

2015

Fred Luthans—The Anatomy of a 50-Year Academic Career: An Interview by Kenneth R. Thompson

Fred Luthans

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, fluthans1@unl.edu

Kenneth R. Thompson

DePaul University, kthomps@depaul.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/managementfacpub>

Luthans, Fred and Thompson, Kenneth R., "Fred Luthans—The Anatomy of a 50-Year Academic Career: An Interview by Kenneth R. Thompson" (2015). *Management Department Faculty Publications*. 132.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/managementfacpub/132>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Management Department at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Management Department Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Fred Luthans—The Anatomy of a 50-Year Academic Career: An Interview by Kenneth R. Thompson

Corresponding author — Kenneth R. Thompson, Kellstadt Graduate School of Business,
DePaul University, 1 East Jackson Boulevard, Chicago, IL 60604, USA; email kthomps@depaul.edu

As the recipient of the 2014 Midwest Academy of Management Distinguished Scholar Award, Professor Fred Luthans's interview by Senior Editor Ken Thompson is included in this Midwest Academy's annual special issue of *JLOS*.

Fred Luthans received his BA, MBA, and PhD from the University of Iowa. He is a University and George Holmes Distinguished Professor of Management at the University of Nebraska. Before coming to Nebraska in 1967, while serving as an officer in the U.S. Army, he taught psychology and leadership at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He is a former President of the Midwest and National Academy of Management. He was or is editor or co-editor of *Journal of World Business*, *Organizational Dynamics*, and *Journal of Leadership & Organization Studies*. He is the author of several well-known books and over 200 articles. In total, his work is approaching 30,000 citations and his current H-Index is 76. His research at first focused on a behavioral approach to management or what he formulated and called O.B. Mod. (organizational behavior modification). In recent years, he has given relatively more attention to the theory building, measurement, and impact of what he founded and has termed "positive organizational behavior (POB)" and "psychological capital (PsyCap)." For further information, see his entry in Wikipedia, some interviews on YouTube, or his profile in Google Scholar.

Ken: Fred, first of all, congratulations on receiving the Midwest Academy's Distinguished Scholar Award and allowing us to do this interview. We both have deep ties to the Midwest, but I feel especially privileged to do this interview for them because I was your student and received my doctorate under you at the University of Nebraska long ago and have kept in close contact through the years. I, of course, know much about your background and work and

will try to formulate my questions in order to clarify things for myself. However, from a career development standpoint, what I think may be of most interest to others is for you to look back and identify what triggered some of the pivotal points in your now 50-year career path. My goal is to keep this very informal and conversational. Let's start with this question: What motivated you to get into teaching and research?

Fred: That's actually a hard question to answer because I think in my case, it just kind of evolved, rather than this was something I always wanted to do. While growing up in Clinton, Iowa, on the Mississippi River, when I was in high school, I took books home, but I never really looked at them. In other words, I was not a scholarly, intellectual type. Instead, I hung out with my friends, and we were mostly into sports. We watched and played football in the fall, basketball in the winter, track in the spring, and baseball in the summer.

Ken: Where do you think your eventual interest in education came from?

Fred: My parents were very much into the value of an education. My dad was the youngest of 10 children in a hardworking family of German descent. He and all of his siblings turned out to be successful, but he was the only one who graduated from high school. Obviously, he was very much into education, as also was my mother who was from an Iowa farm family also of German descent. She graduated from a type of commercial trade or what she called a "Business School." She wanted me to be a high school teacher. With those kinds of values and support from my parents, it was just assumed that I would go to college, and it was also assumed that I would go to the University of Iowa. I was never asked and we never explored any alternatives.

Ken: Why Iowa?

