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"I'LL BE BACK…": The Chance of a Political Comeback as Party Leader

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Abstract

Political leadership has become increasingly volatile in recent times, as experienced directly by many of the leaders of both major parties in Australia over the last few decades who have been ousted by their own party. While some of these leaders have returned to power, others have faded away into history. Political capital can play a key role in the demise or reclaim of leadership and an immediate response can become critical not only in preventing any further loss of political capital but to begin the re-building of political capital towards a return to a leadership position. This study examined ousted political leaders and the likelihood of a return to leadership. Attribution theory was applied to the first press conference given by six Australian major party leaders immediately after having lost their leadership and were analysed thematically to show what the attributional causes of their successes and failures were during their tenure as party leader. The results indicate that what one says and how one says it can be important for their prospects of returning to the seat of power. The major party leaders who returned to power tended to acknowledge successes due to the collective group, while the other major party leaders tended to attribute the successes to themselves and failures on external factors, including their own collective group. The results illustrate the importance of how one handles one's downfall in order to climb back up.

Keywords: political capital, attribution theory, trust, leadership, comebacks

Leadership has increasingly become unstable in liberal democracies as seen recently in Spain, Greece and Italy. However, others have shown consistency and stability, such as in Germany, and the United States. Ireland and Portugal are particularly noteworthy for their stability despite both suffering difficult financial crises in the last decade.

Australia has traditionally belonged to the stable category; however, the last decade has shown a shift in leadership trends, with seven Prime Ministers in less than 12 years (2007-2019). Prior to that, Australia only had four Prime Ministers in 32 years (1975-2007). Furthermore, the two major political parties have both experienced increasing leadership changes regardless of being in government or opposition. Indeed, Tiffen (2017) shows that while there were no leadership challenges on a state or federal level in the 1960s in Australia, there were 73 major party

leaders removed from leadership from the 1970s to 2017. Many countries have been unstable in terms of changes to the Prime Ministership, but party leaders have generally been stable, such as New Democracy in Greece which has had only three leaders between 1997 and 2018. During the same period in Australia, the Australian Labor Party (ALP) had nine leaders and the Liberal Party had six leaders, (five of them from 2007). Walsh (2016) succinctly queries whether this is a "crisis, a political aberration or the new normal?" The issue now is if this will continue in the same fashion or not.

This study investigates political leaders and the likelihood of a return to the leadership after having been ousted by his or her own political party. Attribution theory was applied on the first press conference given by six Australian major party leaders immediately after having lost their leadership.

Literature Review

Political leaders experience more pressure today for a number of reasons, including an increasing lack of trust in politicians, governments being less powerful in a globalised world, weekly opinion polls and the scrutiny of a fast 24-hour news cycle contributing to a high-pressure environment (Badie, 2013; Foa & Mounk, 2016; Lees-Marshment, 2012; Weller, 2014). Furthermore, the "Presidentialization" of politics naturally means more focus on the leader and an impression that the leader of a party can set out the policy direction rather than the party doing so (Webb, Poguntke, & Kolodny, 2012).

Time is therefore of the essence for a party leader to achieve results, which means the election cycle is of increasing importance. Most liberal democracies (Germany, Greece, Spain, US etc.) have a four or five-year election cycle, giving governments and opposition stability and time to develop and implement their policies. In contrast, Australia has a three-year term, giving party leaders less time to succeed, build trust and convince the voters to elect them for another term. This often results in a more volatile leadership environment. In addition, today's media further enhances the pressure on leaders to quickly gain results and avoid costly mistakes (Steketee, 2015). Party leaders are safe as long as they win elections, but they also know that elections are held often (in political terms) and that they can be removed if there is any doubt in their ability to succeed, leaving party leaders under constant pressure (Weller, 2007).

Political Capital

The electoral cycle is of great importance for a leader making key decisions and adds yet another dimension to the pressures of holding the highest office (Franzese, 2002). The limited timeframe adds to the focus on the leader's ability to garner support within the party and among the voters. Countries with a longer election cycle arguably offer more opportunity for the leader to build such support, while the shorter term makes the leader more vulnerable to criticism and potentially losing the leadership. Leaders bring with them into office a certain amount of political capital that can soon evaporate if not used prudently (Steketee, 2015).

