SAM AND BONNIE RECHTER FELLOWSHIP
Research Report

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Developing the Compassionate Coaching by Leader Index (CCLI)

Cameron (2012) defined positive leadership as ''the ways in which leaders enable positively deviant performance, foster an affirmative orientation in organizations, and engender a focus on virtuousness and the best of the human condition'' (p. 2). Four positive leadership strategies are believed to enable extraordinary performance. They are: (1) positive climate, (2) positive relationships, (3) positive communication, and (4) positive meaning. Positive climate was a condition in which employees thrived with optimistic attitudes and cheerful mindsets instead of suffering from fear, anger, stress, or anxiety (Fredrickson, 2003). Positive relationships referred to those that were "a generative source of enrichment, vitality, and learning" for both individuals and organizations (Dutton & Ragins, 2007, p. 5). Positive communication entailed the use of affirmative, supportive language that expressed compliments and appreciation instead of negative critical language that expresses cynicism and dissatisfaction (Dutton, 2014). Positive meaning was fostered when leaders helped others engage in meaningful work by identifying how work was a fulfilling a calling and life-giving purpose (Wrzesniewski, 2003).

For each of these positive leadership strategies, compassion remained central (Cameron, 2012). Compassion is commonly understood as an interpersonal process involving the leader noticing other's needs, empathizing, and taking action to address the needs (Boyatzis, Smith, & Beveridge, 2013; Lilius, Worline, Maitlis, Kanov, Dutton, & Frost, 2008). Not only can being compassionate help leaders foster others' well-being and engagement (Shuck, Alagaraja, Immekus, Cumberland, & Honeycutt-Elliott, 2019), it can also enable leaders to sustain themselves (Boyatzis et al., 2013). The experience of compassion can be an effective antidote to stress resulting from the sense of responsibility felt at times in leadership positions (Boyatzis, Smith, & Blaize, 2006; Harms, Credé, Tynan, Leon, & Jeung, 2017). Given the current COVID-19 circumstances and the compounding effect of civil unrest sweeping the United States, long lasting, high stressful situations are for some leaders, the new normal. Leaders who build a caring relational space in organizations and who experience compassion are more likely to cope with the increased stress of current times and have improved immunity, lower blood pressure, and better health (Davidson, 2002).

Leaders can both give and experience compassion through coaching others. *Coaching with compassion* is defined as "helping others in their intentional change process (i.e., achieving their dreams or aspirations or changing the way they think, feel, and act)" (Boyatzis et al., 2006, p.12). Leaders can coach their employees with compassion to help them build on their strengths and realize their ideal selves (Boyatzis et al., 2013). This experience of coaching others with compassion is

critical to sustaining positive leadership and in doing so, coaching becomes a tool that leaders can utilize to create positive climate, relationships, communication, and meaning so that their employees can thrive and advance. While a handful of scholars have theorized on the phenomenon of *coaching with compassion* (e.g., Boyatzis et al., 2019), there is no scale to assess how leaders enact coaching with compassion. Without an index that can shed light on how, and why, coaching with compassion is practiced by leaders, it is not possible to derive a comprehensive understanding of the factors and conditions (individual and organizational) that influence the arousal of compassion in leaders needed for them to practice positive leadership strategies.

Moreover, an index assessing leader's enactment of *coaching with compassion* could help scholars and practitioners understand how effective leaders avoid compassion fatigue that might result from empathizing excessively and over-committing to their employee's needs and/or development. *"Compassion fatigue* occurs when the experience of compassion becomes a burden, thus stimulating more stress, rather than less"* (Boyatzis et al., 2006, p. 18). This phenomenon has been studied mostly with leaders in healthcare, social work, or other helping professions (Hendron Irving, & Taylor, 2014; Kranke, Gin, Der-Martirosian, Weiss, & Dobalian, 2020; Remegio, Rivera, Griffin, & Fitzpatrick, 2020). There remains a growing need for compassionate leaders in all sectors to help employees cope with the pandemic and address the call for heightened awareness of social justice and equity, while simultaneously avoiding states of fatigue. Given the historical background of this time and space, an understanding of how leaders enact compassion to sustain themselves instead of becoming vulnerable to traumatization through fatigue is warranted.

To address this gap, we proposed an exploratory interpretivist study to develop the *Compassionate Coaching by Leader Index* (CCLI) from interviews with leaders identified as compassionate in varied organizations (for-profit and nonprofit) who had experience in highly stressful situations. In total, we interviewed 16 leaders across a variety of contexts including professional sports clubs, executives at Fortune 100 businesses, and non-profit leaders. Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face and over the phone and lasted an average of 75–90 minutes. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and thematically coded for analyses. Interviews were conducted in English, audio-recorded in full, transcribed verbatim, and checked independently for accuracy by two researchers. Participants were asked to reflect on their experiences of leading with compassion. An interview guide was used to help the interviewer focus on compassionate leader behavior (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Participants were not asked to do the interview outside of defined work periods and were not compensated for their time. Verbatim transcripts and recorded journal interview observations served as primary data. Transcripts where shared with participants to check for accuracy. Throughout our research, we focused on open reflection and dialogue with the participants regarding how they experienced being compassionate and leading others with compassion. Thus, our findings were grounded in data that gave voice to leaders who were identified and recognized for displaying compassionate behaviors in the workplace.