- Fred:** Because that's where almost everybody in my hometown in Eastern Iowa went and, with no pro teams in the state, we were all fervent Hawk-eye fans of all sports. In addition, my only sibling, Nancy, was already there. Therefore, I went to Iowa and just kept going. I ran hurdles on the track team, met and dated my future wife, Kay, and majored in math for my bachelor's degree. Then I went on for an MBA, where I became interested, really for the first time, and intellectually curious about my management course taught by Senior Professor Henry H. Albers. He urged me to go on for a PhD. in management under his tutelage, and I quickly jumped at this opportunity and never looked back.
- Ken:** Besides Albers, whom I know you have always touted as being a true pioneer by having one of the very first Principles of Management texts and his inspiring intellect, what other mentors at Iowa stood out for you?
- Fred:** Yes, Professor Albers was a great mentor to me, not only as a doctoral student but also in my early career. The year after I came to Nebraska, he became the founding department of management chair and I always give him credit not only for my PhD but also for challenging and supporting me in writing my *Organizational Behavior* text and at the same time to do quality basic research in this just emerging field. In addition, after I had been in the Iowa doctoral program a year or two, Max Wortman was hired out of the strong University of Minnesota personnel and labor relations program. Max not only provided me with a sound grounding in what became known as human resource management but also taught me how to write articles. I had seven accepted articles with him by the time I graduated. He also greatly helped me in my early career by preceding me as President of the Midwest Academy of Management and the National Academy of Management. Furthermore, he put me on his editorial board when he was the founding editor of *AMR*. In other words, I was extremely lucky to have two great mentors from my University of Iowa roots.
- Ken:** What were some of the pivotal trigger moments for your career that came from your graduate student days at Iowa?
- Fred:** That is a good question. Bruce Avolio emphasizes the importance of "the moments that matter" to one's development and that was the title of an interview I did about a decade ago for my former close Nebraska colleague Steve Sommer in *Journal of Management Inquiry*. In my case, there

were certainly some important moments or trigger points while at Iowa that definitely shaped my career. An obvious one was when Dr. Albers asked me if I would be interested in going on for a PhD in management, but a more subtle pivotal point for me was choosing psychology as a minor. In those days, most of my fellow doctoral students took their supporting course work in economics and I also took quite a few, especially labor economics. Remember, organizational behavior or strategy were not generally recognized fields at that time, so I majored in management from Albers, personnel and labor relations from Wortman, organization theory from Cal Hoyt (a Cal-Berkley educated organizational sociologist) and a strong outside minor in psychology. There was only one course in my minor that was called "industrial psychology," so I took my course work in social and behavioral psychology. These courses were taken in basically the same psychology program at Iowa from which the famous Albert Bandura had graduated with his MA and PhD about a decade or so earlier. I have always proudly followed Bandura's groundbreaking theory building and research throughout my career, from behaviorism to social learning to social cognition to efficacy to agency. In formulating my approach throughout my career, this psych background has proved to be invaluable.

Ken: Thanks for sharing that early background. What did you do after graduating?

Fred: I received my degree in 1965, at the age of 25, and that period was the start of the buildup for the Vietnam War. I had gone through Army ROTC and received my commission after my bachelor's degree but then took an educational delay. I knew I had to report for my 2 years of active duty as soon as I graduated with my PhD, so a trigger moment for me is when I proactively went to my ROTC Colonel, a West Point graduate, to see if I could be assigned there to use my education to teach leadership. It worked, but I had to go to Infantry School first, to give me some military polish and credibility. The day after I became a doctor, I was doing push-ups at the "request" of a big burly drill sergeant in the red clay at Fort Benning, Georgia. At the end of these 9 weeks of what I will call, "challenging" infantry training, all my classmates, except for me, were shipped off to Vietnam to fight in some of the initial big battles. The movie *We Were Soldiers* starring Mel Gibson was based on a true story about getting ready at Ft. Benning and then

fighting, suffering massive casualties, in the Battle of Ia Drang during November 1965. Right before they left Benning, I reported for duty to teach at West Point. I always say my education probably saved my life, because many of my Benning classmates never came back.

Ken: How did you find West Point?

Fred: I loved it. The cadets were unbelievable; the best of the best and my fellow officers treated me great. They all were all gung-ho infantry majors and above and I was a lowly first lieutenant the first year and captain the second year and a real novice. However, I had the PhD and most of my high-ranking colleagues were just coming out of masters' programs to prepare them for this assignment to teach. They knew what went into getting the doctorate and respected me for it. In contrast, when I was in training at Benning, if a major came through the area it created a real buzz and as a trainee I had no status. The drill sergeant loved to sarcastically call me "Doc." When teaching about status in my classes, I relay this experience. However, to reinforce the value of a higher education, I especially love telling them that as a junior officer at West Point, I had more status than the senior officers because of my degree. This status was also given to me by the cadets. They knew the very few junior officers at the Academy were only there because they had a PhD. The lesson here is that status is relative, and values and context matter.

