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Transforming Impossible Into Possible (TIP): A Bottom-Up Practice in Workforce Development for Low-Income Jobseekers

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Transforming Impossible into Possible (TIP): a bottom-up practice in workforce development for low-income jobseekers

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Abstract: This paper discusses an evidence-informed bottom-up transformative social work practice model that holistically encapsulates multi-system levels of practice. Based on 12 years of empirical evidence on psychological self-sufficiency (PSS), the Transforming Impossible into Possible (TIP) program was developed to focuses on the 'process' of human agency development that leads to economic self-sufficiency (ESS) 'outcomes'. It attempts to bring together various modalities of social work practice into a transformational leadership development framework that reflects a bottom-up, participant-centered approach to empowering individuals to impact larger systems. In workforce development practice, it is being regarded that constructs reflected in TIP improve both employment and retention outcomes.

Keywords: psychological self-sufficiency, humanship, psychological capital, workforce development, empowerment, low-income, transformative social work

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1. Introduction

The main challenge that calls for innovation in workforce development practice stems from mixed research evidence on traditional approaches to connecting low-income jobseekers with employment opportunities. This has mainly to do with the system being limited by poor quality education and training for low-income jobseekers (Hamilton, 2002; Heckman, LaLonde and Smith, 1999; Hong and Pandey, 2008) and lacking the economic and political will to tackle the issue of employment and social well-being as an issue of social right (Iversen and Armstrong, 2006). It is also due in part to individuals lacking psychological capital to overturn the unfavorable odds of securing and retaining a job in the low-wage labor market (Hong, Sheriff and Naeger, 2009). However,

with less than feasible solutions to change the former conditions, by default, unemployment becomes a supply side problem — as indicated in the latter — that does not adequately serve the needs of the demand side — employers.

Transforming Impossible into Possible (TIP) is being introduced as a newly developed evidence-informed group work practice model in workforce development. It aligns with an area in social work called transformative social work practice — a multi-systems, interdisciplinary approach to addressing social problems (Witkin, 2007; Schott and Weiss, 2015). In fact, it is more than a human service program. It is a social movement in the sense that it embodies the principles of transformative social change and social transformation — an emerging social justice organizing ideals characterized by large-scale social change that starts

with individuals and then moves onto organizational and structural systems (Deep Change, 2009). This approach addresses Gandhi's "You must be the change you wish to see in the world" using multi-systems, holistic, and nonviolent methods, by which 'change' becomes 'transformation' by depth and impact.

TIP begins with meeting where the clients are to achieve their full potential by reaching down to the very deeper meaning making level — making this approach seem like behavioral modification at the onset. However, only by anchoring on the 'as is' condition — through the lens of social constructivism — individuals form the basis from which they launch their own journey of transformation (Witkin, 2007; 2014). Considering the person and environment (P-E) fit, a top-down model would require that the person 'changes' to fit the environment as a given condition. On the other hand, a bottom-up model would suggest 'transforming' inside out to where individuals become empowered agents to impact the outer layers of the system. As such, according to Palinkas (2013), *change* uses external influences to modify human or organizational actions, but *transformation* alters beliefs at a much deeper level so actions become natural and thereby achieve the desired result. In other words, c*hange* fixes and improves the past, while *transformation* creates the future through a vision. *Change* is an event, while *transformation* is a process that makes it sustainable. *Change* is reversible, while *transformation* cannot be reversed. *Change* tackles existing systems, while *transformation* causes new systems to emerge.

