Chapter 12
Leading with Support: The Role of Social Support for Positive and Negative Events in Leader Development

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> *"No man will make a great leader who wants to do it all himself, or get all the credit for doing it."—Andrew Carnegie*
>   *"Leadership is unlocking people's potential to become better."—Bill Bradley*
>   *"Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others"—Jack Welch*

The quotes above speak to the importance of growth as a leader—and not only navigating growth for oneself but also taking part in the growth of others. In addition, these quotes all allude to the vital role that relationships with other people play in propelling leaders to success. Although there is a large literature on leader development, the roles of the social context in which leaders reside have received less attention, particularly in terms of the diverse ways in which social support may contribute to leader development. Social support has been defined as "responsiveness to another's needs and more specifically as acts that communicate caring; that validate the other's worth, feelings, or actions; or that facilitate adaptive coping with problems through the provision of information, assistance, or tangible resources" (Cutrona, 1996, p. 10). It can take many forms but includes things such as providing encouraging words or reassurance, cheering someone on after a success or cheering someone up following a failure, or helping or mentoring someone through a challenge. Although past work has mentioned the importance of social support, there has not been a large focus on understanding the specific ways in which support may aid leader development or how different types of social support may play different roles or lead to varying types of outcomes.

Prior work emphasizes the distinction between leader development and leadership development (e.g., Day, 2001, Reichard & Johnson, 2011). Leadership development focuses on creating an organizational and a social environment that can run effectively whereas leader development focuses more on the individual—helping

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him or her to develop their own unique sense of self and identity as a leader—as well as building the knowledge and skills that are required. Social support certainly plays a role in leadership development, helping to create a more positive and effective social network. However, in this chapter, I focus on the unique role social support plays in *leader* development (a focus on the individual rather than the dyadic or organizational effects of support). I examine various ways in which different types of support (both support that is focused on helping us through negative events as well as support that helps us celebrate and feel good about our positive events) and different support roles of leaders (both as support provider and as support recipient) may help develop leaders. First, I briefly review past work on leader development, highlighting three primary areas of interest in this field (self-awareness and identity formation, motivation and willingness to change and develop, and development of competence and key leader skills), as well as current tools that are employed to assist with leader development. Next, I make a case for why social support may contribute to leader growth in these areas, specifically through its ability to promote acceptance, provide affirmation, and bring in outside perspectives. I then dig into past work into various conceptualizations of both received support and support provision in both positive and negative event contexts to more deeply explore the ways in which these processes may contribute to leader development. Finally, I consider how early developmental models of relationships shape social support, how to respond to failure given our understanding of support, and how support needs may change over the career of a leader.

12.1 Past Work in Leader Development: What's Important

12.1.1 Identity and Self-Awareness

One key area of interest in the leader development literature is a focus on identity development and a clear self-concept (e.g., Day & Harrison, 2007; Snook, Ibarra, & Ramo, 2010). Self-awareness, in fact, has been argued to be one of the most important skills that leaders need in order to develop (George, Sims, McLean & Mayer, 2007). Being more self-aware allows the developing leader to acknowledge weaknesses and adjust behaviors as necessary. In addition, our identity can include not just our current self (which we are hopefully aware of) but our sense of possible selves (Ibarra, Snook, & Ramo, 2008). Both our view of self and our potential self can help provide structure around which we can make sense of situations and plan future actions or work towards future goals. As leaders transition from role to role, it is important they are able to incorporate new aspects of their role into their identity (Ibarra, Snook, & Ramo, 2008).

When we discuss leader identity, we can focus on many different aspects. Hammond, Clapp-Smith, and Palanski (2017) argue that we can assess the strength of the identity (extent to which one identifies as a leader), integration of the identity (how well the leader identity meshes with other aspects of the self-concept), the level

of identity (which can focus on the self as an individual, the self in relation to close others, or the self as a member of a group), and meaning (how one defines a leader and what having a leader identity means to the individual). Furthermore, they argue that identity development often involves sensemaking (making sense of and interpreting and imparting meaning on various life events). Sensemaking in their model involves noticing an event, interpreting the event, authoring (or adjusting one's identity in light of the event(s)), and enacting (which involves actually using the new identity as leader). In terms of the impact of various events, Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, and Walumbwa (2005) argue that in order to achieve greater self-awareness, it is not just making sense of salient negative events that play a role (though these sometimes have received more attention as "triggers") but also salient positive events. When individuals reflect in meaningful ways on *both* positive and negative events they grow in self-awareness and ultimately further their development as a leader.

12.1.2   *Motivation to Develop the Self and Willingness to Change*

We want leaders to have a clear identity and a great awareness of the self—but coupled with that need is a need for leaders to be motivated and ready and willing to change, adjust, and adapt. If leaders cling to an initial identity and are never willing to make adjustments or challenge themselves, there would be little growth or development. Past work has shown that leaders typically rate highly in adaptability and openness (Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004; Zaccaro, 2007).

Although organizations can force individuals to receive training or engage in other activities that seem fruitful, recent work has argued for the importance of promoting leader self-development—essentially allowing leaders to adapt and develop in the ways they best see fit (Reichard & Johnson, 2011; Boyce, Zaccaro, & Wisecarver, 2010). Self-development occurs when leaders choose their own developmental activities to aid them in enhancing their leadership and is thought to involve behaviors such as "engaging in stretch assignments, self reflection and self-awareness, and learning from others" (Reichard & Johnson, 2011, p. 35). Reichard and Johnson (2011) note that self-development is often cost effective and important for organizations that want to push forward and continue to adapt and evolve to changing demands and environments. Although self-development is thought to be an important part of leader development, past work suggests that some individuals are more likely to use these tools. For instance, Reichard and Johnson (2011) note that individuals high in conscientiousness or intelligence may be more likely to engage in self-development, but also note that perceptions of supervisor and organizational support can also influence motives to develop the self. In addition, Boyce, Zaccaro, and Wisecarver (2010) identified several individual factors that can promote self-development, such as greater work orientation (which includes stronger career motives, and greater involvement with and commitment to the job/organization), self-efficacy, conscientiousness, an openness to new experiences,

self-regulation, and career growth orientation (which involves exploring careers and seeking feedback about one's own career or performance). In addition, they found that for individuals who had low or moderate inclinations to engage in leader self-development, providing tangible support (in the form of a website with information about how and why to pursue leader self-development) was helpful in increasing the number of self-development activities they engaged in.

Other work has focused on the importance of "transformative change" or "changes in the leader's worldviews and meaning structures" (McCauley, 2008, p. 9). Many leaders report having "crucibles" or experiences where they were challenged or pushed in a profound way that causes them to reevaluate many different aspects of their life—their values, their views of self, their ways of doing things, etc.—and find new strength and meaning after going through the experience (Bennis & Thomas, 2002). This work further underscores the importance of being open and willing to change and adapt. Leaders who aren't particularly motivated to develop themselves or open or receptive to changing key aspects of their self or leadership style may not benefit from or survive "crucible"-type experiences. All leaders will encounter some form of difficulty or challenge, but those who are most likely to grow and develop are those who are open and willing to change as a result of difficulties.

