Suggested APA style reference:

Ponton, R. F., & Cavaiola, A. A. (2008). Positive leadership in counseling workgroups. In G. R. Walz, J. C. Bleuer, & R. K. Yep (Eds.), *Compelling counseling interventions: Celebrating VISTAS' fifth anniversary* (pp. 283-292). Ann Arbor, MI: Counseling Outfitters.

Article 27

Positive Leadership in Counseling Workgroups

Richard F. Ponton and Alan A. Cavaiola

By choice or by chance, counselors take on leadership roles in counseling work groups. From department supervisor to program manager, from clinical director to C.E.O, from dean to owner/president, counselors are called to leadership. The career paths that thrust counselors from the counseling office or classroom to the corporate office or board room may leave them without the preparation, skills, and conceptual framework to insure success. Counselor education programs in general do not prepare counselors to assume managerial positions and the vast menus of continuing education and professional development courses seldom include management issues. Beyond the fundamentals of management, including planning, budgeting, personnel, and program evaluation; the counselor-manager must also successfully negotiate a transition in professional identity that merges counseling and management.

The components of professional identity were addressed by Elman, Illfelder and Ropbiner (2005) who suggested that professional development is a process of integrating the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of a profession with one's own values and interests. They suggested that rather than a process that begins and ends in graduate school, this process is both life-long and contextual. Epstein and Hundert (2002) referred to the development of "habits of mind" in their discussion of professional identity. Ponton and

Onedera (in press) suggested that professional identity is understood only in context of the covenantal agreement that is held between the profession and society. The successful transition from counselor to counselor-manager is measured by the degree to which the counseling habits of mind and covenants are merged with the habits of mind and covenants of management. This paper explores the integration of positive organizational scholarship (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003) into the framework of counselor management to promote that merger.

In 1958 Brewer discussed the management of community counseling centers. Reporting on an informal survey he had conducted among leaders of such programs, he indicated that the majority of those surveyed felt that management training would be helpful to them. At least one third of respondents identified each of the following areas of training needs: relationship with the community, finance and budgeting, personnel, relationship with Boards of Directors, planning, and office procedures (Brewer). In 1981, Scurfield surveyed social workers who transitioned from direct service to administration. It is interesting to note that items on the survey related to professional identity suggested that moving from providing mental health to leading mental health care agencies is not seen by the majority of respondents as shifting their career identity but that three out of four respondents indicated difficulties with both former and new colleagues (Scurfield). Most recently, Curtis and Sherlock (2006) have suggested that "effective leadership within schools and counseling agencies requires specific leadership knowledge and, most important, practice" (p. 120).

Positive Organizational Management

Positive organizational scholarship (Cameron et al., 2003) is a nascent area of investigation which through the integration of management studies and the social sciences focuses on excellence, thriving, flourishing, resilience, citizenship and virtue in the world of work.

The literature of positive psychology has informed the field

of management and leadership for over a decade (Giacalone, Jurkiewicz, & Dunn, 2005; Kerns, 2005; Nelson & Cooper, 2007). Each of the three thematic areas of positive psychology (positive experience, positive self, and positive relationships) can be seen in the discourse of management and leadership (Cameron et al., 2003). Wrzesniewski, McCauley, and Rozin (1997) addressed the role of vocation or calling in the subjective positive experience of work. The Gallup Organization, in their research extending over a 30 year period has identified a dozen items that are distinctly related to positive experience in the work place (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2003). Salanova, Bakker, and Llorens (2006) found a reciprocal positive causal relationship between flow at work and both organizational resources (e.g., interpersonal cooperation, clearly defined expectations and material resources) and personal resources (e.g., self-efficacy).

Much has been written in regard to the relation of positive self and effective management. Kerns (2004) discussed the relationship of values to organizational leadership. Greenleaf (1991) discussed "the servant leader", a model of management built around the positive self of the leader and others in the organization. Kilburg (2006) builds on the postive self of the manager in his conceptualization of executive wisdom which is comprised of three interacting components: discernment, decision making, and action.

The third theme of positive psychology, positive relationships, is reflected in the management literature. Quick and Macik-Frey (2007), in an article outlining the correspondence between individual well-being and organizational well-being, suggested that healthy organizations promoted quality connections to others as characterized by open and honest communication, sense of belonging, cohesiveness and shared mission. Dutton and Heaphy (2003) outlined the power of what they term high quality connections (p. 264). They provided data that suggest that such positive relationships in organizations promote the exchange of resources, the development of organizational identity and meaning, promote the growth of the employees, and promote learning in the organization. In regard to spirituality, Garcia-Zamor (2003) identified over 300

titles on workplace spirituality that appeared in the 1990's and found evidence to suggest that measures of spirituality in an organization were correlated with both the overall well-being of the organization and its effectiveness.