Social interventions have been dominated by the change paradigm that suggested a cause-effect relationship of outer systems influencing individual and family systems at best or one that considered each system level practice separately (Figure 1). TIP is a social transformation model that offers bottom-up solutions starting from micro to mezzo to macro approaches in tackling problems such as unemployment among low-income jobseekers. It starts the ripple effects of transformation as a human-centered approach to empowering low-income, long-term unemployed, and socially excluded individuals within a largely unfavorable structural condition (Hong, Choi and Key, 2014). The program provides an opportunity for participants to rediscover the power within to recognize and overcome their employment barriers — both individual and structural — and develop motivation to return to the workforce. TIP generates the transformative process beyond the individual level and reaches the system
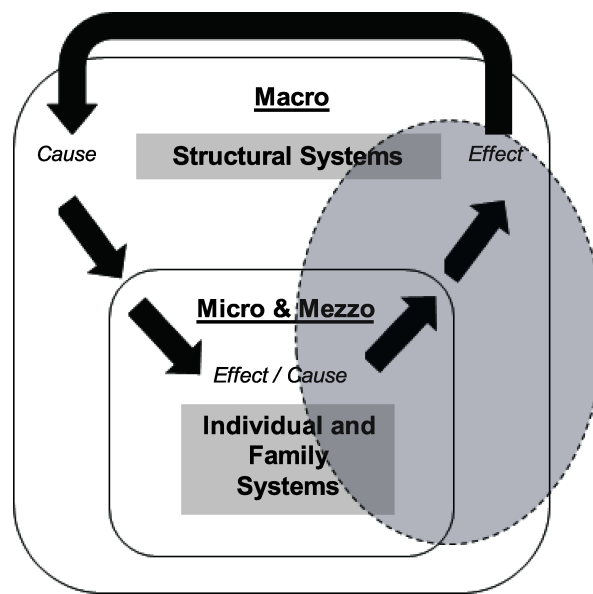

Figure 1. Bottom-up transformative practice.

level impact by nudging the market system to hire and nurture on the basis of this human-centered approach (Hong, 2014).

In this regard, TIP is an evidence-informed bottom-up intervention model that holistically encapsulates multi-system levels of practice in social work and human services. It is a human-centered response to the top-down nature of conservative, liberal, and elitist approaches to poverty that have left the poor in positions of powerlessness and hopelessness. In order to address these concerns, the purpose of this paper is to present: (i) over a decade of research evidence that has led to the development of the TIP program to meet the needs of the low-income community, (ii) the method by which TIP can be best implemented for positive employment readiness process and outcomes for low-income individuals, and (iii) the approach it can take to replicate in other settings of transformative anti-poverty practice for greater impact.

2. Background Literature

2.1 Evidence of Psychological Self-Sufficiency

The development of TIP rests on about 12 years of evidence in the making. First, local exploratory evidence gathering and theory development took place on psychological self-sufficiency (PSS) between 2004 and 2014. The work that began in St. Louis, MO as an evaluation of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Regional Jobs Initiative project resulted in a bottom-up definition of self-sufficiency from client's perspective.

The question that drove the work was "how do low-income job training participants define self-sufficiency from their perspectives?" Qualitative evidence from a series of focus groups resulted in the grounded theory analysis that conceptualized PSS as comprising perceived employment barriers and employment hope (Hong, 2013; Hong, Sheriff and Naeger, 2009). The process-driven PSS has been found to complement the outcome-driven economic self-sufficiency (ESS).

Second, measurement validation was the next phase between 2010 and 2014 that involved rigorous statistical analyses of over 5,000 quantitative survey data, both cross-sectionally and longitudinally. In this process, the Employment Hope Scale (EHS) and Perceived Employment Barrier Scale (PEBS) have been validated from data obtained from over fifteen agencies and organizations in St. Louis, MO, Chicago and Chicago Heights, IL and Kenosha, Racine, Elkhorn, Burlington, WI, and a national sample from South Korea (Hong and Choi, 2013; Hong, Choi and Polanin, 2014; Hong *et al*., 2014; Hong *et al*., 2016a; 2016b). EHS has been found to comprise four factors — psychological empowerment, futuristic self-motivation, utilization of skills and resources, and goal-orientation (Hong, Choi and Polanin, 2014). PEBS comprises five factors—physical and mental health, labor market exclusion, child care, human capital, and soft skills (Hong *et al*., 2013).

Third, the theory development and testing stage as evidence of PSS continue presently to inform the development and refinement of TIP. Analyses consistently suggests that PSS contributes significantly to ESS (Hong, Choi and Key, 2014; Hong, Stokar and Choi, 2016). PSS is best defined as "a dynamic process of overcoming perceived employment barriers along the goal-oriented path to individualized success and developing employment hope within the new realities of career goals" (Hong *et al*., 2014, p.693). The PSS process suggests that successful paths to employment and retention involve tapping into their deep-seated 'purpose' as they set foot on the journey toward their employment goals (Hong, Sheriff and Naeger, 2009). This purpose can be contextualized differently for each individual, but is unequivocally grounded in what is conceptualized as 'employment hope' (Hong and Choi, 2013; Hong, Choi and Polanin, 2014; Hong, Polanin and Pigott, 2012). Employment hope can serve as the motivating purpose toward one's goals against many rejections and obstacles in the low-wage labor market (Hong, 2013; 2014).