Ken: How did the time at West Point help your academic career?

Fred: Because I did not have the pressure of a tenure clock ticking away, I had time to work on my teaching, not only leadership but also the required psychology course. As you can imagine, this is how I really learned and became confident about my understanding of psychology. I also had time to read in depth books and articles that I often only had time to skim through in graduate school. Best of all, however, was that during the first year, Kay and I were able to take full advantage of the cultural life of New York City, only an hour away, seeing all the Broadway shows, events at Carnegie Hall and pro sports, all free thanks to the USO. Also because of the Army, I was very fortunate to be able take free to me postdoctoral courses at Columbia in the City from Bill Newman, who was a President of the Academy and a pioneer in the strategy field, and Leonard Sayles, who was doing some of the original work in organizational behavior from

a group dynamics and applied anthropology perspective. I was also able to attend a program given by Chris Argyris at Columbia's Harriman House up the river from West Point in the beautiful Hudson Valley. I always give Chris much of the credit for my conceptualization of organizational behavior. Later, through my involvement in the Academy of Management, I became close friends with the somewhat older Lyman Porter and give him credit for my emphasizing the importance of basic research and a micro psychological perspective to OB. I consider Port to be the father of OB as we know it today.

Ken: Any final thoughts about your obviously important time at West Point?

Fred: In the second year, our first child, Kristin, was born, and that cut way down our trips to the City, but New York's loss was our big gain. The sad part of our stay was that more and more of the great young men I had as seniors the first year were now being shipped back from Vietnam in caskets to be buried at the West Point Cemetery. I believe the Class of 1967 had the largest mortality rate of any in the history of the Academy. Overall, this 2 years at West Point at the beginning of my career was, in retrospect, a huge advantage to me that other young professors starting off are not able to experience.

Ken: When did you start at Nebraska?

Fred: I ended my 2 years of active duty in May of 1967 and was given the opportunity to stay on as a member of the permanent military faculty. At that time, there were no civilian instructors or women cadets at West Point. I considered staying because we really enjoyed it there and the incentive was I could retire as a Brigadier General. However, we missed being close to family, and we decided to test the academic market in the Midwest. After several attractive offers at great schools, I came to Nebraska as an associate professor (so I was never an assistant professor) for \$11,700, and I have never regretted this decision now after 48 years.

Ken: Who did you work with at Nebraska?

Fred: Well, a young Richard Hodgetts was in his second year out of Indiana University, and we hit it off right away as close friends and collaborators. I was best man at his wedding, and we wrote articles, and later textbooks, on *Social Issues in Business*, that we eventually brought you in on, Ken, about the third or fourth edition, *Introduction to Business*, and *International Management*, still going strong after nine editions now with coauthor Jonathan Doh. Richard

was a one-of-a-kind great guy and too young when he died of cancer several years ago.

Ken: You already told me that Albers came as the first departmental chair in your second year, who else did you work closely with?

Fred: After Albers left, Sang Lee was hired as chair, and we became very close as colleagues and friends. I was also best man at his wedding. He is a world renowned management scientist (an AOM Fellow and former President of DSI) and gives true meaning to being a global scholar. He introduced me to the world stage, especially in Asia but also I was a key team member, along with our close colleague and friend Les Digman, on his dozen year U.S. AID project in Albania. Starting in 1992, this devastated East European country was making the transition from communism to democracy and a free enterprise economy. Our too numerous to count trips provided life-changing experiences for all of us. We owe it all to Sang's hard work and caring, authentic leadership. We remain travel and golf partners today.

Ken: Who else?