Counseling Management and Positive Psychology

In the role of counselor-manager, counseling professionals have the opportunity to promote a positive workplace, that is a workplace that provides an environment that supports the positive experience, positive self, and positive relationships of the employees, clients, organization, and the managers themselves. While an exhaustive list of management strategies and techniques is beyond the scope of this paper, some illustrative examples may be useful. Applying Henderson and Gysbers' (1998) taxonomy can organize the many interrelated functions of the counselor manager and illustrate the application of principles of positive organizational development to the management of counseling work groups.

In the administrative function, the counselor-manager operating from the positive organizational perspective focuses on how the organization's policies and procedures insure that counselors' workplace experience is most positive and most effective. What are the resources needed to promote the flow experience for the counselor? Resources include everything from parking places to office space, from personnel policies to paperwork, from salary to a working copy machine. Do the policies of the organization promote the well-being of the staff by attending to the issues of work life and family life balance, promotion of resilience and protection from vicarious trauma, and professional and personal development opportunities? Likewise, it is the administrative function of management to see the agency from the client's perspective. Do the policies, procedures, and practices of the agency or department promote the positive engagement of the client in the process of counseling? How long does it take to get an appointment? Are services available at times, in locations, and in languages, that address

the needs of those we are to serve? How are clients being treated on the telephone, at the reception desk, in the group rooms, counseling offices, or hallways? Beyond the manager's own organization, how do the policies, procedures, and practices promote positive citizenship in the community at large, the professional community, and the global community to which the manager and the organization are connected? Are there resources to support community education programs and activities, and participation in professional associations? Does the organization engage in responsible global citizenship in regard to the environment and its investment practices?

In the second function identified by Henderson and Gysbers (1998), supervision, the counselor-manager seeking to promote a positive organization attends to the opportunity supervision provides to promote not only performance but also personhood. In the positive organization, forgiveness and gratitude are as much a part of the human resource vocabulary as performance notices and evaluations. Such a counselor-manger will consider the relationship between employee well being and organizational improvement that has been demonstrated in the literature (Grawitch, Gottschalk, & Munz, 2006). The roles of recognition, training, employee involvement, and communication have been demonstrated to promote both organizational and employee well-being. With this in mind, counselor-managers will: communicate clear expectations and boundaries; involve employees in decision-making, goal setting, and project development; provide training both for growth and remediation; and recognize employees for their contribution to the organization. The counselor-manager may question the process of employee supervision for signs that it is deficit focused rather than strength focused. How often do I say thank you? What is more likely to prompt a supervisory conference, positive or negative feedback? When did I last ask employees for suggestions for their own development plans? In our workplace, how do I communicate forgiveness and how do I ask for it? Are the personnel forms I am using restricting the range of my supervision? How am I calling the organization and the employees to virtue and values?

The manager function outlined by Henderson and Gysbers (1998) refers to the need to insure that resources, be they materials and facilities or professionals and support staff, are planned for, budgeted for, put into service toward the goal, and maintained. The key to this function is in the phrase "toward the goal". When planning and budgeting, implementing and maintaining, the key management question is: Does it promote the goal, the organizational mission that is articulated and shared with the stake-holders of the organization, including clients, constituents, management, and staff? Goal directed planning includes stakeholders and moves along a time-aware continuum of decision-making toward implementation. The counselor-manager not only insures that planning and budgeting establish the conditions for success of a program or service, but also insures that a plan for resource maintenance is in place. For a copier that means a service contract, for a building, a cleaning service; for counselors it means clinical supervision, varied case loads, vacation time, life-work balance, continuing education, and compensation.

Finally, Henderson and Gysbers (1998) suggest that the fourth function of the counselor-manager is professional leadership. The leadership function relates significantly to positive psychology at each of its pillars. Whetstone (2005) pointed out that leaders control the most powerful means for embedding and reinforcing the culture of organizations by means of several mechanisms, including reaction to critical incidents, allocation of rewards and status, recruitment and selection, and the choice of the issues to which they attend. In the counseling organization, the counselor-manager promotes positive experience by attending to those issues that promote well-being and flow, rewarding behaviors that promote a positive work culture, and modeling both gratitude and forgiveness. The positive self of the leader has been linked to the culture and effectiveness of the organization (Lakshman, 2006; Whetstone, 2005). Kilburg (2006, 2007) discussed the role executive virtues such as wisdom, prudence, and temperance in the effective leadership of an organization. For the counselor-manager the implications are clear. The well-lived life of the manager in the work place and beyond affects the culture of the counseling organization and

promotes the development of organizational virtue. The questions of relevance for the counselor-manager and the organization are not just about "doing things right" but also about doing the "right things". In regard to relationships, positive leadership in a counseling organization promotes relationships of respect, kindness, and integrity within the organization, between the organization and other institutions, and between the organization and its clients and constituents. The counselor-manager invites employees to mindfulness of the meanings and spirituality of their work.