2.2 Emergence of Non-Cognitive and Executive Skills in Social Policy

Drawing on positive psychology and research on personality, character traits, decision making, and motivation, recent years have seen a strong emphasis and popularity of non-cognitive and executive functioning skills in academic achievement, adult learning, and employment. Non-cognitive or soft skills, referred to by the Nobel laureate and economist James Heckman, are positive character traits,such as persistence, self-control, curiosity, conscientiousness, grit, and self-confidence,that are necessary ingredients for success in the labor market (Tough, 2012; Heckman and Kautz, 2012). Heckman and Kautz (2013) maintain that these crucial skills can be learned to bring about sustained successful outcomes in the labor market.

Moreover, recognizing the history of low success in employment-related human services, Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) has been strongly emphasizing the importance of executive and self-regulation skills to impact employment stability for low-income workers (Pavetti, 2014). Self-regulation — the ability to control one's behavior, emotion and thoughts — and executive functioning skills — the ability to manage oneself and one's resources in order to achieve a goal — are suggested as the key determinants of success for low-income workers.

These skills are more specifically referred to as the "personal success skills" by SRI International and the Joyce Foundation and they include "the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive competencies that individuals draw on to shape their future and thrive in the 21st century workforce throughout their adult lives" (Shechtman *et al*., 2016, p.7). These manifest competencies make up the necessary applied components of the personal success skills ring in the social contexts of working life (National Research Council, 2012). These outer ring components dynamically draw upon the latent foundational components — knowledge and skills, mindsets, values, and self-regulation — that make up the inner ring to enable success (Nagaoka *et al*., 2015). PSS may embody both these manifest and latent qualities but not in such a way that these concepts have been introduced as being present individually or conjointly. Rather, it is a dynamic process of switching from the cognitive perceived barriers to noncognitive employment hope, but keeping the latter

relatively higher to allow the forward progress to continue and be sustainable (Hong, Choi and Key, 2014).

2.3 Vocational and Positive Psychology Literature

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) is a comprehensive theoretical framework in vocational psychology that supports the process of PSS (Lent, 2004, 2005; Lent and Brown, 2006, Lent, Brown and Hackett, 1994). SCCT provides the foundation for a social cognitive model of vocational hope — a construct that has gained much attention in the vocational psychology and career development literatures to have significant effects on employment (Brown *et al.*, 2013). This model hypothesizes that *self-efficacy* — viewing oneself as being able to complete tasks necessary to attain meaningful work in the future — and *outcome expectations* — expecting more positive than negative outcomes resulting from their effort — contribute positively to the development of vocational hope. PSS dynamically embodies the theoretical relationships postulated by the social cognitive model of vocational hope.

PSS also provides an overarching conceptual framework for more holistically bringing together such well-known concepts in positive psychology from the earlier work on positive emotions (Fredrickson, 1998) and possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986), and more recent work on the growth mindset (Dweck, 2006), positive psychological capital (Luthans *et al.*, 2007), and grit (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007). The bottom-up, transformative nature of PSS can be supported by the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, which posits that positive emotions, i.e., hope, broaden the momentary thought-action repertoire that leads to the effect of increasing and strengthening physical, intellectual, and social resources (Fredrickson, 1998; 2001) and these resources then create "an upward spiral toward improved odds for survival, health, and fulfillment" (Fredrickson, 2013, p.15).

> Positive emotions … trigger broadened, curious, and optimistic patterns of thought together with more spontaneous and energetic behavior. These thought–action tendencies increase the odds that people find positive meaning in their future circumstances in ways that seed further positive emotions that decrease stress, provide emotional uplift, and support resilience (Fredrickson, 2013, p.34).

Supporting the dynamic nature of the PSS process is

possible selves and growth mindset. The former is a future-oriented self-concept that has to do with 'selves' that one believes to become in the near and distal future, which by connecting to one's present (i.e., perceived employment barriers) and preserving positive self-feelings (i.e., employment hope), it allows one to make projections about future success and guide goal setting and motivation (Oyserman, Bybee and Terry, 2006; Oyserman *et al.*, 2004; Oyserman and Markus, 1990).