12.1.3   Leader Competence and Skill Acquisition

Competence and skill acquisition is another area of interest within the leader development literature as leaders must continue to develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are needed to lead their organizations (Hammond et al., 2017). Hammond and colleagues argue that competence can be promoted through observing and practicing leadership skills in multiple domains of life (not just the work domain) and that having a strong, coherent identity can help enable gains in competence.

There are many types of skills that can be considered essential leader competencies (McCauley, 2008)—some of which overlap with my earlier discussions of identity and willingness to adapt and develop. Day (2001) argues that when we are focused on leader development, intrapersonal competence is key as leaders must know themselves and be able to use their clear identity in a range of interactions. In addition, Day (2001) argues that key skills required for leader development include self-awareness (which includes emotional awareness, self-confidence, and an accurate self-image), self-regulation (which includes self-control, trustworthiness, personal responsibility, and adaptability), and self-motivation (which includes initiative, commitment, and optimism). Leaders who possess these skills (or can develop them) will be better positioned to further develop as leaders.

Furthermore, Goleman (2004) argues that emotional intelligence is one of the primary markers of leader potential (emerging even more strongly than other competencies such as technical skills or IQ). He defines emotional intelligence as including some of the same traits Day (2001) recognized as important including self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation—but also adds in the importance of

empathy (which involves the ability to read and understand others' emotional reactions and respond to them appropriately) and social skills (which involves being able to effectively build and maintain social connections and relationships).

A recent review notes that in addition to the skills described above, the following have also received attention as important to leaders and leader development: wisdom, intelligence, creativity, and business/strategic skills (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014).

12.1.4   Methods and Tools to Promote Leader Development

There are many ways in which organizations can go about promoting leader development tocultivate, amongst other things, a clear sense of self, an openness to change and develop the self, and the competencies desired for the leader role. Hart et al. (2008) argue that there are four primary approaches to leader development: (1) personal growth (emphasizes personal reflection on behaviors and characteristics of the self), (2) conceptual understanding (focus on theoretical understanding of leadership), (3) feedback (focus on providing feedback to leaders on specific behaviors), and (4) skill building (where specific leadership skills are taught).

Others have instead defined three primary types of leader development including "formal instruction, work assignments, and self-directed learning" (Boyce, Zaccaro, & Wisecarver, 2010, p. 159). However, this maps pretty closely onto the distinctions proposed by Hart et al. (2008) as formal instruction likely includes both conceptual understanding and skill building and self-directed learning maps onto personal growth and perhaps incorporates the search for feedback. The most commonly used tool for leader development is the use of formal instruction—though it has been argued that this is not necessarily the most effective due to poor transfer back to the home organization (Boyce, Zaccaro, & Wisecarver, 2010).

Scholars have also proposed theories on how the process of leader development can be accelerated or optimized. For instance, Avolio and Hannah (2008) argue that leaders show greater developmental readiness when they possess a learning goal orientation (focus on learning for its own sake as opposed to just performance); have developmental efficacy (perceived ability to develop), self-concept clarity (clear sense of who you are), and self-complexity (greater number of components of the self); and show metacognitive abilities (ability to think about one's own way of thinking).

Some methods have also received attention for their ability to facilitate certain aspects of development. For instance, Day et al. (2014) argue that 360° feedback has been shown across studies to be helpful in building self-awareness and competence as one gets feedback from a variety of sources (including from those above, below, and equal to oneself in rank). In addition, composing self-narratives (or life stories) has also been shown as a useful tool to help one better understand the self and develop self-knowledge through which they can evaluate new events (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014).

12.2 Potential Contributions of Social Support to Leader Development: The Big Picture

Although there are many ways in which organizations can promote leader development or offer formal or informal activities to promote leader development, here we want to examine unique ways in which social support (in a variety of settings) may play a key role in leader development. Past work on leader development has sometimes mentioned social support and the potential importance of support to leader development. For instance, Larsson et al. (2006) studied military leader development amongst officers from various countries. They found that everyday interactions between officers and their peers, supervisors, and subordinates played a significant role in their development. In addition, many officers referenced the importance of watching role models and getting feedback as also important towards the growth. These findings highlight the general importance of the social environment in leader development—and provide some evidence for the role social support may play in development. It is likely that many of the day-to-day interactions with their colleagues involved support—either emotional support or other forms of tangible support as they worked together to solve a problem. Furthermore, one way in which a superior or peer may offer support is by modeling (or teaching) certain behaviors to an up-and-coming leader who is unsure of how to do a particular task. Finally, social support can also be a context for feedback where others provide their thoughts on challenges or events that come our way and often provide perspective in terms of how they view the event and the options one has to deal with the event. The authors also noted that both social interactions and real-world mission participation played large roles in leader development whereas more formal leader training or development opportunities were rarely mentioned.

In addition, Allen (2008) found that some of the most useful, cost-effective, and enjoyable methods to provide leader development include things such as developmental relationships, individual/group reflection, action learning (learning via challenges presented to and reflected on by a group), networking with senior executives, multisource feedback, and coaching. All of these six methods (out of the top ten they presented) likely involve social support, but the top strategy of "developmental relationships" is actually defined by the presence of a relationship that offers support, information, and challenge. This work suggests that amongst all of the bells and whistles that organizations might employ—social connection via social support may be a key element to furthering leader development.

In addition, work interviewing successful, authentic leaders has noted the importance of leaders developing a support team (George, Sims, McLean, & Mayer, 2007). George et al. (2007) found that most leaders have a diverse support network made up of personal relationships outside the work setting (spouses, friends, family members) and inside the profession (colleagues, mentors). They also note that leaders need to both provide and receive support to really sustain a healthy and beneficial relationship and need to have others whom they can be completely authentic with without fear of rejection. In addition, scholars are starting to recognize the

need to take a more "whole-person" approach to leader development—and are considering more and more how experiences from outside the work environment are shaping leader development (for brief review see Hammond et al., 2017).

Although there has been some discussion of how social support can be important to leaders and leader development, the findings from the broader social support literature remain largely unapplied to the leader development setting. Most of the work discussing the connection between social support and leader development focuses on the vague notion that having people to support you is helpful and doesn't necessarily explore the specific outcomes of support, the various types of support, differential roles of support provision vs. receipt, or factors that may influence our ability to provide or receive support. Below, I explore different areas of work within the broader social support literature and discuss specific ways in which this work may help promote leader development.