Fred: Although not at Nebraska, I cannot leave out the help and friendship John Slocum has given me over the years. We were together in the leadership of the Academy of Management 30 years ago, we run three journals together, including *JLOS*, and he has always served as a sounding board and confidant for me. More recently, Gary Latham has also been very helpful to me. The same is true for you, Ken. You have always been there for me and of course play a major role, along with Managing Editor Julia Teahen and Sage's Cynthia Nalevanko, as the editorial team for *JLOS*. Closer to home, a big influence on my more recent career was when Sang and I hired the widely recognized leadership scholar Bruce Avolio as founding Director of Nebraska's Gallup Leadership Institute. Bruce and I immediately became close friends and saw synergies between his research/theory development going from transformational to authentic leadership and my work going from positive reinforcement and OB Mod to positive organizational behavior and PsyCap. Through Bruce's personal leadership and hard work, he quickly built a worldclass institute and, in my opinion, the best leadership doctoral program in the country. Except for writing textbooks with Hodgetts, I had seldom collaborated on research and writing with my faculty colleagues, until Bruce. We coauthored some landmark theory

and research articles, several now approaching a thousand citations, and two books. The first one, called the *High Impact Leader* (on authentic leadership), he took the lead on, and the second one, *Psychological Capital* my former doctoral student and since close collaborator, Carolyn Youssef-Morgan, and I took the lead. Bruce has since moved on to the University of Washington, but I will always be thankful to him for our ground breaking collaborative research and for him taking the initiative and organizing a *festschrift* for me. This "festival of writing to honor a senior scholar" was a wonderful event with many of my former doctoral students and close colleagues giving papers and having panel discussions on PsyCap that resulted in a special issue in *JLOS*. We all had a great time celebrating and roasting me.

Ken: You mention Carolyn. What about your other doctoral students?

Fred: Through the years, and now, my closest collaborators have been my doctoral students. I have been very fortunate to have many great ones, and I frankly could not have accomplished my record without them. I could start naming them, but let me simply say that in each phase of my career I had wonderful doctoral students, and I truly mean that they helped me more than I helped them. One needs only to look at my résumé to pick out the major contributions they have made throughout my career.

Ken: What were some other pivotal triggers for you?

Fred: Of course, the biggest one was marrying Kay. I literally could not have done it without her. For example, not only did she provide loving support but also financial support as a high school English teacher, while I was in grad school. Then through the years, she reared our four children Kristin, Brett, Kyle, and Paige. I was at the university during the day and in the evening, I followed my ritual of writing from 7 to 11 pm, followed by an hour on the treadmill, except if the kids had something, which I never missed. Starting in the late 1960s, it took me 4 years following this routine to write my OB text. I have been doing it ever since, except now, I take time out for the grandchildren's activities and, of course, as you know Kay and I have always attended Husker football and men's and women's basketball and volleyball.

Ken: What were the triggers for your well-known research streams?

Fred: Well, once again I was very fortunate to be in the right places at the right times. In the late 1960s, while I was writing the text in the evenings, I was teaching my classes at the university but also doing management training programs for administrators and staff of the Nebraska Mental Health System. One time, while we were traveling across the state together, the Director, an MD psychiatrist, casually asked me, "Fred, why don't you incorporate some positive reinforcement, behavior modification into your management of people approaches? We are finding these techniques have a dramatic positive impact on managing our patients' behavior in our clinical practice." That question hit me like a ton of bricks. I immediately harkened back to my behavioral psychology classes and thought to myself, "Why don't we in the management and leadership field draw from reinforcement theory and the recently emerging behavioral technology being successfully used in clinical psychology?" That trigger question set off in me a determined passion to bring behavioral psychology to the workplace.

Ken: How did you carry out this passion?

Fred: I immediately believed that this behavioral approach was the answer I was searching for instead of the prevailing largely non-researchbased, vague, human relations approach to managing people. Again, with my first doctoral students, Don White and mostly Bob Kreitner, we published conceptual articles in the early 1970s and in 1975, a book that branded this new approach as *Organizational Behavior Modification* or OB Mod. In addition, with subsequent doctoral students, we conducted basic research published in the top journals such as *JAP*, *Personnel Psychology*, and *AMJ* to clearly demonstrate this, new OB Mod approach had an evidence-based positive impact on employee performance and could be readily applied. After almost 30 years of this stream of research and a couple of meta-analyses, led by my former doctoral student, Alex Stajkovic, now a chaired professor at the University of Wisconsin, I felt we had truly brought behavioral psychology to the workplace. I was now ready for a paradigm shift to another new approach.