The ever evolving and recursive aspect of PSS is captured by research on the growth mindset (Dweck, 2006). When individuals have a growth mindset, they believe that it is possible to cultivate and improve their abilities through practice and effort. On the other hand, a fixed mindset will relate to these abilities being preset by some conditions and therefore unchangeable. Both possible selves and growth mindset are malleable and they open the possibility for self-improvement and pursue personal growth.

Positive psychological capital (PsyCap) — hope, resilience, optimism, and efficacy — was found to predict work performance and satisfaction (Luthans *et al.*, 2007). PSS is a psychological capital — one of the core human capital — that glues together education, training, health, etc. to be less fragmented and more relevant together to serve as an asset rather than as a structural vulnerability (Hong and Pandey, 2007; Rank, 2004). Grit, defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals and found to account for academic success (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007), may be a manifest behavior of someone who displays strong PSS skills.

Mental contrasting with implementation intention (MCII; Gawrilow *et al.*, 2013; Oettingen and Gollwitzer, 2010) provides the practice structure for implementing PSS (Hong, 2015). Without MCII, one could take PSS as just pushing for such positive psychological attributes — perceiving a future event as desirable (positive attitude or high incentive value) and growingly feasible (high expectation of success) along with demonstrating relentless tenacity — to be the main source of strong goal commitment and outcome. However, MCII translates positive attitudes, high expectations, and effort into binding goals through mental contrasting between the obstacles and benefits of achieving the goals — comparable to perceived employment barriers and employment hope in PSS. The implementation intention adds the "if then" planning method which demonstrates 'if situation X arises, then I will initiate behavior Y' by which obstacles (X) to goal attainment is addressed.

Informed by vocational and positive psychology, the PSS process highlights the interplay between cognitively anchoring on individual and structural barriers by recognizing and accepting them as such and noncognitively activating and sustaining employment hope to a degree greater than the baseline by which goal-oriented forward progress could take place (Hong, Choi and Key, 2014). It represents the dialectical process of actively making contradictions from the negative cognitive baseline — perceived employment barriers — to the non-cognitive motivator — employment hope — by which goal-oriented movement becomes more concrete, realistic, forceful, and sustainable (Hong, Choi and Polanin, 2014; Hong, Polanin and Pigott, 2012; Hong *et al.*, 2014). The cognitive or non-cognitive elements of PSS alone may produce the ESS outcome to some extent but each effect alone cannot compare to that generated together by deliberate mental contrasting.

3. Tip Program Description

TIP was originally developed in response to requests from community-based agencies to provide a sketch of how the evidence shown through the focus groups and survey results would look like in a program format. Using Freirean critical consciousness through dialoging and praxis (Freire, 2000; 2014), TIP taps into one's intrinsic motivations through existential reflections and hope-based action commitments. This is designed to generate power to claim self-determination, self-awareness, hope, goal-orientation, accountability, conscientiousness, resilience and grit (Hong, 2016). By locking individual assets as an unquestionable condition — taking blaming the victim out of the equation of workforce development — TIP provides stronger bargaining power vis-à-vis the market and the system (Hong, 2013; Hong, Choi and Key, 2014). In this process, TIP challenges the next systems to change their organizational cultures to accommodate the empowered agents as they enter the new systems — i.e., labor market.

In this sense, TIP is an evidence-informed model of intervention that is best suited to activate the sense of 'purpose' among disconnected workers. TIP challenges one to be on a purpose driven path — operationalized as activation of and improvement in PSS — to success in workforce development. 'Purpose' as the engine that drives a meaningful goal-directed path is actively sought through employment hope among low-income jobseekers with multiple employment barriers.

Based on evidence drawn from voices of low-income job training participants and reviewing best practice models and research findings in vocational and positive psychology, a research team at Loyola University Chicago has consulted with group work practitioners to develop an evidence-informed intervention model (Hong, Kenemore and In, 2015; Hong, 2016). By mirroring the design thinking process — empathy, define, ideate, prototype, and test — that emphasizes the importance of listening to and aligning with consumers in any product or service development (Brown, 2009; Brown and Wyatt, 2015), it is anticipated that TIP improves both employment and retention outcomes.