According to Schugurensky (2000) political capital tends to refer to:

> …the degree of popularity (measured usually through opinion polls or votes) enjoyed by professional politicians and leaders. Politicians themselves refer to political capital when, for instance, they compare their capacity to mobilize people with competing leaders. (p. 421)

In Australia, Malcolm Turnbull (Prime Minister 2015-2018) made specific reference to the concept of political capital when he successfully challenged then Prime Minister Tony Abbott for the leadership on 14 September 2015:

> The one thing that is clear about our current situation is the trajectory. We have lost 30 Newspolls in a row. It is clear that the people have made up their mind about Mr Abbott's leadership. (Tony Abbott leadership challenge: Transcript of Malcolm Turnbull's blistering speech, 2015)

Using one's political capital can be associated with a political gamble of some kind, which is often an unpopular or potentially controversial policy. A leader can then invest some of her or his political capital to see it through despite resistance (Dowding, 2013). For example, Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke implemented controversial reforms in 1983, such as floating the Australian currency on the foreign exchange market, the deregulation of the financial sector including the banking sector, tax reforms, cutting tariffs in many industries, etc. (Laing & McCaffrie, 2013). This strategy can have big rewards but also carry big risks, as Grattan (2014) states: "political capital is easier to spend than to acquire" (p. 36). German Chancellor Angela Merkel's decision to accept approximately one million refugees in 2015 was a decision that cost her political capital but it seems that she had enough political capital to see through the resistance (Kornelius, 2016). In contrast, consider British Prime Minister David Cameron's decision to have a referendum on whether Britain ought to remain in the European Union, which led to his downfall (Seldon & Snowdon, 2016).

The ultimate cost of losing your political capital is, as in the case of Cameron, the loss of leadership. A leader dependent on his parliamentary colleagues (for example, the Australian Liberal Party leader) is particularly vulnerable in this situation, as opposed to leaders that either cannot be removed (or with great difficulty, such as the US President) or where the leadership is decided by party members as a whole (for example, the German Christian Democrats leader). Such vulnerability is visible in the Australian political system where traditionally the party parliamentarians choose the leader and deputy leader in the two major parties. They have had 15 party leaders in 21 years, which correlates to only 2.8 years per leader on average. Remarkably, this in turn is less than a regular election cycle of 3 years (Cross & Blais, 2011).

An ousted leader wishing to return to the leadership position needs to repair the trust that was lost from the political party by not only rebuilding political capital through positive expectations but also overcoming the negative expectations that arose because of the leadership loss (Kim, Dirks, Cooper, & Ferrin, 2006). In order to re-accumulate the political capital lost and to enhance the prospects of returning to power, re-building needs to begin immediately after the now former leader steps out of the party room. Often the first opportunity to do so is through a press conference held shortly after losing the leadership. At this time, blaming external actors (other people) and factors (structural) can easily lead to further devaluation of remaining political capital (Tomlinson & Mayer, 2009). However, being magnanimous at the time of defeat and indeed praising the very colleagues or factors that led to your demise can add medium to long-term value to your political capital, resulting in a potential future comeback to leadership (Tomlinson & Mayer, 2009). Scott and Lyman's (1968) taxonomy distinguishes two types of explanations – justifications and excuses. Justifications are where one accepts blame for the causal reason (internal), while excuses tend to blame other actors and factors (external). The immediate press conference can be said to be a "trustworthiness demonstration" to overcome the negative expectations and begin to re-build the trust (Gillespie & Dietz, 2009). What leaders attribute the cause of the outcome to in their initial press conference can therefore be critical for making a comeback. Other factors can also be important in determining whether an ousted party leader can make a comeback or not (Brett, 2013; Tiffen, 2017; Weller, 2014). Such factors can include

a leader's past behaviour towards parliamentary and cabinet colleagues (Eidenfalk, Forner, Jones, & Parrish, 2018), as well as maintaining a positive image of oneself as leader (Brown & Levinson, 1978) and positive image of party colleagues (Bull & Fetzer, 2010).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) can provide a relevant framework for considering the leader's past behaviour towards parliamentary and cabinet colleagues. SDT falls under the umbrella of motivational leadership, arguing that as a leader, fulfilling the basic psychological needs of your colleagues and staff will help in identifying their work as meaningful and important, thereby making them more motivated to work for you as their leader.

The basic psychological needs comprise of three key elements – autonomy, belonging, and competence. Autonomy refers to colleagues and staff having the choice to do their work as they see fit within a given context. Belonging refers to colleagues and staff feeling valued, respected and part of the group. Competence refers to colleagues and staff having the opportunity and ability to express one's skills effectively and efficiently (Stone, Deci, & Ryan, 2009). SDT therefore offers an alternative approach regarding how leaders can remain or return to office. Furthermore, SDT illustrates the importance of fulfilling the basic psychological needs of one's party colleagues, as failure to do so may result in dissatisfaction, which in turn may put the leadership under pressure. The instability of Australian prime ministers over recent times illustrate how failure of adhering to the principles of SDT have had an important impact on one's survival as leader when times are tough (Eidenfalk et al., 2018). If an ousted leader wishes to return to office, having applied SDT principles in the first place may serve him or her well when the leader needs the support of colleagues to be elected leader again.