Ken: I know one of the key career strategic recommendations you give to your doctoral students and young professors is to have a primary research stream, but to also have one or more other interests, you are working on at the same time. Your advice in terms of electrical circuitry is to work in parallel, not in series. Following your own advice,

what were some parallel interests and research you were working on during this OB Mod period of your career?

Fred: You are right. I would say I had two major parallel interests I was working on, especially as OB Mod began to mature. The first was when Sang Lee triggered in me the importance of globalization. Our many trips abroad, and especially over the long Albanian project, led me to do a number of international studies and continue to put a lot of effort into continually updating Hodgetts and my *International Management* text.

The second parallel stream was more unique and specific triggered by Henry Mintzberg's widely recognized observational study and subsequent book on the *Nature of Managerial Work*. His study struck a chord in me, but also triggered three questions that I felt he left unanswered. Unlike Mintzberg's intense study of only five senior Canadian executives, I wanted to try to gain more insight, if not the answer, to the broader question of what do managers in general, at all levels, functions and types of organizations (what I termed "Real Managers") really do? I was not satisfied with the normative answers provided by the textbooks, without empirical research evidence. The same was true for what popular CEOs and media stars of the time, such as Lee Iacocca or Jack Welch, had to say about what practicing managers should be doing. More important to me was to empirically determine what managers in general do in their day-to-day activities, and, especially, what do successful and effective "Real Managers" do and is there a difference between the two.

Ken: How did you study these big questions?

Fred: Taking the lead from Mintzberg, I did not believe that the overused and problematic selfreport methodologies would get at the "really" part of my three research questions. Thus, I decided to do an observational study. In situ, naturalistic observational methods and qualitative and quantitative or mixed analyses are often talked about as being ideal but very seldom conducted. This is because of the difficulty, time commitment and cooperation needed, especially with the relatively large sample I wanted to use for generalizability and the use of both qualitative and quantitative analyses. Therefore, I needed, and was able to obtain, a large research grant from ONR (Office of Naval Research) that, at that time, was funding behavioral science research that did not necessarily directly affect the Navy. Over the next 4 or 5 years, my doctoral

students and I developed a Leader Observation System, developed the protocol and trained student and participant observers, recruited a wide cross-section of organizations and managers, conducted a series of studies to answer the research questions, and published the results in articles and, with Hodgetts and one of my former doctoral students, Stu Rosenkrantz, the book *Real Managers*. Interestingly, widely recognized leadership scholar Bob Hogan has recently discovered this research and is currently in the process of republishing this 1988 book through his company.

Ken: What were some of the specifics of the study?

Fred: Very briefly, in the first phase, trained student observers kept detailed logs of the day-to-day activities of a wide variety of 44 managers during a different hour each day for 2 weeks. Then, a panel consisting of experts and nonexperts used the Delphi technique of anonymous input, composite feedback, and iterations to reduce the 440 hours of free observation into, at first, an agreed upon 12, and then, four categories of managerial activity. These categories made up of directly observed behaviors were deemed to be (a) traditional management (planning, decision making, and controlling); (b) communication; (c) human resource management; and (d) networking (interacting with outsiders and socializing/politicking). Using these categories as a behavioral checklist, trained organizational participant observers, who had knowledgeable and visual contact with a wide variety of target managers in several different types of organizations, recorded what they were doing in a random 10-minute period every hour for 2 weeks (a total of about 80 observations per manager).

Ken: What did you find in this first phase of the study which was aimed at answering the first question of what do real managers do in their day-to-day activities?

Fred: These data indicated that managers on average spend about a third of their time on what we defined, through the previous free observation, on the traditional management activities; almost a third on communication; a fifth on human resource management activities, and almost a fifth on networking activities. There were some slight differences but nothing significant by the type of organization, level or function of the observed manager. No big surprises here of what real managers really do. The exceptions were perhaps the less than expected time spent on traditional management

activities that our business schools are largely based upon, and the greater than expected time spent in networking that is seldom given attention in business schools or conventional wisdom.