Grounded philosophically and theoretically in empowerment, existentialism, positive psychology, and transformational leadership and organizing, TIP brings the "human" back into human resource development and the "process" back into the theory of change in an outcome-focused workforce development policies and programs (Hong, 2013). In essence, without equipping individuals with the core psychological capital that can hold together their human capital and build a strong layer of social capital, any other efforts would end up being a 'dress up' game for jobseekers to only look 'employable' to the employers' demand in the labor market (Hong, 2013). Quick-fix, market-dependent strategies as acquiring credentials, cleaning up resumes, improving interview skills, and modifying work-related professional behaviors have only seen their employment outcomes short lived.

When preparing low-income jobseekers for jobs without anchoring on psychological capital, some changes may occur temporarily to demonstrate work readiness but they are not to the extent of being sustainable when met with multiple obstacles during job search or post-employment. In such cases, many individuals end up losing hope and return to where they started, if they do not fall into greater despair and disengagement from the workforce. Workplace norms, expectations, scheduling, and cultures in the low-wage labor market do not typically adjust to support one's transition from work readiness to career advancement. Due to the rather low success rate in the employers' market, many workforce development agencies have been forced to cream and over-recruit promising jobseekers to meet the annual success goals and benchmarks (Hong, 2013).

In order to overcome these challenges, the purpose driven path that TIP addresses is one that promises to nurture positive character such as resilience, grit, sa-

crifice, and resolve as low-income jobseekers strive for individualized employment goals. These noncognitive skills reflect the inner strengths that help withstand and overcome employment barriers (Heckman and Kautz, 2012; 2013). The transformative decision to partake in this enduring process is rooted in the sense of purpose — the desire and effort that individuals put forth to accomplish their goals, make significant contributions to society, and maintain a meaningful existence. In this sense, psychological transformation has been the missing link in workforce development research and practice and TIP brings this perspective to the table as a beacon of human-centeredness. This transformative approach is the core ingredient necessary to sustaining long-term successful career pathways (Hong, 2014).

TIP is quickly spreading in the community as it represents the mission work that the market-based funding criteria and performance evaluation tend to devalue. The field of workforce development has given less weight to psychological empowerment for it not being a tangible outcome. It has been shunned by private and government funders as a 'touchy feely' by-product of the 'concrete' skills and education-based interventions (Hong, 2013). Granted agencies quite often understand the importance of psychological interventions for this population and in fact some already provide such services in various forms. However, the risk of losing funding keeps them from attributing success to this approach and further develop innovative programs that could truly bring impact in the long-term.

In workforce development, 'nudging' (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008) to empower individuals as 'hoping' agents is a fairly common practice. However, this process is hardly considered central to the change that impact decisions and actions of individuals. Employment and career specialists often provide hope-based coaching — a method of non-cognitive and executive functioning skills development — but in limited fashion as an add-on to other well-regarded, deliberate programs such as human capital development (HCD) and labor force attachment (LFA) approaches. The purpose driven, non-cognitive 'nudging' has received relatively less attention compared to these dominant paradigms and subsequently have not been measured or evaluated in light of the tangible outcomes (Hong, 2013). Therefore, it is paramount that TIP as a purpose-driven psychological transformation program is tested for its impact and contribute to the mainstream discourse on workforce development.

TIP seeks to address the personal success skills among low-income jobseekers, who desire to find not only employment but a new chance to fully participate in the economic and social spheres of life through guidance and support. The program provides a non-traditional 'teaching and learning' environment focused on participant-centered development, believing firmly that all participants deserve to believe in their unlimited, personal potential in a social environment that is welcoming and safe. By unlocking the transformative power within, participants will be provided with rich educational, career, and social-emotional guidance and support in order to define the "pathways" to employment and career advancement.

TIP model suggests that it is the personal success skills that bring together the measured effectiveness on both "pathways" and "teaching and learning" outcomes. Indeed, at the core of these non-cognitive skills — manifested by both interpersonal and intrapersonal skills — is the social and emotional well-being which is crucial to an individual's successin ways that promote employment and later-stage workplace success (Shechtman et al., 2016). Literature supports the importance of these skills that TIP help strengthen. Heckman and Rubenstein (2001), referring to these skills as soft or non-cognitive skills, found that these skills predict earnings and educational attainment among GED test takers. Oyserman et al. (2004) suggest that academic "possible selves", or how one sees oneself as having the potential to achieve success, is a motivator or self-regulator in achieving success. Grit, known as individual's passion for a long-term goal and the motivation to achieve it, is another important character trait. It incorporates perseverance, ambition, and conscientiousness that promote overcoming obstacles to achieve the person's goals (Duckworth et al., 2007).

