

The Shape of Things to Come: Inspiration in the Organizational Sciences

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Abstract

Moments of inspiration are powerful in that they give us a renewed sense of energy and purpose. They also orient us to move in directions that we never thought possible. Most of the research in the organizational sciences has focused on inspiration as a leadership process in which a leader inspires followers by engaging in inspirational behaviors. This simplification leads to interpretation of inspiration as a one dimensional construct placed exclusively inside the leadership development literature. However, research in psychology shows that inspiration may be a multi-dimensional construct as well as a construct applicable outside of leader-follower relationships. The purpose of this paper is to introduce and operationally define inspiration, to introduce an initial nomological network of inspiration in a work context, and to provide future research directions that will enhance our understanding of the complexity of the construct.

Keywords: Inspiration, self-reflection, feeling, action, entrepreneurship

The Shape of Things to Come: Inspiration in the Organizational Sciences

*Inspiration is in the air
so I'll breathe some.
Inspiration is in the water
so I'll just drink some.
Inspiration is all around me
all I need to do is get inspired.*
- Anonymous

All of us have experienced a moment of inspiration at some point during our lives. It is a moment so powerful that it gives us a renewed sense of energy and purpose. It orients us to move in directions that we never thought possible. Collections of these moments help us give meaning to our lives and motivate us to achieve our dreams.

What makes the concept of inspiration so powerful in the practical sense and so interesting in the research sense is the many ways in which one can become inspired. Sometimes we are inspired by our *ideas* and the vision of what those ideas could mean for the future. It was the initial idea that people wanted to be directly connected with their loved ones that spawned the organization that we know today as Facebook. Sometimes we are inspired by the words of our *leaders*, such as Martin Luther King Jr., who spoke of equality and nonviolence in an era that propelled a nation to create change. Whatever its source, inspiration remains one of the most important components of how we direct ourselves to the greater good and better make sense of where we are heading.

Research in positive psychology has shown that inspiration is important in living a life of meaning (Hart, 1998). Research on 'meaning' at work has covered a broad array of topics such as engagement (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004), job satisfaction (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997), empowerment (Spreitzer, 1996), career development (Dik & Duffy, 2009), and personal fulfillment (Kahn, 2007). Research on meaning in the workplace often attempts to discover how

it is that work is (or is not) intrinsically valuable for individuals (Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010). Absent from this list currently is the construct of inspiration. It seems that inspiration has been theoretically simplified in the organizational sciences. In the literature so far, the organizational sciences define inspiration as a leadership process in which it is a leader's goal to inspire followers by engaging in inspirational behaviors such as articulating vision that extends beyond one's own self-interest, expressing confidence, being optimistic, and reinforcing organizational ideals (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; House, 1977; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). This conceptualization hints at describing "inspiration-as-process" in that leaders create goals for their organization and then tap into other individuals' intrinsic motivations in order to energize them towards actualization of those goals. Being an inspirational leader has become one of the fundamental aspects of successful resonant (Boyatzis, & McKee, 2005) and transformational leaders (Bass, 1985). However, this simplification seems to lead to the interpretation of inspiration as a one dimensional construct housed in the leadership literature.

The goal of this paper is to introduce the idea that inspiration can be more than a leadership process. I aim to accomplish four things: (1) to introduce and review the inspiration literature, (2) to discuss the challenge of distinguishing inspiration and other positive psychology constructs, (3) to introduce an initial nomological network of inspiration in a work context for the purpose of future construct validation and (4) to provide future research directions that will enhance our understanding of the construct.

INSPIRATION AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSTRUCT

The Oxford English Dictionary defines inspiration as: "A breathing in or infusion of some idea, purpose, etc. into the mind; the suggestion, awakening, or creation of some feeling or impulse, especially of an exalted kind," (OED; Simpson & Weiner, 1989: 1036). It is words such

as *exalted* and *awakening* that begin to capture the essence of the construct of inspiration. However, it is those same words from a research context that make inspiration so difficult to conceptualize, measure, and study.

Thrash and Elliot (2003, 2004) have conducted the most inspired effort to date to transform inspiration into an empirical research language in the field of psychology. Thrash and Elliot (2003) defined inspiration as having three core characteristics: evocation, transcendence, and motivation. To fully understand these core characteristics, further breakdown is needed.