The model below (see Fig. 12.1) represents an overarching framework for the role of receiving social support in leader development. When receiving support, I propose leaders can benefit from the following:

1. *Feelings of acceptance*. As humans, it has been argued that we have a fundamental need to belong and connect with others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000). When others provide support to us—it shows us that they care and are willing to still include us despite the obstacles we may be facing. By communicating genuine care and concern, we can feel valued and accepted by our support provider. In an organizational sense, receiving support from those within our organization can allow us to further infer that we still are accepted as a member of our organization. Indeed, past work on social support demonstrates the value of support that communicates care and acceptance (e.g., Maisel, Gable, & Strachman, 2008).

2. *Receiving affirmation of their behaviors and/or affirmation of who they are as individuals*. When supporting others, many people include messages that reassure and affirm who the individual is. By communicating that we understand why someone made the choice that they did or reminding them of why they are a good and valuable person, we can affirm key aspects of who they are and point out positive aspects of their behavior. Past work suggests that high-quality support often involves messages that validate the recipient's identity, effort, actions, or emotions (Maisel et al., 2008). Affirmation also helps communicate to the recipient that the support provider views them as competent. Feeling a sense of competence has been argued to be another innate human need—which is important for motivation and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In addition, affirmation is thought to be important in building confidence and shaping one's leadership identity (Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006).

3. *Gaining greater awareness of outside perspectives*. Often when others provide support, they also share their own evaluation of the situation and/or what they feel the recipient could do or might have done. Past work suggests that high-quality support attempts often involve offering new perspectives or elaborating on consequences or meaning of events (Maisel et al., 2008). Support providers
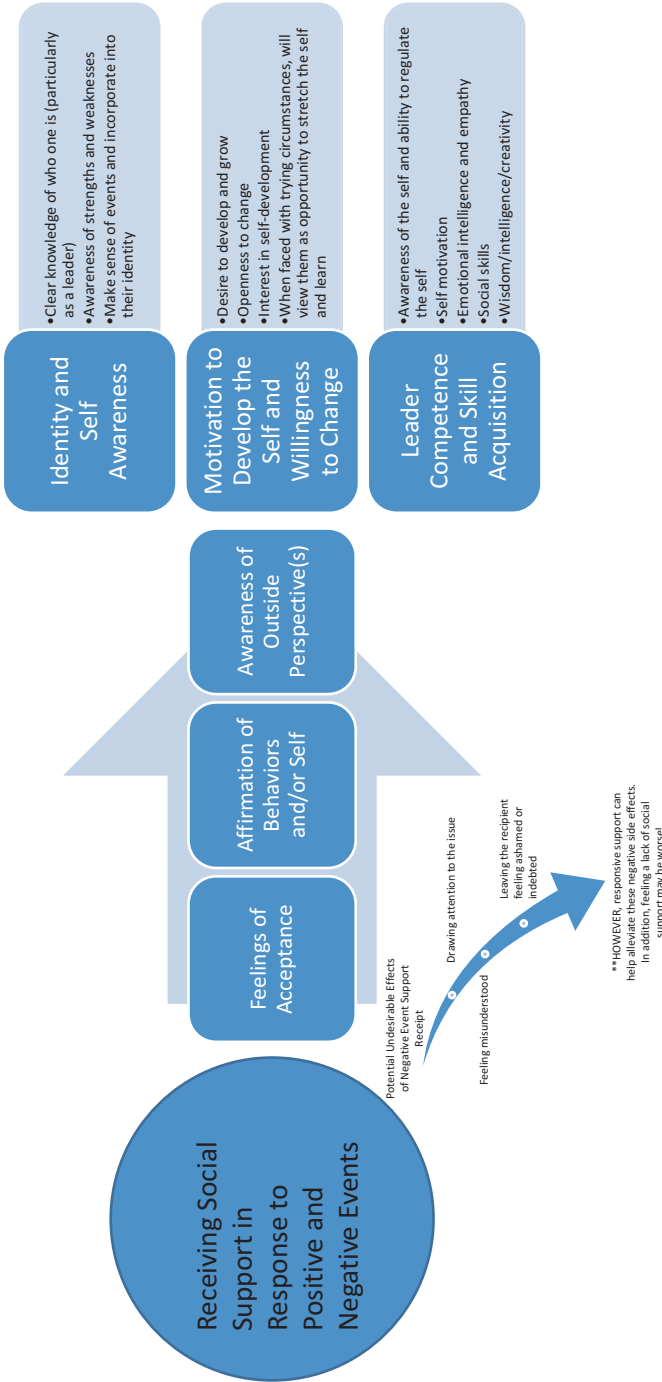
Identity and Self Awareness
- Clear knowledge of who one is (particularly as a leader)
- Awareness of strengths and weaknesses
- Make sense of events and incorporate into their identity

Motivation to Develop the Self and Willingness to Change
- Desire to develop and grow
- Openness to change
- Interest in self-development
- When faced with trying circumstances, will view them as opportunity to stretch the self and learn

Leader Competence and Skill Acquisition
- Awareness of the self and ability to regulate the self
- Self motivation
- Emotional intelligence and empathy
- Social skills
- Wisdom/intelligence/creativity

Awareness of Outside Perspective(s)

Affirmation of Behaviors and/or Self

Feelings of Acceptance

Receiving Social Support in Response to Positive and Negative Events

Potential Undesirable Effects of Negative Event Support Receipt

Drawing attention to the issue

Feeling misunderstood

Leaving the recipient feeling ashamed or indebted

**HOWEVER, responsive support can help alleviate these negative side effects. In addition, feeling a lack of social support may be worse!

Fig. 12.1 How receiving social support influences key components of leader development

share how they see the event, which may oftentimes be different from recipients' perspectives. By sharing events with others and getting their feedback, recipients are often made aware of new ways of seeing their situation. In addition, outside perspectives from those in our social networks can often prevent us from engaging in pessimistic thinking or becoming overly anxious or negative about our experiences and can also lead us to view situations in a new (and hopefully more positive) way (Hazler & Denham, 2002; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011).

These benefits of social support all contribute to building leaders who have a greater sense of identity and self-awareness, a greater motivation to develop the self, and a greater willingness to change. Below, I use past work in social support to provide support for this overarching framework and to discuss practical implications for how this can be applied in a leader development setting.

12.3 How Past Work in Social Support Can Inform and Improve Leader Development

12.3.1 Perceptions of Availability and Social Support Receipt

Perceptions that others will come to your aid in response to stressful life circumstances are consistently associated with better physical and mental health outcomes, including reduced anxiety and depression (e.g., Cohen, 1988; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Fleming, Baum, Gisriel, & Gatchel, 1982; Kaul & Lakey, 2003; Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996; Uchino, 2009). It has also been found to be helpful in terms of goal pursuit. For instance, Turan et al. (2016) found that daily perceptions that others would be there for you in the event of a personal problem amongst people living with HIV were associated with higher treatment self-efficacy (in other words, people believed that they could adhere to treatment more on days when they felt like they perceived greater availability of support). In this way, the basic presence of a support system may help fuel leader success as they are more mentally and physically prepared to handle stress, an important aspect of being a competent and self-regulated leader. Perceived support, after all, just requires having the sense that others will be there for you should you need them.