The following themes were identified through our coding:

1. Self-other Boundary for Compassion

2. Dignity in Compassion

3. Compassion as Proactive

4. Compassion as Reactive

5. Compassion as Identity Work

6. Personal Experience as a source for capacity for Compassion

7. Compassion as Emotional Intelligence

8. Compassion as walking the line between empathy and accountability

9. Compassion as practicing and seeking out authenticity

10. Compassion being enabled by a relational context

11. Building Personal Bandwidth for Compassion

12. Building Organizational Bandwidth for Compassion

Due to the lack of a measure of compassionate coaching in the literature, the steps of scale development and validation were followed (Nimon, Zigarmi, Houson, Witt, & Diehl, 2011; Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010; Shuck, Adelson, & Reio, 2017; Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). First, we searched the literature using a multiphase content review process for scale items that might fit within the definitions of each emergent theme from our interviews. It was important that scale items could be nested within the experience of participants. That is, we were not looking for scale items that fit the name of the emergent theme but scales that matched the expressed experience of the theme. Post review of the literature failed to identify suitable items that adequately aligned with the emergent themes. Thus, we began the process of developing our own set of questions aligned to each of the themes.

In total, 51 items were developed for 12 themes with 2-10 items for each theme. The index can be found in Appendix A.

In short, the CCLI is intended to be deployed as a leader facing index focused on a leader's personal experience to understand how and why they might enact coaching with compassion. In developing the CCLI, we drew from the recent work by Shuck and colleagues to examine if and how the themes of compassionate leader behavior reflected in the Compassionate Leader Behavior Index (CLBI) (e.g., *integrity, accountability, empathy, authenticity, presence*, and *dignity*) (Shuck et al., 2019) guide leaders' enactment of coaching with compassion. As there is no empirical index available for leaders and almost all measures of compassion are grounded from a trauma or burnout perspective, our intention was to ground the CCLI through the prism of positive leadership.

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Appendix A
Compassionate Coaching Index for Leaders

1. **Self-other Boundary for Compassion**

    1. I try to help others without mirroring their sadness.

    2. I try to help others from the sidelines without getting in the way.

    3. I try not to get carried away while trying to feel what others are feeling.

    4. I want to support others to take responsibility for addressing their challenges instead of taking on their responsibility.

2. **Dignity in Compassion**

    1. I am drawn to help others because of their needs irrespective of whether I like them.

    2. I coach everyone based on who they are.

    3. I see the dignity in others even in their most adverse situation.

3. **Compassion as Proactive**

    1. I proactively try to understand other's needs to help them flourish.

    2. I practice caring for others as central to my way of leading.

4. **Compassion as Reactive**

    1. I listen actively to make others feel heard.

    2. I am considerate towards other's feelings even when they might be responsible for any adverse situation.

    3. I check-in and express care for others facing a crisis in their personal life.

    4. I offer others respite from job-related responsibilities when they are facing a crisis in their personal life.

5. **Compassion as Identity Work**

    1. I try to understand how someone who is demographically different from me thinks differently to decide how to react.

    2. I take into consideration how cultural differences might shape one's actions to better understand why one acts in a certain way instead of judging them.

    3. I try to sense other's (minority colleagues) threshold for emotional labor in difficult conversations concerning race and other minority identities.

    4. I lean on my own experiences of being marginalized (if any) to connect with others who are marginalized.

    5. I adapt my ways of interacting with others based on our identities (personal/social).

6. **Personal Experience as a source for capacity for Compassion**

1. I use personal experiences of adversity as a resource for learning how to understand others in similar vulnerable situations.

2. I use experiences of failure in my own life as an opportunity for growing capacity to be compassionate to myself and others.

3. A disorienting experience (e.g., personal crisis) in my life shaped my outlook to be centered on caring for others.

7. Compassion as Emotional Intelligence

1. I try to understand what emotion(s) might be driving other's anger during a challenging situation.

2. I constantly strive to overcome the insecurity of showing my vulnerability to others.

3. I am aware of how others are perceiving me.

4. I can regulate my emotions to overcome the need to satisfy my ego and focus on the other.

5. I work on reconciling contradictory emotions I might experience during a challenging situation to gain a greater perspective.

6. I take on a counseling mindset as a leader.

7. I can regulate my urge to become defensive and receive feedback.

8. I naturally try to establish a connection with other through tuning into their emotions.

8. Compassion as walking the line between empathy and accountability

1. I try to balance good decision making with empathy (rational and emotional components of compassion).

2. I offer critical feedback with the intent to help.

3. I have the courage to face the blowback of going against the grain.

4. I try to balance persona/role-based needs with other's needs to be fair.

5. I try to balance perspectives learned from direct contact with others with a detached perspective giving a systems level view.

6. I am not afraid to take risks by challenging the status quo for helping others.

9. Compassion as practicing and seeking out authenticity

1. I try to understand one's developmental needs within the contexts of their problems and challenges.

2. I act the way I would want others to act.

3. I reveal how I think for others to better understand and trust me.

4. I express gratitude authentically.

5. I admit mistakes as an opportunity to learn and move forward.

6. I reflect on my mistakes to evolve into a better self.

7. I try to have meaningful conversations through speaking candidly.

8. I accept other's true selves that encompass their multiple identities.

9. I acknowledge intersections between work and life in my interactions with others.

10. I can help others envision their future selves.

10. Compassion being enabled by a relational context

1. I center my compassion around others.

2. I learn how to be compassionate through watching others.

3. I encourage a relational orientation over individualistic focus in building my teams.

11. Building Personal Bandwidth for Compassion

1. I build personal bandwidth/capacity for compassion through selfcare.

2. I lean on loving relationships in life to build capacity for compassion.

3. I use a spiritual lens to understand compassion.

4. I use self-advocacy to seek help needed for me sustain my capacity to be compassionate to others.

12. Building Organizational Bandwidth for Compassion

1. I align resources with expectations to build organizational capacity for compassion.

2. I use team reflections to help each other be present for practicing compassion.

3. I try to bridge the gap in understanding between units at different levels in the organizational hierarchy to build organizational capacity for compassion.