Face or Facework theory can also provide a framework for considering the leader's needs, such as being well regarded by others in order to improve his or her chances of a later return to the leadership. According to Goffman (1955), these needs can be considered across three faces: their own individual face (as political leader), the face of significant others (such as the media), and the face of their own political party. Face can be seen in two dimensions, positive and negative face. Positive face is the need to be accepted and to be treated as a member of the group (Goffman, 1955). A political leader who wants to be respected as a good leader needs to be connected with her or his party colleagues (Bull & Fetzer, 2010). Negative face is the need to be independent to have freedom of action and not to be imposed upon by others (Goffman, 1955). A political leader who wants to leave his or her options open for the future should continue to focus on building or increasing positive face, while at the same time preventing the potential impact of negative face leading to suffering possible serious harm to face.

Attribution Theory

Over recent decades, attribution theory has become very influential in social psychology and works on the assumption that people try to determine why people do what they do, that is, interpret causes to an event or behaviour. Attribution refers to the "perceived cause of an outcome; it is a person's explanation of why a particular event turned out as it did" (Seifert, 2004, p. 138). Explanations as to why someone won or lost an election provides an example of this notion. Attribution theory deals with clarifying causal perception (Bar-Tal, 1978). In other words, 'attribution' is a term that is related to the perception of an individual about the causes of her or his own or another person's behaviour.

Weiner's model of attribution theory comprises two interrelated theories. The first, Weiner termed 'intrapersonal attribution theory,' which is internalised within individuals. Here, the individual predicts future outcomes, focusing on their own expectancy for future success. This entails self-directed thoughts, and feelings including self-esteem,

guilt, shame, pride, embarrassment and others (Weiner, 2000). The second theory Weiner termed 'interpersonal attribution theory' as it is externalised and focused on significant others (such as colleagues, leaders, etc.). This frames how individuals make predictions on future outcomes for the (in this case) leader, focusing on their expectation of the leader's future success. The focus is on judgements about the leader, regarding whether the individual is good or bad, responsible or not responsible, and the target for frustration and anger, or sympathy (Weiner, 2000).

Process underlying an attribution — Heider (1958) was particularly interested in the reasons that people gave for their own successes and failures. He believed that everyone had an innate interest and need to understand and control their environments. A three-stage process underlies attribution. The first stage is the behaviour of a person, this has to occur and be observed. Heider described two distinct descriptions – 'phenomenal' and 'causal'. 'Phenomenal description' focuses on the connection between the environment and the person whereas the 'causal description' focuses more on analysing the conditions, which raise awareness to the observed experience Heider (1958). The second stage, according to Heider (1958), is where the observer or perceiver has to determine a judgement in regards to whether the behaviour observed is deliberate. The third and final stage is where the perceiver/observer makes an attributional trait, that is, makes a decision on the cause or reason towards the behaviour Heider (1958).

Factors identified by Attribution Theory — There are many different behavioural causes (factors) that are attributed to perceived outcomes. According to researchers, the main behavioural causes are ability, effort, luck, task difficulty, others within the group, others outside the group, mood, health, fatigue, and many more (Holschuh, Nist, & Olejnik, 2001; Le Foll, Rascle, & Higgins, 2008; Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008; Stipek, 2002; Weiner, 1979, 1986, 1992; Yan & Li, 2008). The behavioural cause that has been assigned as the reason for the outcome has many implications. For example, depending upon the cause given for a behavioural outcome, different responses in regards to behaviours and future expectations from the individual person and observers will result. Thus, matching the cause to the performance and outcome can be very important. Each behavioural performance (whether a successful or failed outcome resulted) is measured along different dimensions. It is these causal dimensions that have the psychological force to influence expectancies, emotions, self-efficacy beliefs, effects and actual behaviours (Schunk et al., 2008).

Motivational dimensions in Attribution Theory — The motivational push of attributions in the theory originates from a classification along dimensions based on an analysis of the individual's causal structure. These dimensions have implications for an individual's expectancy beliefs, emotions, and motivated behaviours (Schunk et al., 2008). Weiner (1979, 1985, 1986) proposed that attributions imposed by an individual to explain success and failure have three dimensions—locus of causality, controllability and stability. Locus of causality differentiates a cause as internal or external to the individual. Controllability evaluates whether a cause was controllable or not and similarly, stability distinguishes whether a cause is likely to change or not in the future.

Each of these three dimensions of causality have both a primary psychological function and a number of secondary effects. According to Weiner (1979), attribution theory is captured by emotions. These emotions (secondary effects), combined with "expectancy beliefs, can be used to predict choice, persistence, and achievement behaviour" (Schunk et al., 2008, p. 104).

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In relation to these secondary effects, the locus of causation dimension links to feelings of pride. The locus of causation dimension can build or break a person's self-esteem or self-worth (Weiner, 1994) if the cause is placed within the individual. For example, a cause that is attributed to an individual, such as ability that resulted in success, produces an emotional feeling of pride and an increase in self-esteem. Alternatively, a cause attributed to an individual, such as ability that resulted in failure, produces an emotional feeling of humility, and a decrease in self-esteem.