When individuals perceive that they have more support available to them, that is thought to lead to greater self-confidence and beliefs in the self, and these changes are thought to contribute to the benefits we see in well-being (Liu, Li, Ling, & Cai, 2016). In addition, those who perceive more social support available to them also tend to pursue more positive coping styles, which includes things like finding ways to adapt or change or seeking the help of others, whereas those who perceive less support may be more likely to avoid issues or use unhealthy coping behaviors (Liu et al., 2016). Other work has shown that perceptions that others will provide support to you if needed boost self-esteem and one's sense of control, which in turn influence overall quality of life (Warner, Schuz, Wurm, Ziegelmann, & Tesch-Romer,

2010). This work highlights how perceptions of support availability can play a key role in leader development. Individuals who perceive that others are there for them may be able to grow and develop in the face of adversity (more willing to adapt and change and confident in their ability to do so) and possess a more positive and growth-oriented view of self which may help them develop a more positive sense of identity and buy into the idea of a future self that is an improved leader.

However, actually receiving social support shows mixed effects. Some work has shown that receiving support, like the general perception that one has support available to you, can have positive effects. For instance, one study found that daily receipt of emotional support related to smoking cessation was actually associated with reduced smoking (Scholz et al., 2016). However, many other studies have demonstrated negative effects of received support on health and well-being (e.g., Barbee, Delega, Sherburne, & Grimshaw, 1998; Gleason, Iida, Bolger, & Shrout, 2003; Warner et al., 2010). Although feeling like others are there for us should we need them is a good thing, when we actually receive support it can be a blow to our self-esteem or feelings of competence and can lead us to feel indebted to our support providers (e.g., Bolger et al., 2000; Gleason et al., 2003; Shrout et al., 2006). This work highlights a potential area of concern in terms of connections to leader development. Although perceptions of support availability are almost uniformly associated with positive outcomes (and likely play into an individual's identity, sense of competence, and willingness to grow and adapt), actually receiving negative event support may actually cause a leader to question his or her competence (or even one's identity as a leader)—especially if the leader is frequently reaching out for support. This might occur when the support leaves the leader NOT feeling accepted or when the support given doesn't resonate in a way that makes them feel affirmed. Instead of feeling like one gained a new perspective or insight, the leader receiving the support may instead just be focused on what they now owe the person who was trying to support them. Negative events can often serve important functions in a leaders' development leading them to question themselves and move forward in transformative ways—however, the quality and helpfulness of the support given may play a key role in whether these events promote or inhibit leader development.

Practical Applications: This work suggests that perceptions of a good social support base are critical. Those who feel like they have support tend to be healthier, are better able to adapt to new situations that are thrown at them, and are more confident in themselves. Thus, leaders need to prioritize relationships that provide them a sense of social support. In addition, organizations that want to promote optimal leader development need to recognize and contribute to the maintenance of social support networks for their leaders. This could be efforts within the organization (socials, mentoring relationships) to help leaders find others within their organization that they can connect with and rely on. However, it may also mean giving leaders the time and flexibility to improve their relationships with friends and family members who often provide the bulk of our social support.

12.3.2   Received Support: The Importance of Responsiveness

I've highlighted the benefits of feeling like others are there for you, but have mentioned the downsides that can arise from actually receiving social support. The work on actual received support can seem alarming—Does actually providing support to someone else who has encountered a difficulty actually make them worse off? And by extension, does giving support to leaders potentially lead to hits to well-being and confidence in the self? Early work on something called "invisible support" led many to conclude that it was best to get support in subtle ways so that you weren't actually encoding it as support (Bolger, Zuckerman, & Kessler, 2000). The researchers found that when studying for the Bar exam, law students showed reduced depression on days when romantic partners reported providing support (via listening and comforting their partner) but recipients did not report receiving it—a process they refer to as "invisible support" (Bolger et al., 2000). Luckily, past work has shown that received support (even when "visible" and encoded as support) is not always linked to negative outcomes; the key to successful support (regardless of context or "visibility") seems to be that it communicates responsiveness (or responsiveness to the self) (Gable, Gosnell, Maisel, & Strachman, 2012; Maisel, Gable, & Strachman, 2008; Reis et al., 2004). When support is responsive, it communicates to the recipient that they are understood, validated, and cared for (Reis et al., 2004). For instance, Maisel and Gable (2009) found that received support was beneficial when it was high in responsiveness—and high responsiveness was associated with reductions in sadness and increased relationship connection and security. This was true whether support was visible (the recipient reported receiving responsiveness support) or invisible (the provider partner reported providing highly responsive support but the recipient did not report or recognize the support).

The communication of responsiveness is likely to play a key role in the promotion of leader development. When a support provider responds to a leader's disclosure of a stressor and is able to communicate "I hear you and know you" (understanding), "I respect your thoughts, ideas, and perspectives" (validation), and "I genuinely care about you and am concerned for you" (caring)—these messages can directly speak to a leader's sense of identity ("Hey—I'm still a good/worthy person!") and help affirm them and reassure them of their competence ("Hey—someone else sees me as reasonable, valuable, and possessing worthwhile ideas!"). In addition, the affirmation and acceptance provided may make them more likely to feel confident in their abilities to change or further develop the self as needed. If they receive support that is low in responsiveness, they might spiral downwards and begin to question who they are, whether they have the necessary skills to lead, and whether they are capable of growing into the leader they desire to be. Hopefully, leaders will have a strong support base outside of their work environment—that can communicate to them that no matter what happens at work, they are understood, valued, and cared for. However, this support may be even more important if it comes from within the organization. My husband or wife telling me they value me at home may be different than someone from my work communicating that I am valued as a

teammate or in the organizational setting. This suggests that organizations may need to think strategically about how to communicate these sentiments to employees.

Practical Applications: Even if we are approaching someone after a failure, the ability to communicate that they are still understood, valued, and cared for may be key in helping them to maintain their sense of professional identity and their confidence in their abilities—while at the same time challenging them to use this experience to change and adapt and develop skills or competencies that they may be lacking. If a leader doesn't receive that sense of acceptance and affirmation, he or she may not feel as confident that they can change and adapt. Furthermore, having the outside perspective of the support provider may provide greater insight into how they might continue to change and adapt to move past the negative event. Assuming that a failure is not so egregious as to warrant separation from the organization or the responsibilities as leader, organizations can encourage its members to be mindful of their communication practices and make attempts (especially in the context of a failure) to communicate that that individual is still a valued and understood member of the team and that the organization is committed to seeing the individual grow and thrive as a leader.