Inspiration is thought to be *evoked* by some stimulus object rather than arising arbitrarily or without some apparent cause. In this regard, one does not feel directly responsible for becoming inspired. The stimulus may be a wide variety of objects, if even an object at all. For example, one may have a moment of inspiration evoked by a realization or epiphany. The major takeaway and challenge moving forward is that inspiration is literally different for every individual. Even if two individuals are brought into an inspired state while experiencing the same stimulus (e.g., listening to a leader speak, appreciating a beautiful landscape), the way in which these individuals make meaning and direct their energy in the moments following their inspiration are completely different.

Inspiration involves an element of *transcendence* in that the individual orients him or herself towards something more important than his/her usual concerns and is able to more clearly visualize alternative possibilities (Thrash & Elliot, 2003, 2004). Inspiration is also thought to imply *motivation* such that when someone is inspired there is a self-directed energy given to his/her behavior to which he/she may orient toward some targeted goal, either in the abstract (e.g., their ideal self) or the concrete (e.g., work deliverable) (Elliot, 1997).

In earlier conceptualizations, inspiration was described simply as a feeling; a temporary state that occurs in a moment (Council, 1988; Hymer 1990; Nachmanovich, 1990) and was thought to subside with time. Thrash and Elliot (2004) re-conceptualized this notion, demonstrating that inspiration has two component processes: *being inspired by* (a feeling) and *being inspired to* (a behavior). Being inspired by involves having a deep, intrinsic appreciation for some evocative object (e.g., natural landscape, beauty of artwork) while being inspired to involves a motivational component to express or actualize qualities exemplified in some stimulus object. Thrash and Elliot (2004) theorized that evocation and transcendence are characteristics of being inspired by, whereas motivation is a characteristic of being inspired to.

It is through this conceptualization that we can begin to understand that inspiration is first felt and then may be subsequently cultivated into some type of directed behavior that goes beyond one's own self-interests. However, it is important to make the distinction here that it is possible for an individual to be inspired by but not necessarily be inspired to. For example, one may be inspired by observing a painting of the Mona Lisa in that it awakens one's deep appreciation for beauty but may not be inspired to then direct their behavior to paint a master work of art. This is important to consider in the context of leadership. One may be inspired by listening to their manager speak of a future vision of the company but may not be inspired to then direct that energy towards their own work.

More recent research efforts in the study of inspiration have shifted focus from developing the research definition of the construct to applying it to other constructs. For example, inspiration was shown to mediate the relationship between creativity of an idea and creativity of a product using a short story paradigm (Thrash, Maruskin, Cassidy, Fryer, & Ryan, 2010). Interestingly, this research effort also tested mediation effects of similar positive

constructs (e.g., effort, positive affect, and awe) and found that none of these mediated this effect as inspiration was shown to. Thrash, Elliot, Maruskin, and Cassidy (2010) rounded out the recent contributions to the literature by linking inspiration to the enhancement of well-being and living a full life.

THE THREE SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

Over the years, a combination of scholarly literatures have been pieced together to describe three major theoretical sources of inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). The focus of these sources stems from two simple questions: “What is inspiration and where does it come from?”

The Three Sources of Inspiration: Inspiration from Above

Many creative individuals, such as artists and poets, have attributed some of their best ideas to the supernatural or unknown forces from above (e.g., Ghiselin, 1952; Harding, 1948). Indeed, if you trace the usage of inspiration back to its roots you would find that it is firmly planted in the biblical context. Christian theology suggests that the authors of the Bible were influenced by God and that their writings were used for the purposes of teaching the word of God. Leavitt (1997) provided an example from ancient Greece in which a Muse was known to have whispered into a poet’s ear in order to deliver divine knowledge from above. This is not unlike a Judeo-Christian belief in message transmission in which inspiration is defined as a God-given ability to communicate God’s message (Aquinas, 1950; Schleiermacher, 1963). Furthermore, Nimmo (2013) posits that the term inspiration stems from the relationship that is had between the Holy Spirit and the writer, in which the message of the former is written down by the latter and delivered to others in the form of writing.