The dimension of controllability and emotions focuses on personal reactions experienced by individuals as they react to their own performances, and the effect experienced by individuals as they evaluate or react to others' performances. In terms of personal reactions of individuals about their own performances, the research suggests that personal controllability is associated with shame and guilt-related emotions (Weiner, 1986). If a cause is seen as controllable, the individual is deemed responsible, whereas uncontrollable causes generate a perception of less personal responsibility for the outcome (Weiner, 1994). In terms of reactions to other individuals for their performance, if the individual's performance is seen as controllable, the observers are likely to feel a sense of anger and frustration (negative emotional behaviours) towards them. Alternatively, they may feel a sense of pity or sympathy (positive emotional behaviours) if the cause is seen as uncontrollable.

Finally, the dimension of stability affects individuals' future expectations and can result in helplessness and helpfulness. In regards to future expectations, individuals who succeed through a stable cause (for example, ability) are likely to create future expectations of success, and feel greater optimism for the future. Alternatively, those who fail through a stable cause (such as lack of ability) are likely to create future expectations of failure, and feel greater helplessness for the future.

Feedback — Comments made either about another person's performance or about one's own performance can be either positive or negative, or focus on the positive or the negative aspects of the performance. While generally more praise needs to be highlighted in comparison to criticism (Viera & Kramer, 2016) in order to lead to positive feelings of the process, the ratio of positive to negative comments varies amongst studies. Furthermore, in Wu and Coleman's (2014) study, which conducted an experiment to examine the impact of effect on candidate evaluation and voting intention, using three treatments: positive, negative, and neutral, of a fictional congressional office-seeker, they found that even though positive effect made an impact on voting, the negative exert a more powerful force.

An Attributional Approach to Political Achievements

Attribution theory offers a useful framework for exploring party leaders' responses to political situations, such as success or failure (for example, having just been replaced by one of your own party members). Furthermore, the linkages among the attributional dimensions, the emotions experienced, and the subsequent behaviours can help us to understand party leader and party member effects and behaviours. Attributional principles can be applied, either by individual party leaders (intra-political attribution) trying to understand their own behaviour and outcomes, or by others such as parliamentary colleagues trying to analyse and understand the party leaders' performance in order to improve the party's performance (inter-political attribution).

Intra-political attribution — Intra-political attribution is a self-reflective identification of a cause that an individual attributes about an individualised political event. While most attributional theory literature focuses on the personal aspects of the causes of an event, in the political arena it is more on the multi-faceted aspects of the issues and

the consequential impact that the causes can play on the party and the public at large. For this reason, the term intra-political attribution is introduced.

Inter-political attribution — Inter-political attribution refers to external actors (such as parliamentary colleagues, voters, public, etc.), where those outside the individual attempt to identify causes of political events. Similar to above, whereas most of the literature focuses on the personal aspects of the causes of an event, it is the multi-faceted aspects and issues in the political arena that can play a substantial impact on the individual, party, and public in the future.

Attributional messages and performance — In order to begin the process of rebuilding confidence and political capital, overcoming negative and developing more positive expectations is important from the very beginning (Gillespie & Dietz, 2009). Sending signals to the relevant audience through what Gillespie and Dietz (2009) referred to as "positive promotion of renewed trustworthiness" (p. 134) that demonstrates a level of competence, confidence, and ability is more likely to result in favourable beliefs and expectations from parliamentary colleagues in the future. Furthermore, in order to re-establish political capital, one must consider focusing on positive attributional causal comments. Nevertheless, as Kim, Dirks, Cooper, and Ferrin (2006) noted, some researchers have observed that political capital can be enhanced if ousted leaders accept some causal responsibility for the outcome. Moreover, Kim et al. (2006) stated that research has found that doing this can lead to an acknowledgment of responsibility, which in turn can result in a negative outcome. According to Weiner (1986), stability plays a key part in regard to future expectations. This can be because an outcome that results from a stable cause is likely to lead to future expectations of the same or similar circumstances. Alternatively, an outcome due to an unstable cause may lead one to have different expectations in the future (Tomlinson & Mayer, 2009).

Aim of the Study

This paper builds on Kim et al.'s (2006) 'trust repair decision tree' model, which used Heider's (1958) attributional theory with its internal and external locus of causalities. In addition to Kim et al.'s (2006) original model, which only considered one dimension of internal/external attributional causes, our study used Weiner's (1979) three-dimensional attributional model (the internal/external locus of causality, controllability and stability) (see Figure 1).
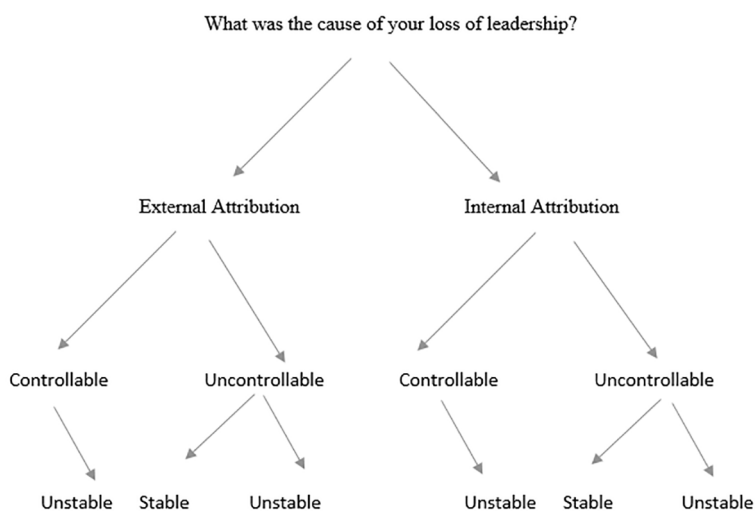