What strategies can be used to communicate responsiveness? Past work has outlined behaviors that contribute to interpersonal perceptions of responsiveness (Maisel, Gable, & Strachman, 2008): Understanding can be communicated by asking for additional information or details, acknowledging that one is following along (through paraphrasing or even a simple head nod or "mm-hm"), or even explicitly stating that one understands. Validation can be enhanced through communicating that one understands the significance of an event and where it fits in the "big picture," agreeing with the discloser; reassuring and expressing confidence in the discloser; affirming the discloser's feelings, efforts, or identity; or sharing a similar personal experience that relates to discloser's experience. Finally, caring is communicated via expressions of love, support, empathy, or concern, discussing the joint outcomes (or joint investment) of an event, and engaging in thoughtful behaviors such as offering assistance or promoting a more positive mood (Maisel et al., 2008). These specific behaviors offer specific applications into leader development as organizations or other individuals invested in the development of a leader can utilize these strategies in an attempt to better convey responsiveness and hopefully leave the leader still feeling that they are competent, and that they are capable of growing and adapting even in the face of adversity, and without causing them to question their identity as a leader.

12.3.3 Capitalization Support Receipt

In the broader social support literature, most work has focused on how we receive support for negative events. Similarly, in the leader and leadership development literatures, there is more of an emphasis on failures and negative experiences shaping leaders and at times researchers have proposed that positive events may offer less opportunity for leader transformation (for brief review see Ellis, Mendel, & Nir, 2006). In both fields, however, recent work is making a case for the importance of understanding the impacts of positive events.

Support for positive events (also known as "capitalization" or "capitalization support") provides an opportunity for close others to demonstrate that they are there for us—and it may be an easier context to communicate responsiveness (Gable, Gosnell, Maisel, & Strachman, 2012). Gable et al. (2012) conducted a daily diary study to determine how participants responded to positive and negative support attempts from their romantic partners. They found that individuals were more likely to perceive responsiveness (a sense of understanding, validation, and caring) when getting support for positive events—compared to negative events. In addition, they left the interactions feeling more supported, thankful, and admiring of their partner. In a leadership context, we know from past work that feeling positive other-directed emotions like a sense of thankfulness or gratitude helps promote authentic leaders who demonstrate fairness, honesty, and putting more respect for and value on others' opinions (Mitchie & Gooty, 2005).

Furthermore, Gable et al. (2012) demonstrated that the potential benefits of received support are greater with capitalization support (and risks are lower!). When providers provide especially responsive support for recipient's personal positive events, recipients show significant reductions in daily feelings of anxiety, have a greater sense of well-being (a composite measure of happiness and life satisfaction), and show greater signs of relationship quality (as measured by self-report ratings of relationship satisfaction, connection, and security). When they received less responsive support for positive events, they still had better personal outcomes than on days they didn't disclose a positive event and it had no effect on their relationship. In contrast, on days they receive support for negative events, even highly responsive support could not make up for the dips in well-being and increases in anxiety. Highly responsive support did help promote greater relationship quality. However, on days when less responsive support was received for negative events, recipients reported being especially anxious, had lower well-being, and reported much lower relationship quality. In a leader development context, providing support to leaders when they succeed may be an easier opportunity to reinforce that we are there for them. Ironically, the receipt of capitalization support (as opposed to negative event support) is actually a better predictor of changes over time in how much we perceive providers will be there for us when something bad happens (Gable et al., 2012). And, as we mentioned earlier, it is the perception that people will be there for us when bad things happen that is so clearly tied to mental and physical health outcomes across studies.

We also know that receiving capitalization support can result in greater experience of positive emotions. For instance, Monfort et al. (2014) conducted a lab study on romantic couples and found that when one individual received feedback that they had been successful on a stressful lab task and shared their success with their partner, receiving a supportive capitalization response led them to report more positive emotions and less negative emotions—and also to show greater positive emotion facial expressions. Through the promotion of positive emotions, capitalization can be important in the leader development context in a number of ways. First, past work has linked the experience of positive emotions with creativity. For instance, participants in a lab setting who were shown a positive emotion-invoking film clip were able to come up with more potential courses of actions they would like to take

(Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Leaders who experience positive emotions may also see more possibilities in the organization (a valuable skill) and more possibilities in the self (potential future selves, ways to grow/develop). In addition, they may bring in more creative ideas that allows them to build a greater sense of competence and effectiveness. In addition, past work has demonstrated that a leader's positive mood can spread to followers and lead followers to actually view the leader as more effective (Bono & Ilies, 2006). Thus, leaders may grow in their own sense of competence and self-efficacy if they perceive that their followers trust them.

Capitalization also helps us make the most of our positive events. Reis et al. (2010) found that when individuals shared positive events with others (as opposed to just remembering the events or even writing about the events) and received enthusiastic responses, they later rated the events as being even more positive than they originally rated these events. This might be important in the context of leader development, as capitalization support may actually help leaders better remember and encode their successes into their identity as they will view those successes as being especially good and important events.

Furthermore, capitalization can also build interpersonal resources (Reis et al., 2010). Reis and colleagues found that capitalization interactions amongst strangers led to increased liking, trust, greater self-disclosure of personal information, and more prosocial orientations. Fun interactions, in comparison, result in increased liking but didn't build trust or increase self-disclosure. They suggest that this may be due to the communication of security that comes from an enthusiastic capitalization response which may diminish concerns over self-protection (Reis et al., 2010; Murray et al., 2006). By building interpersonal resources, leaders may be sharpening their social skills, a key skill for leaders.

Recent work has begun to examine how capitalization support at home may have organizational or job implications. Ilies, Keeney, and Scott (2011) found that even when controlling for the pleasantness and number of positive work events, participants reported significant increases in job satisfaction when they received support from their romantic partner or spouse in regard to a shared personal positive event that occurred at work that day. It is likely that individuals who are more satisfied with their job are more motivated to continue to grow and develop and are more likely to have developed an identity that meshes with their organization. In addition, we know that "commitment" and "optimism" are skills necessary for leader development (Day, 2001) and these are likely fueled by job satisfaction (whereas dissatisfaction should make one less committed and perhaps more generally pessimistic).

Finally, an exercise called "appreciative inquiry" is a method of leader development that shares some overlap with capitalization support (Hart, Conklin, & Allen, 2008). Appreciative inquiry (AI) involves having a leader reflect on "peak moments" of leadership (in other words, highly positive events and experiences) on their own and also in the context of group discussion. From there, the leader develops ideas of how those positive events might shape their future potential for impact and commits to take action to bring about desired changes for the organization. Many participants in their AI exercises reported feeling opened up to new opportunities and possibilities

and overall the AI exercises seemed to lead to greater self-awareness, a key asset for leader development. While appreciative inquiry isn't capitalization support per se, it involves some similar processes (having others reflect with you on your especially positive moments) and has been found to be effective and helpful for achieving greater awareness and opening the self up to develop and make practical changes in the organization.