Summary

This paper advances the important discussion of counseling management by applying positive organizational scholarship to counseling work groups. Research questions that emerge from this review include the following:

1) To what degree do individuals retain their professional identity as counselors when they assume roles as counselor-managers and what variables affect this phenomenon?
2) What is the impact of professional identity on management strategy and effectiveness in counseling work groups?
3) Are organizational outcome variables such as effectiveness, employee turnover, and employee satisfaction, related to positive workplace development in counseling organizations in a manner similar to that of other organizations?

In counseling work groups, as in all organizations, the manager is influential in setting the course of the group's activity; planning for, acquiring, and maintaining the resources of the group and promoting or impeding the success of the group. As administrator, supervisor, manager, and leader; the counselor-manager is responsible to the organization, the employees, the constituents, and most of all the clients for competent and ethical management practice. Positive organizational scholarship and its foundational research in positive psychology provide a coherent theoretical platform from which to view counseling management functions.

References

Brewer, J. E. (1958). Administrative issues for the psychologist as director of a community counseling center. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 15,* 249-251.

Cameron, K. S., Dutton, J. E., & Quinn, R. E. (Eds.) (2003). *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline.* San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Curtis, R., & Sherlock, J. J. (2006). Wearing two hats: Counselors working as managerial leaders in agencies and schools. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 84,* 120-126.

Dutton, J. E., & Heaphy, E. D. (2003). The power of high quality connections. In K.S. Cameron, J.E. Dutton, & R.E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline* (pp. 263-278). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Elman, N. S., Illfelder, J., & Ropbiner, W. N. (2005). Professional development: Training for professionalism as a foundation for competent practice in psychology. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 36,* 367-375.

Epstein, R. M., & Hundert, E. M. (2002). Defining and assessing professional competence. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 287,* 226-235.

Garcia-Zamor, J. (2003). Workplace spirituality and organizational performance. *Public Administration Review, 63,* 355-363.

Giacalone, R. A., Jurkiewicz, C. L., & Dunn, C. (Eds.) (2005). *Positive psychology in business ethics and corporate responsibility.* Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

Grawitch, M. J., Gottschalk, M., & Munz, D. C. (2006). A path to a healthy workplace: A critical review linking healthy workplace practices, well-being, and organizational improvements. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research, 58.*

Greenleaf, R. K. (1991). *The servant as leader.* Indianapolis, IN: Greenleaf Center.

Harter, J. K., Schmidt, F. L., & Keyes, C. L. (2003). Well-being in the workplace and its relationship to business outcomes: A review of the Gallup Studies. In C. L. Keyer & J. Haidt (Eds.), *Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well-lived* (pp. 205-224). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Henderson, P. & Gysbers, N. C. (1998). *Leading and managing your school guidance program staff.* Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

Kerns, C. D. (2004). Strengthening values centered leadership. *Graziadio Business Report, 7*(2). Retrieved September 20, 2007, from http://gbr.pepperdine.edu/042/leadership.html.

Kerns, C. D. (2005). The positive psychology approach to goal management. *Graziadio Business Report, 8* (3). Retrieved September 20, 2007, from http://gbr.pepperdine.edu/053/goals.html

Kilburg, R. R. (2006). *Executive Wisdom.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Kilburg, R. R. (2007, August). *Virtuous leaders: Implementing ancient ideals in the 21st Century.* Paper presented at the 2007 meeting of the American Psychological Association. San Francisco, CA.

Lakshman, C. (2006). A theory of leadership for quality: Lessons from TQM for leadership theory. *Total Quality Management, 17*(1), 41-60.

Nelson, D. L. & Cooper, C. L. (Eds.). (2007). *Positive organizational behavior.* London: Sage Publications.

Ponton, R. F., & Onedera, J. D. (in press). The code of ethics: Articulating counseling's professional covenant. *Journal of Counseling & Development.*

Quick. J. C., & Macik-Frey, M. (2007). Healthy, productive work: Positive strength through communication competence and interpersonal interdependence. In D.L. Nelson & C.L Cooper (Eds.), *Positive organizational behavior* (pp. 5-39). London: Sage Publications.

Salanova, M., Bakker, A. B., & Llorens, S. (2006). Flow at work: Evidence for an upward spiral of personal and organizational resources. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 7,* 1-22.

Scurfield, R. S. (1981). Clinician to administrator: difficult role transition? *Social Work, 26*, 485-501.

Whetstone, J. T. (2005). A framework for organizational virtue: the interrelationship of mission, culture, and leadership. *Business Ethics: A European Review, 14,* 367-378.

Wrzesniewski, A., McCauley, C. R., Rozin, P., & Schwartz, B. (1997). Jobs, careers, and callings: People's relations to their work. *Journal of Research in Personality, 31,* 21-33.