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Summary

There is increasing research interest in how the leisure domain can influence leaders' development and effectiveness by providing learning opportunities for leadership, recovery experiences and psychological resources.

At the same time, a growing number of leaders have a "serious leisure" interest, a goal-oriented, skill-building avocational activity they strongly identify with. Examining how having a passionate nonwork interest can impact leaders' development and effectiveness is especially justified because, compared to casual leisure, serious leisure also builds a strong, personal "serious leisurite" identity. Identity processes are recognized as central to leaders' development and, as argued by a growing body of research on multiple identities and identity work, the leader identity should be examined together with other important identities of the individual rather than in isolation. Yet hardly any studies have investigated the relationship between serious leisure and leadership.

This dissertation examines how having a serious leisure interest can influence leaders' development and their effectiveness in the leader role.

First, Chapter 2 undertakes the task of conceptual theory building by bringing together insights from two separate academic domains: serious leisure, mostly researched by sociologists, and leader (identity) development. To structure the proposed theoretical model, we introduce an "identity augmentation" framework that extends the established concept of role enrichment. Specifically, we propose that having a serious leisure interest can contribute to increasing the strength and "breadth" (number of attributes defining it) of a leader identity along three distinct "paths". First, leaders can use their serious leisure identity to construct a stronger leader identity imbued with desirable attributes such as authenticity. Second, the serious leisure-leadership inter-role enrichment creates and transfers to the leader role

important resources that increase the leader's effectiveness and therefore re-affirm the strength of the leader identity. Third, the serious leisure identity, a strong and self-affirming identity, provides valuable "positive diversification" from the risk of the leader identity's taking an overwhelming proportion within the individual's sense of self, which in turn not only protects the individual's well-being, but, by preventing excessive affective reactions to negative events in the leader role, allows leaders to stay open to learning from such events. Thus, the positive diversification offered by serious leisure can both protect and further develop the strength of the leader identity. We also propose important boundary conditions under which the three identity augmentation paths can unfold, such as the compatibility of the two identities (serious leisure and leadership), the salience of the leader role, the type of passion for the serious leisure identity (harmonious vs. obsessive) and, for the identity construction path, the "granting" by followers of the stronger leader identity "claim" extended by the leader.

The empirical study in Chapter 3 starts with a broad research question: "Why do CEOs of major organizations who have a serious leisure interest invest substantial time and resources in their nonwork passion and openly communicate about it?" and discovers that one answer lies in the construction of authenticity in the leader role. We take a two-staged empirical approach: First, we investigate substantially all mentions of nonwork interests for the CEOs of companies included in the S&P 500 index (the largest public companies in the United States) and then focus on a thematic analysis of how those CEOs who qualify as "serious leisurites" speak about their nonwork passion in public interviews, at events, and in social media. Second, we use grounded theory techniques to analyze 15 interviews I held with "serious leisurite" CEOs of major US companies, 10 of whom led S&P 500 or Fortune 500 companies, while the remaining five led companies with a median headcount of 22,000. Our discovery is that serious leisurite CEOs use their nonwork passion to construct increased authenticity in their leader role, both in their own eyes ("experienced" authenticity) and in the eyes of others ("perceived"

authenticity). We further find that they do this first by disclosing their serious leisure identity, second by engaging in it with their followers and third by constructing consistency and continuity between their serious leisure and their leader identities, in terms of values, worldview of “philosophy” and their life story. Our findings thus illustrate how the “identity construction” path theorized in Chapter 1 may unfold, whereby leaders construct a stronger and “broader” leader identity (in this case, a more “authentic” one) by using their serious leisure identity.

Chapter 4 takes a different perspective on the interviews I held with major company CEOs who are also “serious leisurites” by focusing on how they perceive the executive job demands of their CEO role and the role of their serious leisure in helping them cope with such demands. Offering a rare glimpse into the vulnerable sensemaking of these top leaders, our findings show that they see the CEO role as “overwhelming”, exposing them to risks for their mental health and for their sense of “true self” and that they attribute this massive strain to their accountability for the entirety of their (globe-wide and tens of thousands-strong) corporations, to the pressure to deliver short-term results and to the bedlam of multiplying and often contradictory stakeholder demands. Less intuitively, they also identify self-inflicted pressure coming from their own demands of themselves as leaders as a source of strain, arising from the need to project optimism in moments of uncertainty or self-doubt, the difficulty of empowering their teams while staying fully accountable and the massive energy expended in behaving as a transformational leader. Turning to their serious leisure, the CEOs believe not only that they are uniquely able to help them manage the strain of the top role, in ways that casual leisure and time spent with loved ones cannot, but also that they build substantial personal resources that support optimal functioning in the CEO role. Thus, this chapter’s empirical findings illustrate how the “role enrichment” path and, to a lesser extent, the “positive diversification” path proposed in Chapter 2’s theoretical model can unfold.

Chapter 5, motivated by my commitment to help bridge the academic-practitioner divide, presents insights related to this dissertation's research question as published in practitioner-oriented journals. Specifically, the first article summarizes our preliminary empirical findings regarding the role of serious leisure for CEOs' leader identities and their effectiveness in the leader role. The second article draws on insights from gender-focused leadership identity research and from the serious leisure literature to propose future research directions on how a serious (and specifically athletic) leisure interest may support women's leadership identities and effectiveness.

As a whole, this dissertation contributes to research on leaders' (identity) development and especially self-development, research on developing positive forms of leadership, studies on leaders' personal resources and recovery, and offers insights valuable for other fields such as the future of work in the "gig" economy and leaders' communication in the 21st century. I trust this work opens a promising new agenda for management research, understanding the interplay between serious leisure and leadership.