Practical Applications: Going back to our model, this work suggests that with positive event support it might be easier to communicate acceptance and affirmation and (without the defensiveness or indebtedness that may come along with negative event support) capitalization may also free leaders to more easily appreciate others' perspectives on the event. If capitalization offers an easier context to communicate acceptance and affirmation, and share outside perspectives, it may also be an easier way to encourage leaders to solidify their identity, motivate them to continue to change or be open to new experiences, and make them feel more competent while also building competencies (e.g., creativity, social skills). Given this, organizations should make a point to celebrate good news and accomplishments. This can be done on a group level (parties, awards, or other "recognition" activities)—but should also be encouraged at an interpersonal dyadic level, especially to those who have contact with developing leaders. Many of these capitalization studies focus on the benefits of getting support for everyday events—not just major life events. Organizations often have built in celebrations or ceremonies for major markers of success. However, if a leader's small victories or positive events are celebrated (especially since small events are likely to happen more frequently than major events), you are providing even more opportunities to give your leaders that reminder that someone else accepts them, affirms them, and sees great potential in them. These small reminders can ultimately make a big difference in leader's identity, their motives to continue to change and develop, and their skill acquisition.

12.3.4   *Social Support Provision in Good Times and Bad*

When we talk about social support, people tend to think about recipients of social support or the need for support. More rarely do we consider how *providing* support to others may influence us (as the provider). However, as leaders, providing support may be a critical activity. By providing support, leaders are further developing key competencies that they will need to continue to grow and develop such as empathy, social skills, emotional intelligence, and wisdom. Here, I propose a similar model for the provision of support as I did for received support (see Fig. 12.2 below). However, when we provide support, (1) we aren't receiving acceptance but are giving acceptance and strengthening our team; (2) we aren't being affirmed personally, but are affirming others and their behaviors; and (3) we aren't necessarily receiving new perspectives on an event of our own but instead are able to provide an outside perspective to someone who is figuring out their own event for themselves (and perhaps develop new ways of thinking about situations ourselves as we seek to
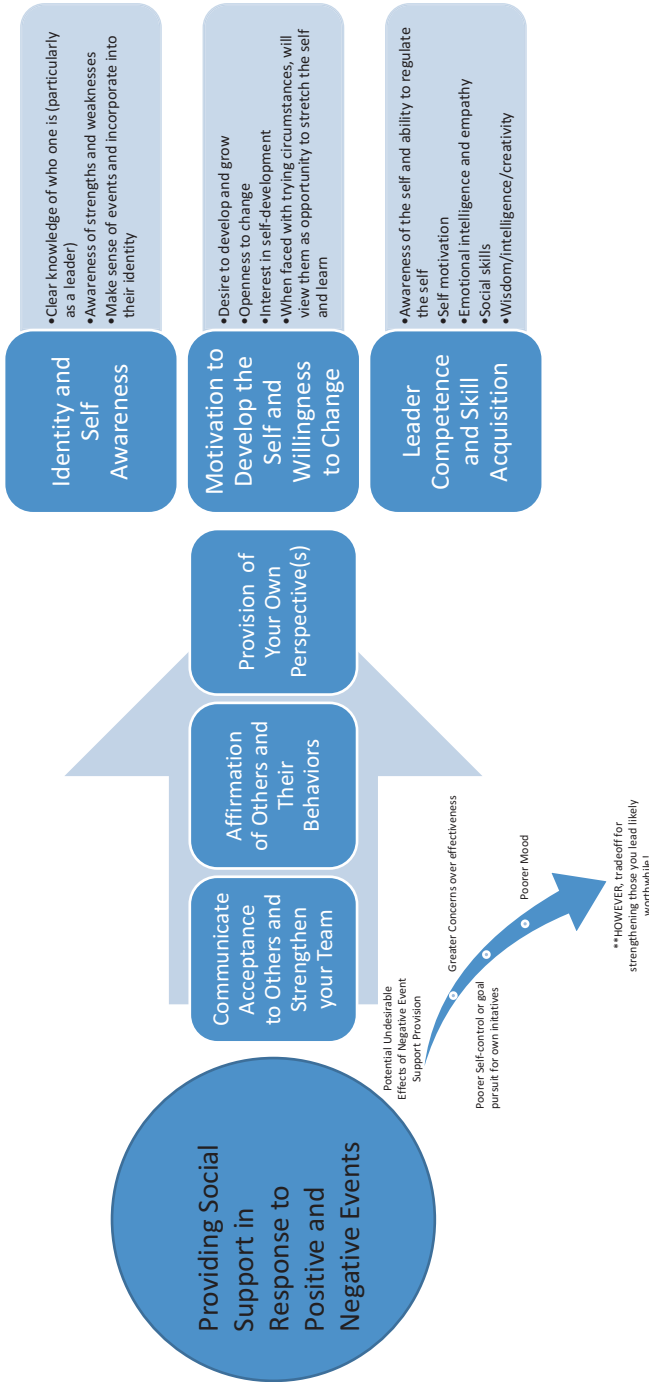
Fig. 12.2 How providing social support influences key components of leader development

provide support). Broadly, I believe that these aspects of provision still lay the groundwork for improvements in key areas of leader development. When we communicate acceptance and affirmation to others, we are typically reminded of where we are compared to where this person is which can often remind us of or reinforce our identity. We often communicate acceptance or affirmation by sharing our own similar experiences, which can also increase our self-awareness as we reflect back. In addition, communicating acceptance allows us to include aspects of being a compassionate person or someone who looks out for others as part of our identity (which many consider to be important components of a leader's identity). In addition, when we offer our own perspectives on an issue that can also reinforce some of our core values and how we view ourselves and our work—contributing to our clear sense of identity and self-awareness. Affirmation of a support recipient's behaviors and the offering of our perspective may also involve suggestions of things they can do in the future to fix the problem or continue to be successful (depending on the context of the event). These suggestions can often motivate us in turn to develop ourselves and continue to change and adapt. In addition, wisdom is considered an important skill in leader development (Day et al., 2014) and the process of providing support to others can help us develop this skill.

Although the social support literature has largely focused on recipients of social support, there has been some work to identify some of the outcomes of provision—and particularly some of the ways in which provision may benefit us more than support receipt. For instance, providing responsive support to a friend that acknowledges their perspective and ideas and encourages their autonomy was predictive of greater assessments of the quality of a friendship and enhanced well-being for the provider (more so than actual receipt of support; Deci, La Guardia, Moller, Scheiner, & Ryan, 2006). In addition, those who perceive themselves as providing support live longer, suggesting potential health and well-being benefits, whereas just receiving support did not have the same beneficial effect (Brown, Nesse, Vinokur, & Smith, 2003).