Figure 1. Three-dimensional attributional causality towards political comeback.

Research has shown that controllability and stability can play an important part in rebuilding political capital, trust, and positive beliefs in a leader (Eberley, Holley, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2011; Wan & Zhang, 2014) and questions have arisen as to whether the locus of causality dimension alone captures the entire conceptual space of this phenomenon. Therefore, using Weiner's (1979) three-dimensional attributional theory for this study was important. Based on the literature and Figure 1, our research question was; to what extent do the comments made by party leaders immediately after having been ousted influence the chance of a comeback?

Methods

Case Studies

The sample consisted of six Australian case studies, each of an ousted party leader. The selection of ousted party leaders was a criterion-based sample evenly represented over both major political parties in Australia. Furthermore, the selection of ousted party leaders consisted of an even number of those who returned as party leaders and those who did not. Since 1989 there were three party leaders who had been replaced who subsequently made a comeback. Two of these leaders were from the Liberal Party and one from the ALP. In order for the sample to be evenly represented across both major political parties, it was important to identify three non-returning ousted leaders with the opposite party affiliations. Thus, a total of nine leaders were replaced that did not return to the leadership. Four were from the Liberal Party and five were from the ALP. As two of the returning leaders were from the Liberal Party and one from the ALP, the aim was to get an even sample by selecting two of the non-returning leaders from the ALP and one from the Liberal Party. The sample was chosen on proximity of time with the returning leaders. The selected cases that met both sets of criteria covered the last three decades. As Table 1 shows, half of the sample was from the Liberal Party and half were from the ALP, and again half made a comeback to the leadership and half did not.

Table 1

Ousted Party Leaders From the Two Major Political Parties in Australia

Party Leader	Party	Year ousted	Comeback?	Year as leader	Additional information
John Howard	Liberal	1989	Yes	1985-1989 1995-2007	Ousted by Andrew Peacock
Bob Hawke	ALP	1991	No	1983-1991	Ousted by Paul Keating
Brendan Nelson	Liberal	2008	No	2007-2008	Ousted by Malcolm Turnbull
Malcolm Turnbull	Liberal	2009	Yes	2008-2009 2015-2018	Ousted by Tony Abbott
Kevin Rudd	ALP	2010	Yes	2006-2010 2013-2013	Ousted by Julia Gillard
Julia Gillard	ALP	2013	No	2010-2013	Ousted by Kevin Rudd

Materials

As highlighted earlier, the sooner the ousted leader begins the process of rebuilding political capital the greater the potential likelihood of opportunity in regaining leadership in the future. Therefore, the leaders' first full press conference after being replaced was selected to identify their immediate attribution of the causes of their loss of leadership. Analysing later press conferences or interviews would allow the research subject to alter their response and thereby bring into question the validity of their actual causal attributions to being ousted. Moreover, all of the six participants gave their first full press conference shortly after being replaced which made a more reliable comparison of data. The press conference data for each participant was obtained from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation as well as from YouTube.

Analysis

Methodologically, the research involved analysing the initial press conference in relation to attributional responses in accordance with Weiner's three dimensions (internal/external; controllable/uncontrollable; stable/unstable). Following Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) approach to coding, the analysis involved 'first cycle' and 'second cycle' coding stages. For Saldaña (2013), a code is 'most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data' (Saldaña, 2013, p. 3). First cycle coding involves assigning codes to chunks of data. Second cycle coding involves further analysing these initial chunks of data to identify key themes within them.