Thrash and Elliot (2003) argue in their seminal article on inspiration as a psychological construct that these supernatural influences are very important for the three characteristics of inspiration: motivation, evocation, and transcendence. In these examples, the supernatural influences are the “trigger” (e.g., evocation) that brought the targets a heightened sense of direction and purpose (e.g., to spread the word of God, transcendence) to which they delivered an outcome (e.g., the bible, motivation).

The Three Sources of Inspiration: Inspiration from Within

Research around inspiration shifted from a religious conceptualization to the realm of creativity; more specifically the creative process (Kris; 1952; Preminger, 1965; Ribot, 1907). The primary reason for this shift was a call from scientists to replace the supernatural conceptualization to be more deterministic and intrapsychic (e.g., Kris, 1952; Ribot, 1907). The new direction of the construct focused around if inspiration was an unconscious process or a conscious one. The answer, as one might expect, was theoretically both. This was best demonstrated using Wallas’ (1926) creativity process. In this process, creativity is described as a four-stage process which includes preparation, incubation, illuminating, and verification. Thrash and Elliot (2003) made the argument that this process is an ‘inspiration from within’ process and the conscious mind dominates during the preparation and verification stages whereas the unconscious takes over during incubation and the illuminating stages.

As the construct developed, scholars identified the preconscious as another source of inspiration generation (e.g., Kris, 1952; Martindale, 1981; Rothenberg, 1999). According to Freud (1954) and his psychoanalytic theory of personality, the preconscious mind is a part of the mind that corresponds to ordinary memory, making ideas more readily accessible. In this regard, while these memories are not conscious we can retrieve them to our conscious awareness.

Similar to the concepts we took from *inspiration from above*, many of the same dynamics are at play when we look at *inspiration from within*. In this conceptualization, inspiration is evoked from ideas that are formed in the unconscious or the preconscious. Transcendence is shown when individuals access ideas they feel are more novel than any that they may have attempted to generate willfully (Thrash & Elliot, 2003), which prompts a re-orientation. When individuals act on these ideas and move in this new direction, they show a sense of motivation. *Inspiration from within* is best conceptualized by this understanding from Thrash and Elliot (2003): "... a motivational state that is triggered by a compelling idea or illumination and that is targeted toward the actualization or realization of the idea," (872).

The Three Sources of Inspiration: Inspiration from the External Environment

Aspects of the external environment (e.g., leaders, nature, music) have been linked with inspiration for quite some time. For example, McCutchan (1999) interviewed twenty-five leading composers who found inspiration in music, nature, poetry, etc. Many have also become inspired by managers, great leaders (e.g., Bass, 1985; Dess & Picken, 2000) and role models (Tjas, Nelsen, & Taylor, 1997). *Inspiration from the external environment* has been researched across a few research domains such as implicit motives (e.g., Steele, 1977) and social comparison (e.g., Lockwood & Kunda, 1997, 1999; Taylor & Lobel, 1989). Further review of each of these research contexts is described below.

Several researchers have connected implicit motives to inspiration (e.g., McClelland & Kirshnit, 1988; Steele, 1977). For example, McClelland and Kirshnit (1988) recruited 132 undergraduate students and had half watch a documentary on Mother Teresa and her selfless love for the poor and the other half watch a documentary on the triumph over the Nazi's in World War II. Results indicated that participants in the Mother Teresa condition produced a positive

immunological response (e.g., saliva) whereas there was no response for those who watched the World War II documentary. In another study, Steele (1977) recruited 104 participants to watch inspirational speeches by Winston Churchill, Thomas Jefferson, and Henry V. Implicit motives were measured with the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT: Murray, 1943). Half of the participants took the TAT after listening to the speeches and the other half took the TAT before listening to the inspirational speeches. The results of this study showed that those who viewed the speeches and then took the TAT had increased power motivation and general activation compared to those that took the TAT prior to watching the speeches. It is also important to note here that in McClelland and Kirshnit's (1988) experiment, individuals who displayed higher levels in need for affiliation tended to be the most responsive, and in Steele's (1977) experiment individuals who displayed higher levels in need for power tended to be most responsive. This suggests the idea that different environments may cue and activate different motives.