TIP program is made up of transformative 15-session modules designed to assist low-income jobseekers transition from long-term unemployment — due to welfare receipt, homelessness, substance abuse, mental health issues, prison sentencing, etc. — to employment. TIP curricular content comprises reflection and action commitment on topics — such as identity and purpose, forgiveness, goal setting, pathways, barrier inventory, source of strength, self-worth, self-perceived capability, future possibilities, self-motivation, skills/resource awareness, managing unresolved triggers of stress/anger, gratitude, and social support and

compassion — that lay the foundation for core personal success. The program's main goal is to improve participants' PSS — the transformative energy generated by capitalizing on the interplay between employment hope and perceived employment barriers as participants look toward advancing into the workforce. As a result of TIP, empowered participants will be more deeply connected to maintaining internal power and be more proactive consumers of the workforce systems.

The summary of key program content is presented in Table 1. The switch from the impossible (barrier box highlighted in red: Session 5) to the possible (employment hope box highlighted in green: Sessions 7–12) marks the core target in TIP. The impossible is equivalent to the employment barriers and the possible is equivalent to employment hope in PSS. Employment hope is the transformative motivational energy that actively switches from the barrier-filled negative reality of impossibility to the futuristic empowered state of possibility. It is not just wishful thinking hope but 'active hope' in that it springs off of the barriers with concrete action-based hope that is greater in magnitude vis-à-vis the barriers.

This switch coupled with commitment to hope actions is best supported by the concept of mental contrasting with implementation intention (MCII; Duckworth *et al.*, 2011; Oettingen, 2000; Oettingen,

Pak and Schnetter, 2001) that represents a process of concentrating on a positive outcome and simultaneously concentrating on the obstacles in the way. This mental contrasting of the barriers and hope in TIP — dwelling and indulging respectively in MCII — creates a strong association between future and reality that signals the need to overcome the obstacles in order to attain the desired future. TIP uses the 'if then' statement to generate hope actions, but deliberately committing to two such specific actions to overcome one barrier that limits one's ability to fully exercise the targeted TIP theme in each module.

The non-linear version of the curricular content can be seen in the TIP Circle summarized in 9 TIP topics (Figure 2). Every topic is linked with another indispensable and closely connected *yin-yang* partner topic in the same ring of the circle. With source of strength at the core centre, the PSS process ring serves as the main theory of change. Outer rings provide the psychological scaffolding effects to best seek one's intrinsic source of strength and maintain the practice of switching from barriers to hope throughout program participation and beyond.

TIP represents a bottom-up, multi-systems approach to transformation that can best be promoted in a group setting. Group discussions and exercises to enhance applied learning of TIP's core principles will require synergistic, supportive, respectful, and safe environment. Encouraging organic development ofsubgroups, with some facilitator guidance, for transformative

Table 1. TIP Program Content

| Sessions	Themes	Topics
1	Identity & Purpose	Survey (1) Who Am I/Purpose In Life
2		Forgiveness
3	Renewed Commitment	Goal Setting
4		Improvement & Pathways (1)
5	Barriers	Barrier Inventory
6	Source of Strength	My strength comes from
7	Employment Hope	Love/Self-Worth
8		Self-Perceived Capability
9		Future and the Possibilities
10		Self-Motivation
11		Skills and Resources Inventory
12		Improvement & Pathways (2)
13	Unresolved Triggers of Stress	Managing Stress & Anger
14	Gratitude	Finding meaning in life Count blessings Combining gratitude to meaning in life
15	Social Support and Compassion	Seeking Help & Helping Others Survey (2) Graduation Ceremony
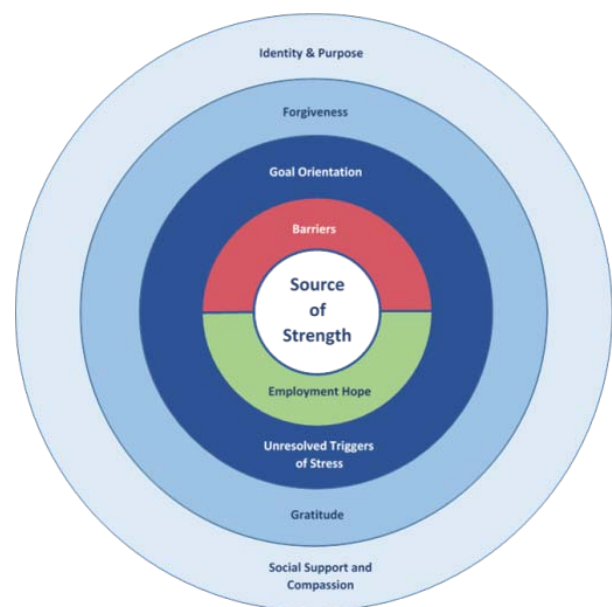
Figure 2. TIP Circle: theory of change.

