuations in LE are partially explained by ego development and emotional

state factors. Such research has implications for how to develop sport management curriculum such that educational experiences (e.g., experiential learning) can be strategically fostered to: 1) stimulate students' ego vertical development, in combination with their lateral development; and 2) more effectively develop future sport leaders for the realities of leading in the sport industry.

## References

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