Social comparison researchers have also become interested in inspiration (e.g., Lockwood & Kunda, 1997, 1999; Taylor & Lobel, 1989). Lockwood and Kunda (1997) found that role models for aspiring accountants and teachers provoked feelings of inspiration when their success seemed attainable but self-deflation when it seemed unattainable. Lockwood and Kunda (1999) followed up this experiment by demonstrating that when individuals were inspired by a role model; their motivation and self-evaluations were enhanced. However, when their most positive self-views (e.g., their best self) were temporarily activated, individuals' motivation and self-evaluations of their role models tended to decrease. Finally, Taylor and Lobel (1989) found that cancer patients often sought out other cancer patients who were healthier than they were in order to gain inspiration and information on how to cope with their illness.

To this point, I have described inspiration as a ‘process’ that involves three characteristics (evocation, transcendence, and motivation). I have identified three different sources of inspiration (inspiration from above, within, and from the external environment). I have also described in a preliminary sense how the three sources of inspiration have an influence on the three characteristics of the inspirational process. I have discussed the difference between being inspired by and being inspired to and connected them to their corresponding characteristics that each exemplifies. Finally, I have provided several examples of research that has utilized inspiration as a construct or outcome of interest. A conceptualization of inspiration as described to this point is provided in Figure 1 below.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

METHODS AND MEASUREMENT OF INSPIRATION

While inspiration has had an extensive theoretical overview, its place in the empirical literature with regards to the methods and measures used to capture the essence of the construct are limited at best. In this section, I will present ways in which inspiration is commonly measured in the literature.

As a Dependent Variable: The most common way inspiration is measured in the social sciences is as a dependent variable of interest (e.g., Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; 1999; Tjas, Nelsen, & Taylor, 1997). This most often occurs when participants are asked to rate another individual through an evaluative questionnaire. For example, Lockwood and Kunda (1999) had participants evaluate role models on 11-point likert scales on qualities such as inspiration. Similarly, Tjas and colleagues (1997) had high school students evaluate alumni with whom they interacted on various qualities, including inspiration.

Inspiration Scale (IS): Thrash and Elliot (2003) developed the Inspiration Scale (IS), a trait measure of inspiration, whose items can be seen in Table 1. Through an exploratory factor analysis, 19 drafted items became four which were then measured in terms of their frequency and their intensity. Frequency items are rated on a scale from 1 (never) to 7 (very often), and intensity items are rated from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very deeply or strongly). A confirmatory factor analysis showed that while the latent frequency and intensity items were highly correlated, a two factor solution produced a stronger fit than a one factor solution.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS): Inspiration appears as one of twenty items on the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS: Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). The PANAS is a state level measure of positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA) separated into two subscales. The PA and NA scales both consist of 10 items (PA e.g., “excited”; NA e.g., “upset”) that are rated from 1 (very slightly or not at all) to 5 (extremely). “Inspiration” is included as a measure of positive affect on this scale. While the PANAS has never been used to necessarily measure inspiration, Thrash and Elliot (2004) demonstrated that one of the strongest correlates during inspirational experiences is PA. That is, all of the items in the PA subscale taken together in aggregate.

DISTINGUISHING INSPIRATION FROM SIMILAR CONSTRUCTS

The boom of the positive psychology movement (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) has created several confusing pieces of literatures. Perhaps one of the largest struggles in research on inspiration has been a general inability to create a clear definition as to what it is and how it differs from similar positive constructs. This is not unlike the early academic research in

psychology where a vast amount of literature came out in such a short period of time that researchers often found reliability difficult and frustrating. Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, and Erbaugh (1961) were among the first to answer this call by providing a clear definition for depression, showing how it differentiated itself from similar constructs such as unhappiness, and showed that it could be used by other researchers with reliability for diagnosis.

A similar theme is appearing in the organizational sciences. Researchers are interchangeably using terms such as inspiration, hope, elevation, admiration, motivation and creativity at will (Goddard, 1981; Searle & Hanrahan, 2010). This tends to occur most often in theoretical papers that lack empirical study. In the following sections, I aim to discuss some of the similarities and differences of several of these constructs with inspiration.

Hope.