group exercises, will create empowering group dynamics that reduce participatory reluctance and increase commitment to transformation and peer support and learning. Therefore, central to facilitation of TIP is social work practice with groups using the concept of mutual aid. The facilitator recognizes that the group, with its multiple helping relationships, is the primary source of change. The group worker's role is one primarily of helping members work together to achieve the goals that they have established for themselves.

Commitment to mutual contribution to each other's success is key and it requires an artful skill to facilitate this type of process — the merging of human action and word by which the environment of 'trust' is established among those that are involved in the process together. As such, the Chinese word for 'trust' is a combination of the words 'action' and 'word' [信 (trust) = 人 (human, action) + 言 (word)]. This is in line with Paolo Freire's pedagogical concept of "praxis" — a Greek term that combines reflection and action (Freire, 2000). Through the process of constant reflection, actions can be critically evaluated against the newly set personal and social justice goals and one's expressions become consistent with his or her actions. Applying praxis as an iterative process of reflection and action as the main philosophy that informs TIP makes it a transformative process. This will keep it a process of 'becoming' for participants and trainers by removing the teacher-student power hierarchy and constantly defining and redefining goals, pathways, barriers, and hope together as trusting partners who are invested in individual and mutual transformation.

TIP's philosophy rests on challenging the inherent biases that participants, including trainers, inevitably hold by asking critical reflective questions. Thinking constructively beyond the scope of current understanding of barrier-filled situations cannot be overemphasized. In this regard, the key source of transformation in TIP is empowerment. Empowerment is the "process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals, families, and communities can take action to improve their situations" (Gutierrez, 1994, p.202). Empowerment differs from coping in that the latter focuses more on how individuals adjust to stressful events while the former refers to exercising power to eliminate stressful and unjust situations (Gutierrez, 1994; 1995). TIP epitomizes the global definition of social work approved by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW).

> Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people.

Adopting this holistic view — "concentrating on the multiple, reverberating transactions between people and their environments" whereby "effects are bi-directional" — social work practice empowers people being affected by and having the capacity to change their environments (Hare, 2004, p.209). The process of empowerment therefore involves strengthening psychological control over the individual system to exercise power to influence the institutional systems (Gutierrez, 1990; 1995).

TIP is also supported by the theory of transformational leadership. In his book titled *Leadership*, Burns (1978) defined this relational process between leaders and followers as one that raise each other to "higher levels of morality and motivation." Bass (1985) further developed this idea in his book titled *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* that a transformational leader: (i) tends to be a model of integrity and fairness, (ii) sets clear goals, (iii) has high expectations, (iv) encourages others, (v) provides support and recognition, (vi) stirs the emotions of people, (vii) gets people to look beyond their self-interest, and (viii) inspires people to reach for the improbable. TIP trains individuals to be leaders of their own lives through commitment to breakthrough transformation (impossible to possible) and cultivating self-sponsorship in life skills (identity, purpose, forgiveness, goal setting, stress/anger management, gratitude, social support and compassion) that help nurture the experienced transformation. This paper conceptualizes these qualities as humanship. Humanship is defined as leadership in one's life or self-sponsorship through finding an optimal balance between awareness and action by focusing on one's internal locus of control.