From the data, first cycle coding involved both authors independently coding the data into the attributional categories discussed above (locus of causality; controllability; stability). A fourth dimension was included in the coding process that identified comments as positive or negative. This first cycle involved an iterative process in which coding and recoding were carried out until all of the data could be classified within the thematic categories. Both authors carried out coding independently. Categories were then check-coded and joint agreement was reached on final coding through discussion. This process was carried out six times (one per case study), resulting in an overall inter-coder reliability of 91% (acceptance rate is 80% according to Miles et al., 2014). Furthermore, the inter-coder reliability check using Cohen's Kappa (1960) resulted in an agreement of $k = 0.79$ confirming that an acceptable agreement between the two authors had been reached considering the possible chance of agreements upon statements. During the iterative process it was deemed necessary to add a third group to the internal/external dimension within the attribution theory. This third group was categorised as a 'collective' variable and consisted of comments to the individual party leader and others (cabinet, party as a whole etc.) combined that did not fit with either internal or external locus of causality. For example, if an ousted party leader made a positive comment such as "I am proud of what we've achieved over the past two years…We've signed free trade agreements with our largest trading partners, with Japan, with Korea, and with China" this would fit within this new collective variable as it refers not simply to either internal only or external factors but to both combined. If the comment focused solely on the individual leader then this would be classed as an internal locus of causality. For example, a comment such as "I was the first prime minister to spend a week a year in remote Indigenous Australia and I hope I'm not the last" would fit within the internal category. Finally, if the comment focused solely on 'others' then this would be classed as an external locus of causality. For example, a comment such as "…my staff, who have been absolutely unceasing in their devotion to our party and our country, especially my chief of staff" would fit within the external category.

Second cycle coding then involved both researchers collectively identifying key themes/patterns within each of these initial categories. Specifically, this process revealed several themes within each attributional category for each ousted leader as well as collectively for those who made a comeback and those who did not, as outlined in the results below. Furthermore, an analysis of party affiliation showed no attributional differences between the two parties investigated. Nothing indicated that belonging to one political party would increase or decrease one's chances of returning to the leadership.

Results

The results are presented firstly by individual studies of each ousted leader in regard to their first press conference and what they attributed the cause of their leadership loss in relation to Weiner's (1979) three-dimensional (internal/external (as well as collective); controllable/uncontrollable; and, stable/unstable) model. Next the results present the leaders' comments in a more holistic way by grouping the three leaders who made a comeback into leadership compared to the three leaders who did not. The order of the case studies is based on the date of loss of leadership.

Study 1 – John Howard (Comeback)

During John Howard's initial press conference after being replaced as the Liberal party leader, all of his attributional comments (100%) were positive and there were no negative comments. Of the positive attributional comments made, 66.5% were categorised as Collective Controllable Unstable causes, and 33.5% External Uncontrollable Stable causes.

In regards to Howard's positive comments within the Collective locus of causality, there emerged two themes: domestic achievement, and government direction. Regarding domestic achievement, such comments include:

"The stance that the Liberal party in particular took over de-regulation over the wheat industry"

Comments within the theme of government direction include:

"We have re-established a joint senate ticket in Victoria"

Moreover, Howard's positive comments within the External locus of causality focused around one theme: party member praise. Such comments include:

"He is a great whip"

"Alan was a very good shadow minister and I thank him for his help and for his loyalty and for his friendship"

Overall, Howard only made positive attributional comments in which all were either External or Collective locus of causality. Thus, Howard only praised others and not himself nor criticised anyone.

Study 2 – Bob Hawke (No Comeback)

During Bob Hawke's initial press conference after being replaced as the ALP party leader, in relation to his attributional comments, two thirds of the comments (66.5%) were positive comments, whereas one third of the comments (33.5%) were negative. All of the positive attributional comments made were Internal Controllable Unstable

(100%), while of the negative comments, 16.5% were Internal Controllable Unstable, 67% were External Uncontrollable Stable, and 16.5% were Collective Controllable Stable.

In regards to Hawke's positive comments, none of them were within the External or Collective locus of causality. All of Hawke's positive comments were within the Internal locus of causality. Two themes emerged from these comments; personal contribution and achievement, and his strength. Comments within the theme of personal contribution and achievement include:

> "The Australia of 1991 is a profoundly better place than the Australia of early 1983 that I inherited"

> "I had the best chance of leading the Labor Party to victory in what I regard as one of the most important post-war elections, the 1993 election"

> "I stayed for one reason and one reason only, that was the belief that I held, and I must be honest I continue to hold, that I was the one who had the best chance of winning what I think is going to be just about the most important post-war election"

In relation to Hawke's negative comments within the External locus of causality the themes that emerged included: media coverage, and, party perception about him being replaced. Comments within the theme of media coverage include:

> (Regarding the press gallery) "I would be dishonest if I didn't say it, so I'll say it briefly; I think you have been bloody hopeless"

Comments within the theme of party perception about him being replaced include:

> "Some of my dear friends had made the suggestion that from the point of view of my own interests that perhaps I should consider standing down and I would have stayed on as Prime Minister until January and they thought that might be easier for me"

> "Some people said I had no chance"

However, Hawke did demonstrate some awareness of his own mistakes by internally commenting, "Well, I have made mistakes. We probably don't have long enough for your satisfaction to detail them all but I accept that mistakes have been made".

Overall, while Hawke made some positive comments they were all Internal locus of causality. Furthermore, Hawke generally made negative comments that were in the External locus of causality. Thus, Hawke generally praised himself and criticised others.