Perhaps the most often used confused construct with regards to inspiration is hope. Snyder, Irving, and Anderson (1991) took the position that human actions are inherently goal directed and defined hope as a positive motivational state that is based on successful agency (e.g., goal-directed energy) and pathways (e.g., planning to meet goals). In this regard, most researchers have come to the agreement that goals are the cognitive component of hope (Snyder, 1994a, 1994b, 1998; Snyder, Cheavens, & Sympson, 1997; Snyder, Sympson, Michael, & Cheavens, 2000). To further understand the construct of hope, I will breakdown the concepts of goals, pathways thinking, and agency thinking as described by Snyder (2002).

Goals are mental action sequences that may take the form of visual imagery in our minds (Snyder, 2002) or through verbal descriptions (Pylyshyn, 1973). Goals may also vary in regards to their temporal frame (Snyder, 2000), be it short term (e.g., "I want find my pen") or long term (e.g., "I want to get a promotion"). In order to accomplish these goals, Snyder (2000, 2002)

argues that individuals engage in a concept called *pathways thinking*, or the way in which people approach particular goals with thoughts of usable achievement routes. In other words, individuals try to figure out ways in which to go from point A to point B.

The final component mentioned by Snyder (2002) is *agency thinking* which he defines as the “perceived capacity to use one's pathways to reach desired goals,” (251). In this regard, it is clear that agency thinking is the motivational component of hope theory. Research related to this area has found that individuals high in hope engaged in positive self-talk such as "I can do this" and "I am not going to be stopped" (Snyder et al., 1998), which plays into the discussion about if hope is cognitive (as Snyder would suggest) or affective (which Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006 would suggest).

One of the primary differences I see between hope and inspiration as constructs is that hope can exist within a person without having to be evoked by a stimulus object. Hope simply requires a goal-directed energy and a pathway in which one can plan to meet that goal. Inspiration must be evoked by an outside source and does not necessarily require goal-directed energy until one wishes to bridge the gap between *being inspired by* and *being inspired to*. Inspiration also involves a level of transcendence, in which one re-orientes him/herself towards a possibility not known before one became inspired.

Elevation, Admiration and the ‘other-praising’ emotions.

Previous research around self-transcendent emotions (Haidt 2000, 2003) has discussed preliminary operational definitions of elevation and admiration as psychological constructs which can help when discussing their relationship with inspiration. Haidt (2000, 2003) describes elevation as a process in which positive emotion is evoked when one witnesses virtue which, in turn, produces a desire for that individual to be virtuous. In this regard, elevation is seen as the

emotional response to moral exemplars (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). On the other hand, admiration is described as the emotional response to non-moral excellence (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). Admiration is what individuals feel when they see extraordinary displays of skill, talent, or achievement in another individual.

These emotions are deemed ‘other-praising’ emotions because of their inherent appreciative nature towards a stimulus object. One can certainly see similarities between inspiration and these constructs. All three involve an evoked emotion in which the individual him/herself is not directly responsible for coming into the heightened emotional state. The primary difference between these constructs is that inspiration is not an ‘other-praising’ emotion; it is more complex. Inspiration, no matter if evoked by an idea or a person, is centered on a person’s own re-orientation and the inherent sensemaking that becomes a part of the shift while admiration and elevation do not necessarily involve a shift in orientation or behavior.

INITIAL NOMOLOGICAL NETWORK OF INSPIRATION

Antecedents of Inspiration

In order to flesh out the initial nomological network of inspiration, key personality traits from the psychology literature, openness to experience, locus of control and self-reflection, as well as a work context variable, psychological safety, from the organizational sciences literature were considered for inclusion as antecedents of inspiration.

Locus of Control.

Locus of control is a psychological construct conceptualized by Rotter (1966) which suggests that there is a degree to which people believe they are in control of what happens in their lives, rather than by external forces. Individuals with an internal locus of control regarding their actions in life are more likely to attribute inspirational sources as coming from within

themselves. Those with an external locus of control are more likely to attribute the source of their inspiration as coming from above or from the external environment, such as heavenly influence or leadership.

Proposition 1a: Internal locus of control would be positively related to inspiration from within.

Proposition 1b: External locus of control would be positively related to both inspiration from above and inspiration from the external environment.

Openness to Experience.