TIP challenges its participants to transform first — to be the change that one wishes to see as Gandhi would suggest — and reflect upon socially unjust conditions within which one tends to face insurmountable barriers. Accordingly, the participant could gradually move the 'needle' from this zone of impossibility to that of the possibility as one plans and executes hope-based actions to achieve goals. This individual

transformation from being stuck in the barriers to be-ing a hoping agent — manifested by concrete goal setting, strong goal commitment, relentless goal pur-suit, and small step conquering of barriers to achieve smaller goals followed by newer, bigger goals — may effect transformation of other participants, community stakeholders, frontline staff, workforce development agencies, employers, business culture, and policies.

Focusing on the internal propensities of jobseekers alone may not directly and immediately bring about measurable outcomes in the mezzo and macro systems to genuinely accommodate all those who have acqu-ired PSS. Therefore, a parallel process of proactive and reactive measures needs to be put in place for TIP at the micro level to make a soft landing at the mezzo and macro levels. Other agents of change outside the labor market system will also have to fine-tune the growth and composition of the labor market by tools such as policies, advocacy, institutional reforms, etc. More specifically, the issues of shifts in the highly unfavorable macroeconomy, work supports, and post-secondary education (Lambert, 2009), instability of low-level jobs (Lambert and Waxman, 2005), em-ployer-driven flexibility in enforcing nonstandard work schedules in these jobs (Henly, Shaefer and Waxman, 2006; Lambert, 2008), and organizational stratification of opportunities for work-life balance among firms (Lambert and Haley-Lock, 2004) are of paramount concern.

4. Conclusion

As TIP is a transformative leadership program that tailors to unique individual situations and social con-texts within which the barriers operate, evaluating the non-linear, purpose driven psychological transforma-tion over time may not be easy. However, using PSS as an evaluative tool to study the impact TIP has on employment sustainability will fill the gap in the lite-rature and propel the field to confidently embrace the win-win solution of investing in holistic human de-velopment to achieve long-term success in workforce development. Validation of this empowerment path-way to ESS will help advance and improve the mod-el by continuing to focus on the non-tangibles and uncovering the essence of 'purpose' in workforce de-velopment. Maintaining this transformative approach could have significant ramifications on the success of this bottom-up intervention not only to see its impact at the onset of employment but also in the long-term

with retention and advancement outcomes.

By continuing to build evidence for PSS, it will not only give life to TIP as a new pathway model in workforce development, but also impact the larger environment in which true competition for social in-vestment in worker empowerment can be fostered. Findings from impact evaluation will help promote policy development locally and nationally that enables purpose driven psychological transformation by sus-taining a healthy local labor market structure. In this sense, marketing for humanship in the public policy making can help brand human strength as the main target of policy to build a system of bottom-up race to the top (Hong and Park, 2016). Creating a labor mar-ket system in which these purpose driven self-actuali-zation processes can bear fruit would have significant implications for how anti-poverty policies are to be shaped in this country.

With some creativity, community agencies can use curricula, counseling, coaching, and other support services to carve out spaces for their clients — their inventors of hope — to be partners in developing and implementing the customized version of TIP. Using the core elements of TIP curricular content, adaptation should be personalized to account for the unique dif-ferences in individual experiences, personalities, and attitudes. Examining the particularities of how the perceived employment barriers interact with employ-ment hope given the overarching social and environ-mental barriers impacting self-sufficiency, popula-tion-specific, contextualized TIP can be further honed. Subjectively perceived level of barriers may provide the most valid assessment particularly given the nature of it being socially constructed and how it tends to co-occur with other structural barriers. More research is needed in the way in which employment hope tra-nsforms the internalization of structural barriers into self-sufficiency and further employment outcomes.

In summary, TIP provides an opportunity for par-ticipants to rediscover the power within themselves to recognize and overcome barriers — both individual and structural — and develop intrinsically motiva-tional hope to succeed in the way that the participants define their own success. As a result, participants will achieve the TIP (true, intrinsic and purposeful) goals that will manifest into marketable tangible, intentional and practical goal achievement in society — i.e., workforce development, health and mental health, housing/homelessness, youth development/academic success, ex-offender reentry, social enterprise, human

resource development, financial literacy and capability, refugee/international migrant resettlement, Native American empowerment, etc. Once tipped, one will continue to be in the 'tipping' process to impact people in the community and the outer layer systems that need to respond and adopt by transforming with the 'tipping' agents.

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