Although the general perceptions that one provides support tend to be positive, the actual provision of negative event support can carry some costs (similar to what we see with received support). For instance, on days when individuals provide particularly responsive support to a romantic partner, they also tended to feel less satisfied with their relationship and have increased anxiety (Gosnell & Gable, 2015). In addition, providing support for negative events in an everyday context (particularly when a provider is concerned about the effectiveness of their support) as well as in a lab setting has been associated with reduced abilities to regulate behavior (such as refraining from over-eating, or over-drinking, or the ability to persist on a strength task; Gosnell & Gable, 2017). However, being someone who typically provides more responsive support for negative events is still associated with benefits (increased sense of vitality and trends to be more satisfied with one's relationship and life; Gosnell & Gable, 2015). Together, these results suggest that there may be short-term costs when leaders provide negative event support—whether that is to colleagues or to those in their own personal lives. Providing support for negative events, particularly if they are

events that lead to a lot of effort or concern on their part as the provider, might lead them to feel burnt out, anxious, and less connected to their social network, and perhaps make them less likely to make progress towards goals (which can inhibit their development) or regulate their behaviors in other contexts (i.e., regulation of emotion). However, it is likely that ignoring these opportunities is not the answer. Over time, providing support to others for negative events is still important in maintaining relationships and feeling good about the self.

Recent work has also turned to examining how providing support for positive events may impact individuals. Just as receiving capitalization support can promote more positive emotions, prior work has also demonstrated that capitalization support provision can promote more positive emotions. For instance, Monfort et al. (2014) found that when providers gave positive capitalization support to a romantic partner via a message (after their partner had shared their own success on a lab task), the providers reported feeling more positive and less negative emotion. Furthermore, we know that when individuals provide particularly responsive capitalization support on a given day (more than they might normally provide), they tend to also report being more satisfied with their life, and more satisfied with their relationship, and have a greater sense of vitality (energy) (Gosnell & Gable, 2015). In addition, providing positive event support to others may motivate leaders to achieve their goals. Prior work has shown that on days when individuals provided positive event support to others (friends, family members, coworkers, etc.), they also tended to report making more progress on their own personal and health goals (Gosnell & Gable, 2017). In addition, providing support has been linked to increased self-esteem and a sense of control (Warner et al., 2010). Providing support for other's positive events may promote leader's self-control, lead them to feel more confident in their abilities, and motivate them to pursue their own growth and development.

Practical Application: This work suggests that leaders may find real value in providing support to others, in a number of ways. Leaders should look for even small opportunities to provide support to others when good things happen to them—as this provides rewards to them but also to those whom they provide support to. Leaders shouldn't turn away from opportunities to provide support for others' negative events—but can remain aware that constant provision may leave them feeling burnt out. Learning strategies to provide effective support may alleviate some of this strain (as concerns about being effective in support provision might be reduced). In addition, balancing positive and negative event support provision may be helpful. If you feel that your day is being drained with helping others solve issues or handle bad experiences, can you also make a point to ask people what has been going well and celebrate even small accomplishments?

12.3.5   *The Function of Support Receipt and Provision and Influences by Early Experiences*

As part of Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory, he argued that caregivers (or support providers) provide both a "safe haven" (someone we can turn to for comfort/help if something goes wrong) and a "secure base" (someone who supports us as we go off to individually explore our environment). Collins & Feeney (2013) note that exploratory behavior in adults can include things such as pursuing goals, making new friends, developing hobbies or skills, and working. However, they also note that individuals need that secure base to really fully explore their environment (Collins & Feeney, 2013). I think this captures an important role that social support plays in leader development. Social support can help communicate to a close other that you are there for them and can fulfill that secure base function. If a leader perceives that they have that secure base, that will free them up to explore. Exploration can involve trying on new roles or new identities, taking on a job or role that is a challenge or outside one's comfort zone, or innovating in some way (breaking from the norm to explore new options). If we want leaders who will innovate, break the mold, and really lead with new ideas and vision—they need to feel that they do have that base.

Furthermore, past work has shown links between attachment styles and the ability to be a transformational leader (one who is able to motivate and inspire subordinates to go beyond their requirements and contribute in meaningful and unique ways; Popper, Mayseless, & Castelnovo, 2000). Popper et al. (2000) argue that transformational leaders are likely to be secure individuals (who tend to have positive views of themselves and others). Indeed, they found across three different studies using different measures that a secure attachment style was positively correlated with higher ratings of transformational leadership—particularly focusing on three components of transformational leadership: charisma, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. Other work has also suggested that the potential to lead is associated with characteristics of secure individuals, such as low anxiety (Popper & Amit, 2009). While all of this work focuses a bit more on leadership development (how can we create an atmosphere of transformation), there are implications for leader development. Leaders likely gain a lot from providing individualized consideration in terms of their skills and abilities to accommodate and work with diverse individuals. In addition, their ability to intellectually stimulate subordinates likely also has carryover on their own abilities to innovate and push themselves.

More directly related to leader development, Drake (2009) has argued that attachment theory can be applied to coaching leaders. He argues that coaches can themselves help fulfill some of those secure base needs by being supportive and understanding and can help leaders to further refine and develop their identities by exploring both how their early experiences have influenced how they relate to others and how they can adjust their models to improve their leader potential.

Practical Applications: Organizations or leader coaches/mentors may want to establish themselves as both a safe haven and a secure base. In practical terms, this means communicating clearly that you are willing to be supportive and not overly punitive should someone fail (a safe haven) but also to actively encourage trying new ideas and be willing to innovate (and thus serving as a secure base). Celebrating small positive events (as discussed earlier) may provide a foundation for leaders to see the organization or coach/mentor as someone who can fulfill both functions. Furthermore, the work by Drake (2009) suggests that there is practical value in examining how one's early experiences with caregivers (parents) or other close others may have influenced how you relate to other people. For some leaders, these may be helpful models, but in other cases, early relationships may lead us to expect the worst of others or have issues developing trust. Reflecting on these experiences and thinking of a personal ideal vision for leading may help the leader to better understand the self but also develop new ideas of how they might want to shift their identity in the future.