Openness to experience is a member of the Big Five personality traits in the psychology literature (McCrae & Costa, 1987). Individuals who display high levels of openness to experience tend to exhibit high levels of original, imaginative, and broad interests. Thrash and Elliot (2003) included openness to experience in their initial nomological network of inspiration, stating that openness to experience would facilitate receptiveness between the individual and the evocative stimuli. Given that inspiration brings individuals into a transcendent state, I would posit that openness to experience would be positively related to all dimensions of inspiration.

Proposition 2: Openness to experience would be positively related to all of inspirations dimensions; inspiration from above, within, and from the external environment.

Psychological Safety.

Psychological safety is determined by the ongoing cost-benefit analysis that an individual faces in feeling comfortable to speak up without fear of consequences to their career development (Edmondson, 1999, 2004; Kahn, 1990). Psychological safety helps determine how individuals go about learning and making sense of their environment (Edmondson, 1999). Social structures that fail to provide psychological safety greatly reduce the availability for an individual to learn and integrate with the organization (Carmeli & Gittell, 2009). While I have discussed that the external environment is one key source of inspiration, psychological safety

may play a key role in making the distinction between being inspired by and being inspired to. For example, individuals who do not feel psychologically safe in their work environment may still be inspired by the work they are doing, but feel unsafe in taking the risks to act out being inspired to do something. Meanwhile, individuals who feel a high level of psychological safety inside of their organization are more likely to see themselves as valued resources to the success of the organization (e.g., being inspired by) and take the necessary action steps to push their ideas forward. In this way, psychological safety is important for helping individuals make the leap from inspired by to inspired to. This understanding underscores the need not only to create a scale that assesses sources of inspiration but also one that makes the distinction of particular work contexts that tease a part being inspired by and being inspired to. Thus,

Proposition 3: Individuals with low levels of psychological safety will be negatively related to the concept of 'being inspired to'.

Self-Reflection and the importance of the Holistic Self.

Theodor Roethke once wrote, “Self-contemplation is a curse that makes an old confusion worse,” (Roethke, 2011). Self-Reflection (also known as self-contemplation/introspection) is a cognitive process that individuals engage in to reflect and implement information-processing strategies (Hixon & Swann, 1989). Research on the consequences of self-reflection has been inconsistent to this point. For example, researchers have found that encouraging participants to reflect on and implement information-processing strategies can interfere with learning as the process is intended to be non-conscious (e.g., Brooks, 1978; Howard & Ballas, 1980; Reber, 1976; Reber, Kassin, Lewis, & Cantor, 1980). However, Hixon and Swann (1993) found that self-reflection specifically around the self can help to foster self-insight. Research from Duval and Wicklund (1972) suggested that individuals tend to focus on their deficits instead of their strengths. This line of thinking explains the link between self-reflection and depression.

In order for inspiration to be enabled, I believe a combination of all is true. Self-reflection must focus on the positive aspects of the self in order for one to be open to inspirational stimuli. Self-reflection must also acknowledge one's weaknesses as to not become narrow-minded in goal setting endeavors. Among all of the antecedents to inspiration, holistic self-reflection is arguably the most important. I take the stance that holistic self-reflection is a key cognitive component to inspiration.

Proposition 4: Self-reflection would be positively related to all of inspiration's dimensions; inspiration from above, within, and from the external environment.

These propositions represent an initial nomological network for inspiration as a multi-dimensional construct. Ultimately, longitudinal research will be needed to clarify these relationships and multiple samples will need to be collected to demonstrate contextual consistency.

Consequences of Inspiration

Leadership Effectiveness and the Employee Performance Dilemma.

The ability to inspire others has been described an essential trait of effective leadership (Clemens & Mayer, 1999; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The primary issue around this conclusion is that higher levels of employee inspiration do not necessarily mean higher levels of employee performance. Imagine if you will a leader who builds inspiration in a strategic initiative for an employee who lacks the skill set to complete the initiative. Is this effective leadership because the employee was inspired or poor leadership because even though the employee was inspired the project still failed? This question brings to light an important triadic relationship between inspiration, performance, and leadership effectiveness.

Several streams of research have corroborated the finding that leaders who intend to inspire individuals do not always lead others to higher performance (Grant, 2012). This

inconsistency has been demonstrated in a variety of different contexts from field experiments utilizing the Israeli military (Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002) to laboratories using business simulation tasks (Bono & Judge, 2003; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996).