Study 3 – Brendan Nelson (No Comeback)

During Brendan Nelson's initial press conference after being replaced as the Liberal Party leader, in relation to his attributional comments, 5.5% were positive comments while 94.5% were negative. The positive comments made were Internal Controllable Unstable, while all of the negative comments (100%) were External Uncontrollable Stable.

In regards to Nelson's comments, nearly all of his comments were negative. The only praise that Nelson expressed was Internal locus of causality around his personal achievement around single-aged pension. Such comments include:

> "I went out to prosecute an argument, for example, the need to increase the single aged pension"

Moreover, in relation to Nelson's negative comments all of them were within the External locus of causality. The comments emerged into three themes: timing of leadership, media criticism, and party tension. Comments within the theme of timing of leadership include:

> "And as we all know and I knew myself, whoever was going to take the leadership early on, it was likely to be a poisoned chalice and so that sort of put us off balance a bit at the start"

Comments within the theme of media criticism include:

> "…I think some of the coverage that we've seen over the last or at least since the election there are people in the media who barely conceal their political petticoat who were I think looking forward […] to the liberal party being in opposition and whoever was going to be the leader was going to be the subject of all sorts of criticism and so on but there were others however I think who perhaps could have been a bit more objective at least in reporting things that I was saying and doing"

Comments within the theme of party tension include:

> "The things that leak out are not the things you want to leak out, but I said to them [at our party room meeting] a couple of months ago, I said for some of you it is all a game"

Overall, Nelson made nearly all negative comments, which were External locus of causality. The only praise was Internal locus of causality. Thus, Nelson only criticised others without taking any responsibility himself and with minimum praise been given to himself and not others.

Study 4 – Malcolm Turnbull (Comeback)

During Malcolm Turnbull's initial press conference after being replaced as the Liberal party leader, all of his attributional comments (100%) were positive. They were divided up into three categories: 25% Internal Controllable Unstable comments; 50% External Uncontrollable Stable comments; and, 25% Collective Controllable Unstable comments.

In regards to Turnbull's positive comments within the Collective locus of causality theme there was around the party's achievement in negotiations with the government. Comments within this theme include:

> "…reflects the very substantial concessions the government made to us as a result of our negotiations, that legislation, in my view, is worthy of support"

Furthermore, Turnbull's positive comments within the External locus of causality resulted in two themes: praising cabinet loyalty, and appreciation of others. Comments within the theme of praising cabinet loyalty include:

> "I just want to say thank you to my colleagues in the party room who stuck with me, who supported me both at the spill and in the leadership ballot. I want to thank them, there have been difficult times, there has been a lot of drama going on and I want to thank all of them for their loyal support"

Comments within the theme of appreciation of others include:

> "I also want to thank through you, the media, the thousands of Australians"

Although all of Turnbull's comments were positive and primarily either External or Collective locus of causality he made reference to the positive Internal Controllable Unstable category around his stance towards climate change.

"Principled stance I took around climate change"

Overall, Turnbull only made positive attributional comments in which most were either External or Collective locus of causality. Thus, Turnbull predominantly praised others and did not criticise anyone else.

Study 5 – Kevin Rudd (Comeback)

During Kevin Rudd's initial press conference after being replaced as the ALP party leader, all of his attributional comments (100%) were positive. These positive comments were divided up into three categories: 4% External Uncontrollable Stable comments; 12% Collective Controllable Stable comments; and, 84% Collective Controllable Unstable.

In regards to Rudd's comments, all of them were positive Collective or External locus of causality. Of the Collective comments, two themes emerged; domestic achievements and international achievements. Comments within the theme of domestic achievements include:

"I'm proud of the fact that we are building 20 regional cancer centres right across our country"

"And I am most proud of the fact that about here, we greeted the stolen generation"

Comments within the theme of international achievements include:

"I'm proud of the fact that the first thing we did in government was ratify the Kyoto Protocol"

"I'm also proud of the fact that on the global stage Australia is now at the table of the G20"

Moreover, within the External locus of causality the theme that emerged was on cabinet and Ministry praise. Such comments include:

"I've been blessed and aided by the fact that they [the ministry and the cabinet] have given every ounce of their intelligence, every ounce of their energy, every ounce of their ability to delivering the reforms and many others besides that I just referred to"

Overall, Rudd only made positive attributional comments in which all were either External or Collective locus of causality. Thus, Rudd only praised others and not himself, nor criticised anyone.

Study 6 – Julia Gillard (No Comeback)

During Julia Gillard's initial press conference after being replaced as the ALP party leader, 68% of her attributional comments were positive comments, while 32% were negative. Her positive comments were divided up into four categories; 31% Internal Controllable Unstable comments; 8% Internal Uncontrollable Stable comments; 23% Collective Controllable Unstable; and 38% Collective Controllable Stable. Her negative comments consisted of 17% External Controllable Unstable, while 83% of her comments were External Uncontrollable Stable.