12.4 Special Considerations in Regard to Social Support in Leader Development

12.4.1 Social Support in the Context of Failure

Many people like to acknowledge the value of learning from failure, but prior work suggests that many organizations don't really do this effectively and suffer as a result (Cannon & Edmonson, 2005). Cannon and Edmonson (2005) argue that there are many barriers to learning from failure—but particularly in the social domain, people are hesitant to admit that they've failed, and even if they do admit it, they and their leadership often don't want to discuss it or thoroughly dissect it due to strong emotions and intense reactions that may arise. They argue that if organizations want to be as successful as possible, they must learn from small failures to help avoid larger ones and contribute to organizational knowledge (knowing what doesn't work is often as important as knowing things that do work). To remove some of these social barriers, they recommend creating a culture without strong negative repercussions for reporting a failure (perhaps encourage "blameless" reporting for errors reported immediately), having leaders themselves identify failures publicly (to model to others that it is OK to fail and learn from the experience), developing guidelines for analyzing failures in depth (such as the military's "After Action Reviews"), and incorporating diverse perspectives and requesting diverse opinions within these contexts, as well as building an experimentation-based culture where people feel that innovation and trying new things are valued (Cannon & Edmonson, 2005).

Practical Application: This work suggests many avenues for the work on social support to inform organizational practices. Social support can provide a mechanism by which leaders who fail can learn that it is OK to fail and can benefit from an

outside perspective helping them to identify potential causes for failure and encouraging them to learn/grow from it. If someone spends all of their time criticizing a leader for their failures, the leader won't feel affirmed or accepted and they won't necessarily have gained much from the experience. They are more likely to feel unsure of their identity and their competencies and may even question whether they are capable of growing or succeeding.

It is also important for leaders to keep this work in mind as they *provide* support to others. The support that you give others after a failure will either communicate that this is a learning experience from which they can grow (which will help them to experience acceptance, affirmation, and a motivation to change) or focus the attention on the failure (leaving them less sure of who they are and their abilities). This is not to say that leaders can overlook all failures (and repeated or serious failures may require immediate and harsh consequences)—but especially in small failures, leaders have the opportunity to respond in a way that will build others up and make them more likely to innovate and grow from the experience. When leaders practice this, they will also be developing their own social skills and empathy and, if done effectively, can benefit from hearing of others' perspectives on their failures.

12.4.2 Social Support Over the Course of Leader Development

I believe that social support is necessary throughout a leader's development. One might argue that confidence, self-awareness, and skills build over time so that towards the later parts of a leader's career they need less social support. And, in some ways this may be true. Avolio and Hannah (2008) argue that a key component of developmental readiness in a leader is leader complexity (or self-complexity). They argue that leaders who have simply had more experiences are able to have a more complex view of self and are able to evaluate new situations in more complex and multifaceted ways. Given that, leaders who are farther along in their careers may benefit less and less from outside perspectives (as they may already have so many experiences with diverse perspectives and tackling challenges in diverse ways). In addition, there may be less of a need to develop their identity or self-awareness because they may already have a very complex and multifaceted identity. Certainly there is always room to grow and develop, but their willingness to do so might be less important given that they have so many experiences and ways of viewing problems at their disposal (they have likely evolved and changed many times over their career).

However, as leaders progress in their careers, the stakes of their decisions and actions tend to go up and up. Their visibility to others in and outside the organization often rises and they are held accountable for more actions. Support may be particularly helpful in these contexts in terms of its ability to reduce stress—particularly from outside the organization. A leader in a high rank within an organization has likely had the opportunity to feel accepted and affirmed by those in their organization. However, when placed in a position of higher power, they open themselves up to more criticism. It may be especially important that they feel a sense of acceptance

and affirmation from those in their own personal lives so that need to belong can be satisfied, freeing the leader to truly make decisions they deem as best as opposed to those that will just keep people happy or maintain their favorable impression. In addition, although leaders who are advanced in their careers may have learned about a wide variety of perspectives as they have served, outside perspectives can always be valuable. Sometimes, leaders who are in higher positions may need to get support or advice from those underneath them to better understand concerns that they personally may not be actively dealing with. In addition, ideas and ways of doing things are constantly evolving so being closed off to ideas can still be stifling.

Practical Application: Future work is needed to more fully understand how support needs may change over the course of a leader's development. However, even within an organization, it may be worth noting the types of needs and concerns that come up at various levels of training and development to better meet the needs of the leaders. Earlier on, it may be that support within the organization is critical for introducing new perspectives or new ways of viewing a problem whereas later on support from outside sources holds a greater influence on well-being and success.

12.5   Conclusion

Most people would inherently say that social support is a good thing and research has demonstrated some of the value leaders place on supportive relationships both inside and outside their organizational network. However, less work has sought to really understand how various types of support may produce various outcomes for leaders. Focusing on leader development and drawing from the broader social support literature, I argued that both receiving and providing social support can help leaders develop self-awareness and solidify their identity (current and desired), motivate them to be open and willing to change, and help them develop core competencies and skills needed to lead such as social skills, self-control, creativity, self-motivation, and an understanding of the self. Social support does this because, as a recipient, it helps leaders to feel accepted by others, affirmed in their actions or thoughts, and presents outside perspectives that might motivate them or help them to see situations (or themselves!) in a new light. Similarly, providing support can contribute to leader development as providers give affirmation and acceptance and learn from the experiences of sharing their own perspectives with others.

Organizations or coaches and mentors seeking to develop leaders should recognize the importance of allowing leaders to develop social support networks and support initiatives, policies, or programs that help leaders to build support networks within and outside of the organization. Furthermore, they must take advantage of "low-stakes" opportunities to provide support for positive events and successes that leaders have along the way. Doing so can help them to feel affirmed and accepted and provide insight into *why* their contribution is valued and what they may want to do next. In addition, knowing that others are there for you when good things happen helps you to know that they will be there for you when bad things happen (Gable et al., 2012).

Leaders can themselves seek out people who can provide support and wise counsel to them. In addition, leaders should seek to build up others around them using similar strategies. Whether it be support for positive events or negative events, leaders should find ways to communicate key elements of responsiveness (understanding, validation, and caring) to those that work above and below them.

Most people will agree that being a leader and developing others to lead are significantly bolstered by the receipt and provision of quality support from our social network. Many organizations will agree with the mindsets proposed here (value small successes, communicate acceptance after failure and ways to grow, help to build solid social networks). However, the challenge to those developing leaders is to really go beyond agreeing with these ideas and instead to work to implement them in practical ways that actually achieve change and desirable outcomes. It is easy to say "cheer on people's successes" but may take more work and effort to develop systems to recognize small successes or create time or appropriate rewards to show that these are valued. It is easy to say "we value our leader's social networks" but it may be harder to give them additional time away from work to connect with friends and family or to plan intentional activities within an organization that will enhance relationships and not feel forced. It is easy to tell your leaders to "be supportive" with their subordinates, but it may take more time and investment to teach them how to be supportive (and demonstrate responsiveness) via workshops, training events, etc. We are inherently social creatures. Taking advantage of the power of our social relationships via their ability to provide us social support can help us further develop leaders whereas more artificial techniques (formal instruction) may do far less. However, it may take more work to truly harness the power of social support and teach those within our organizations to communicate support in a way that makes it uplifting and a catalyst for growth and development as opposed to a hindrance.

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