Kirkpatrick and Locke (1996) theorized that this disconnect may stem from a leader relying on rhetoric in articulating vision. Grant (2012) theorized that it may be the result of not making visions a tangible reality. I postulate the reason for this disconnect has more to do with leaders being told to inspire others but not necessarily having the ability to do so correctly since there are so many complex mechanisms. Too often the communication of leadership tries to be is a 'one size fits all' trick, in which general rhetoric attempts to inspire the masses. For example, imagine a leader who speaks to a project team in an attempt to inspire them to increase productivity. One message may be effective if everyone in the project team tends to be inspired by their external environment (e.g., the leader in this example). However, what about those who tend to be inspired from within themselves, or from their connection with a supernatural being? How would the message change if the leader was in tune with this knowledge? While I agree that changing the message does not change the fact that an external source is still providing the inspiration; changing the message may still speak to different values.

Innovation.

Innovation is defined as a change-oriented process which involves the creation of a new product, service, idea, or procedure (Woodman, Sawyer, & Griffin, 1993). Because inspiration involves a change-based process, inspired individuals are likely to be less constrained than others by the rule-bound aspects of work (Amabile, 1988).

Key management scholars have pointed out the inherent link and the importance between understanding the dynamic of innovation and inspiration. For example, Peter Drucker once said

that innovation is a disorderly and unpredictable process (1984). Drucker (1984) made the point that managers are put into a tough position and posed a very important question: how can management plan for and count on a process that is so dependent on creativity and inspiration? I have several responses to Drucker's argument. One is that while innovation can be a consequence of inspiration it is also important to consider that the reverse is true: that inspiration is the result of innovation. Innovational products, services, and ideas activate new forms of cognitive processing when individuals are exposed to them. For example, it was not until the innovation of the desktop computer that inspiration for a better, more mobile solution (e.g., the laptop) began to take shape. The relationship between inspiration and innovation is dynamic, not linear.

Another reflection on Drucker's statement is that it seems that the argument for innovation being disorderly is due to inspiration being disorderly. I would argue that this is true only in the sense that inspiration as a multi-dimensional construct has not worked its way into the leadership literature. I believe this statement (e.g., that disorderly innovation is the result of disorderly/sporadic inspiration) adds extreme value to inspiration as a research topic.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS FOR INSPIRATION

Multi-Dimensional Scale Development

Thus far, I have reviewed three distinct sources of inspiration: inspiration from above, inspiration from within, and inspiration from the external environment. I believe that one critical component to future research for inspiration is to develop a scale that properly assesses the complexity of each source of inspiration. The IS (Thrash & Elliot, 2003) provided a much needed starting point but failed to separate out the separate sources of inspiration. The first step of this process is to establish validity for three separate scales that would have to be developed

and tested within a nomological network. This process involves providing evidence of discriminant validity and convergent validity; two critical components of establishing construct validity (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). In order to establish discriminant validity, construct dimensions must reflect different components in order to show that they are not completely equivalent to one another. In order to establish convergent validity, these same dimensions must contribute in some way to an overall construct.

Proposition 6: There are three empirically distinct dimensions of inspiration.

Proposition 7: Assuming there are three distinct dimensions of inspiration, they will converge into a second order factor of “inspiration”

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Through the Looking Glass: Experience of Inspiration in Entrepreneurs

One sample that seems ideal to study the idea of inspiration as a multi-dimensional construct is entrepreneurs. For starters, successful entrepreneurial ideas are scarce commodities (Stevens & Burley, 1997) and the cognitive skills and methodologies used by successful entrepreneurs are not well understood (Baum, Frese, & Baron, 2007). Entrepreneurs also differentiate themselves from the leadership-followership literature by having inspirational ideas that can be attributed to the many sources of inspiration. As mentioned earlier, one inherent limitation in studying inspiration at the leadership-followership level is that the evocative stimuli is always the leader, even if the meaning of the message is tailored to those with a different inspiration orientation.