Ken: What about your other two research questions?

Fred: Of greater interest was what separate studies then found out about successful and effective managers. Of course, it depends on how success and effectiveness are defined, but we tried to operationally define success as best we could by creating a relatively objective success index made up of the level in the hierarchy of the observed manager over his or her organizational tenure. This is basically a rate or speed of promotion index, which has been used in previous research. We found, again through various analyses of the observational data, that networking made the largest relative input (not time spent) into the observed managers' success, and human resources activities made the least relative contribution. In other words, we empirically found what many have suspected. Those who play the game effectively give relatively more attention to socializing, politicking, and interacting with outsiders, are more successful in terms of rapidly getting ahead in their organizations.

In terms of the analysis of managerial effectiveness, which we defined as an index made up of a sum of the managers' subordinates' satisfaction, commitment, and perceptions of the quality and quantity of performance of the unit, we found quite different results. In this analysis of the observed managers' activities, communication and human resource management made by far the greatest relative contribution (again not necessarily the amount of time) to their effectiveness and traditional management, and especially networking, contributed the least.

Ken: In other words, the successful managers, those who were being promoted the most rapidly, the "fast trackers" if you will, were not doing the same activities as the effective managers, those with satisfied and committed subordinates and judged to have high performing units?

Fred: Correct! When comparing the top third with the bottom third of both the successful and effective samples, the successful managers were not generally the same as the effective managers. Ideally, we would like the successful and effective managers to be the same. The effective managers should be the ones being promoted. But that is not what we found. In fact, further analysis indicated that

the few, who were both successful and effective, barely made it into the top third of both groups. This counterintuitive, but interesting, finding could maybe help explain some of the underlying problems organizations have in trying to complete in the global economy.

Ken: Interesting food for thought and maybe could become a trigger for someone looking for a new research path. But for us, let's get back to the paradigm shift you mentioned for your primary research interest, post-OB Mod.

Fred: Yes, that would be another fortuitous trigger moment sending me on my current passion and research stream. While working with the Gallup Organization, which at that time was headquartered in Lincoln, in 1999, I was able to attend the first Positive Psychology Summit hosted by Gallup. Based on my positive reinforcement background and perspective, I was very interested in what Seligman, Diener, Fredrickson, Csikszentmihalyi, and the other founding positive psychologists were saying. However, I soon realized they were almost solely concerned with basic understanding and clinical applications. The light went on for me, as it had in my early career with behavioral psychology. I was going to take positive psychology to the workplace.

Ken: How did you operationalize this new found mission?

Fred: To avoid the mistakes that I thought the popular, but then not scientifically sound, positively oriented concept and emerging workplace applications of emotional intelligence had made, I quickly established the criteria that must be met to be included in what I termed as "positive organizational behavior (POB)." These criteria were (a) theory and research foundation; (b) valid measurement; (c) statelike (as opposed to trait-like) and thus open to change and development; and (d) positive impact on desired employee attitudes, behaviors, and performance. I then searched the positive psychology literature and determined that hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, or what I called the HERO within, best met these inclusion criteria. I branded and published this POB in an article in the *Journal of Organizational Behavior* that came out in 2002. Then, just as I had done with OB Mod, but this time with my colleague, Bruce Avolio, and our doctoral students, especially Carolyn Youssef-Morgan, James Avey, and Suzanne Peterson, we conducted basic research with all types of dependent variables.

Ken: Was there a study that stood out from the rest in terms of meeting the criteria you had established for POB and that provided research support for combining the four positive constructs into what you termed Psychological Capital or PsyCap introduced in two 2004 articles published with your sons, Brett Luthans and Kyle Luthans and with Carolyn?

Fred: Yes, definitely. The real key, foundational research study by Luthans, Avolio, Avey, and Norman (2007) published in *Personnel Psychology* (now up to about a thousand citations) was where we validated our measure and clearly demonstrated that combining the four POB constructs of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism into Psychological Capital (PsyCap) out predicted each of these individual components on satisfaction and performance. This study also showed this second-order, core construct of PsyCap was more stable over time than positive emotions and less stable than personality and core self-evaluation traits. Thus, we demonstrated the "state-like" nature of PsyCap. In addition, as we had done with OB Mod, at this time, we published with Oxford University Press our first PsyCap book. Now, 8 years later, we have published numerous other basic research studies verifying and adding to the foundational article and have just come out with a new and greatly expanded version of our PsyCap book titled *Psychological Capital and Beyond*. A few years ago, with James Avey taking the lead, we also published a supporting meta-analysis of 51 PsyCap studies and are currently in the process of refining and expanding PsyCap to multiple levels and multiple domains.

