Positive leadership education and practice: a self determination theory based leadership development program

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Publication Details

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Abstract
Abstract of a presentation at the Fourth World Congress on Positive Psychology, Florida, USA, 25-28 June.

Disciplines
Medicine and Health Sciences | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Publication Details

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This conference paper is available at Research Online: http://ro.uow.edu.au/smhpapers/3052
Conference Abstract


Authors: Forner, Vivien W.; Jones, Michael; Parrish, Dominique; Eidenfalk, Joakim; Kiridena, Senevi; Popov, Nicholai; Berry, Yoke

Individual Paper Title: Positive Leadership Education and Practice: A Self Determination Theory based Leadership Development Program.

Individual Paper Abstract:
Interest and investment in leadership development continues to grow, yet the content taught in many leadership programs often lacks a theoretical foundation and empirical support. Self Determination Theory (SDT) is a theory of motivation that posits a need-based approach to facilitating motivation, wellbeing and optimal functioning in others. SDT provides an empirically based model of conditions, such as such as a manager’s interpersonal approach and the workplace climate that facilitates employee wellbeing and optimal motivation. In doing so SDT offers practitioners a theoretical framework for positive leadership education and practice. This paper presents the preliminary findings of a pilot project testing an SDT-based leadership program in a volunteer organization. The development program trained and supported managers in an SDT-based approach to leadership and was created to address retention and leadership issues in the organization. The research investigated whether or not the training intervention would help managers develop a more constructive motivating leadership approach. Volunteer job satisfaction and turnover intention correlates of the SDT based leadership approaches being taught in the program were also examined. This paper provides an introduction to SDT as a model for positive leadership and a leadership education approach to applying the theory in the work domain.