In particular, it would be beneficial to understand the complex nature of inspiration by interviewing entrepreneurs with regards to their recent inspirational experiences. This process

would allow for the exploration of the behaviors and thought processes used by entrepreneurs to develop and refine their creative ideas regarding various products, services, and processes.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have reviewed how the construct of inspiration has multiple sources (inspiration from above, within, external environment), multiple components (inspired by, inspired to), how it differs from other positive constructs (hope, elevation, admiration), and provided an initial nomological network that can be used to guide future research. Perhaps the most critical component of inspiration is its transcendent nature and the inherent sensemaking process that is derived from these moments of re-orientation. This multi-dimensional approach will benefit organizational research in the fields of entrepreneurship, leadership, and innovation.

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List of Tables and Figures

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Figure 1. Inspiration as Process Model.

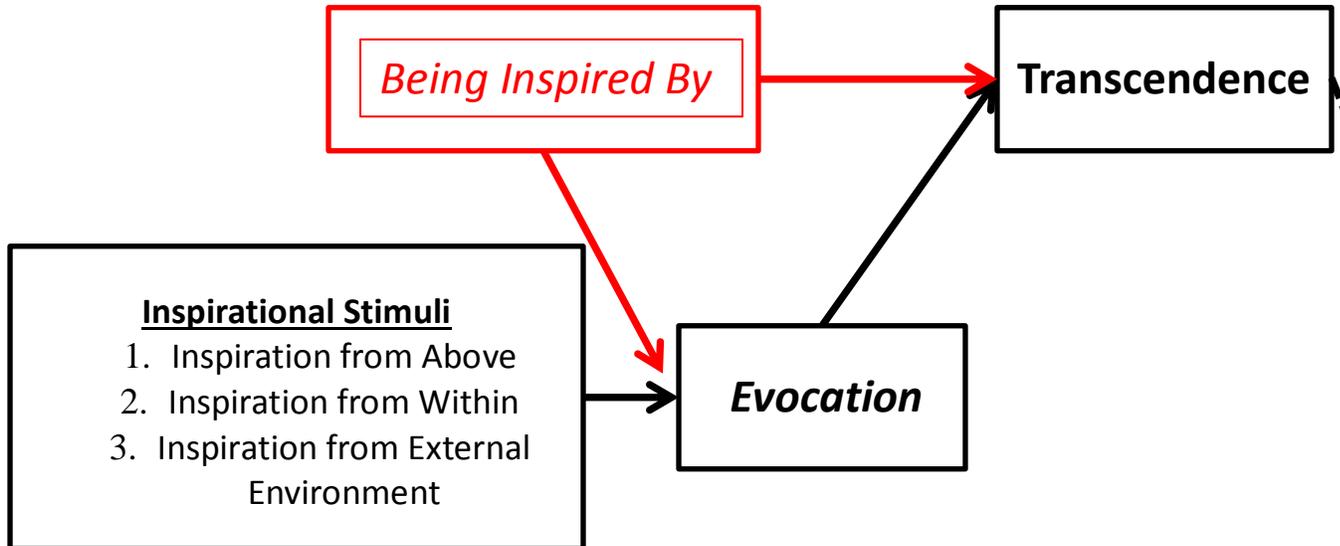
Figure 2. Initial Nomological Network of Inspiration.

Table 1. The Inspiration Scale (IS)

<p>Inspiration Scale (Thrash & Elliot, 2003)</p> <p>Statement 1: I experience inspiration. Item 1f: How often does this happen? Item 1i: How deeply or strongly (in general)?</p> <p>Statement 2: Something I encounter or experience inspires me. Item 2f: How often does this happen? Item 2i: How deeply or strongly (in general)?</p> <p>Statement 3: I am inspired to do something. Item 3f: How often does this happen? Item 3i: How deeply or strongly (in general)?</p> <p>Statement 4: I feel inspired. Item 4f: How often does this happen? Item 4i: How deeply or strongly (in general)?</p>

Note. The four Frequency items are rated on a scale from 1 (never) to 7 (very often). The four Intensity items are rated on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very deeply or strongly). An “f” in item numbers indicates that the item belongs to the Frequency subscale; an “i” indicates that it belongs to the Intensity subscale.

Figure 1. Inspiration as Process Model.



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Figure 2. Initial Nomological Network of Inspiration.