Ken: What has been the reaction to PsyCap?

Fred: The reaction around the world has been very gratifying from both academics and practitioners. A recent comprehensive independent review of 66 articles by Alexander Newman and colleagues published in *JOB* was quite favorable on all aspects of PsyCap. The same was true of an in-depth psychometric critical review of the PsyCap construct and measure by Sara Dawkins, Angela Martin, and colleagues published in *JOOP*. There has been a steep upward trajectory of published research articles on PsyCap and to date, well, over 2,200 formal requests for our PsyCap questionnaire (PCQ-24 and PCQ-12) from mindgarden.com that administers this permission process free of charge. In terms of objective impact, a recent check of Google Scholar indicated I had citations

approaching 30,000 (current h-index 76) and about 18,000 (h-index 57) since 2010 that would almost all be related to PsyCap. So I would say PsyCap is now widely recognized.

Ken: What about with practitioners?

Fred: The beauty of PsyCap from the beginning is that it has intuitive appeal to almost everyone. Who can argue with the power of positivity and the HERO within? This recognized importance of positivity over negativity has been around forever. However, a positive management approach also was not necessarily treated seriously, either by skeptical academics nor hardheaded, results-oriented practitioners. It was written off as too much fluff, balloons, and smiley faces. This is why, from the beginning, I set up my scientifically based inclusion criteria and conducted supporting basic research published in the top journals. I deliberately did this to give our positive approach credibility and evidence-based impact that academics could agree with and practitioners could understand, appreciate, and apply.

It also helped a lot when we were able to show through sophisticated utility analysis, using assumptions and equations from my colleague and friend, Wayne Cascio and others in the HR literature and real data from a PsyCap training program led by James Avey of engineers in a large aerospace firm, the well over 200% return on investment (ROI) from psychological capital. This dollar, bottom-line impact, of course, is very appealing to practitioners and organizations' HR programs. Consultants and consulting companies throughout the world are also beginning to feature PsyCap. Unfortunately, this usage is often without any attribution to our published original terms, conceptualizations, and research support.

Ken: Where do you go from here?

Fred: Frankly, at this point in my career and life's journey, I am not looking for another paradigm shift.

Also, I take on emeritus status from Nebraska in the fall. I will no longer teach formal courses, but I will continue to give PsyCap programs, as I have been doing around the world, and continue to do research on refining PsyCap in terms antecedents, mediation/moderation, and predicting new dependent variables. However, I will mainly concentrate on expanding PsyCap into team, organizational, and community/country levels of analysis, apply to underutilized domains such as health care, education, military/police, and nonprofits, and, especially, overall well-being. So far, we have just touched the surface of each of these, but all seem to have unlimited potential for expanding the reach of PsyCap into the future.

Ken: Fred, thanks so much for giving us this overview of your amazing career and especially recalling specific trigger moments that mattered in each step of the way. Any final thoughts you might share?

Fred: Just thanks to the Midwest Academy of Management for the award and Editors Megan Gerhardt and Joy Peluchette for allowing me the opportunity to share my career journey in their special issue of *JLOS*. Finally, I want to thank you, Ken, not only for doing this interview but for your many contributions to our field and the Midwest and National AOM, your editorial leadership of *JLOS*, and mostly your friendship. Family and friends always matter most!

Author Biography

Kenneth R. Thompson, PhD (Nebraska) is professor of Management at the Kellstadt Graduate School of Business, DePaul University. Ken is a Master Senior Examiner for the American Health Care Association and was a Senior Examiner for the Malcolm Baldrige National Performance Award Program, and a Senior Lead Examiner for the Illinois State Quality Award. Ken's research focuses on the behavioral aspects of goal setting and employee management.