In regards to Gillard's positive comments within the Collective locus of causality the theme that emerged included: policy achievements by her government. Such comments include:

"Very pleased that we pushed through and put a price on carbon"

"What we have achieved with disability care"

"I am very proud too of the work we have done in Australian schools"

However, Gillard also made positive comments within the Internal locus of causality with two themes that were: personal general achievements; and, personal characteristics and behaviours. Comments within the theme of personal general achievements include:

> "I have prevailed to ensure that this country is made stronger, and smarter, and fairer for the future"

> "I have, either as prime minister or as acting prime minister, attended 24 funerals for soldiers lost in Afghanistan"

Comments within the theme of personal characteristics and behaviours include:

> "I thank them for giving the opportunity not only to me to serve the nation but to serve as the first female prime minister"

In relation to the negative comments that Gillard made within the External locus of causality, the themes included; a minority-divided party, and media pressure. Comments within the theme of a minority-divided party include:

> "I have faced a minority parliament"

> "I have also faced internal division in my political party"

Comments within the theme of media pressure include:

> "There has been a lot of analysis [in the media] about the so-called gender wars, of me playing the so-called gender card, because heavens know no one noticed I was a woman until I raised it"

Overall, while Gillard made some positive Collective Controllable comments, she also made some positive Internal Controllable Unstable and Uncontrollable Stable comments as well as negative External comments. Thus, while Gillard did praise others it was overshadowed by her praising herself and criticising others.

Combined Results

As can be seen in Table 2, in regard to the three leaders who made a comeback, only positive attributional comments were made. Nearly all of these comments (97% - 34 comments) were divided up into three categories: 74% (26 comments) Collective Controllable Unstable comments; 14% (5 comments) External Uncontrollable Stable comments; and 9% (3 comments) Collective Controllable Stable comments. Overall, the overarching themes that emerged from the three leaders who made a comeback were positively within the collective locus of causality and were based around domestic and international achievements. Furthermore, the themes that emerged from these leaders were also positively within the external locus of causality and were based around praising members of the cabinet as well as appreciation of others.

Concerning the three leaders who did not make a comeback, both positive and negative attributional comments were made. In relation to the positive comments, nearly all of these comments (84% - 22 comments) were divided up into two categories: 65% (17 comments) Internal Controllable Stable comments; and, 19% (5 comments) Collective Controllable Unstable comments. In regard to the negative comments, nearly all of these (89.5% - 26 comments) were categorised into only one category: External Uncontrollable Stable. Overall, the overarching themes that emerged from the three leaders who did not make a comeback were positively within the internal locus of causality and were based around generic personal achievement, and specific personal achievement. Moreover, the themes that emerged from these leaders in regards to negative comments were within the external locus of causality and were based around the media pressure as well as party tensions.

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Table 2

Overall Attributional Comments Made by Ousted Party Leaders

		External				Internal				Collective			
		Controllable		Uncontrollable		Controllable		Uncontrollable		Controllable		Uncontrollable	
Comment	Comeback?	Unstable	Stable	Unstable	Stable	Unstable	Stable	Unstable	Stable	Unstable	Stable	Unstable	Stable
Positive	Come Back				5 (14%)	1 (3%)				26 (74%)	3 (9%)		
Positive	No Come Back					17 (65%)	1 (4%)			3 (12%)	5 (19%)		
Negative	Come Back												
Negative	No Come Back	1 (3.5%)			26 (89.5%)	1 (3.5%)					1 (3.5%)		

Discussion

As stated earlier, a lack of trust in politicians, opinion polls, and a 24-hour news-cycle, leaders that have been ousted need to re-build their political capital (Badie, 2013; Foa & Mounk, 2016; Lees-Marshment, 2012; Weller, 2014). With time therefore being of the essence, the first opportunity to re-build their political capital is the immediate press conference.

As the results show, to overcome the negative expectations and begin to re-build the trust and political capital in order to regain the leadership in the future, the initial press conference can be said to be a "trustworthiness demonstration" (Gillespie & Dietz, 2009).

Comeback

For those leaders who made a comeback, nearly all of their comments that were focused within the external or collective dimension were positive. Moreover, interestingly, only one comment made by these leaders was internally positive. That is, these leaders generally did not claim to have achieved anything by themselves. Rather, any positive achievement comments that they stated they attributed to either external factors (such as others) or collective factors (such as cabinet), which the leader in question was a part of. Furthermore, these positive accomplishments by the party were based on domestic and international achievements, while the positive comments towards others were based praising members of the cabinet as well as appreciation of support from various actors. In relation to negative comments, those leaders who made a comeback, it was notable that they did not attribute a single negative comment to the cause of their leadership loss. Thus, rather than highlighting the cause of leadership loss and risk a decrease in the party's own belief in the leader's capability to lead again in the future, these leaders immediately focused on re-building political capital for a potential future comeback as well as re-building positive face (Goffman, 1955) to begin re-connecting with the party and other actors. As Viera and Kramer (2016) have illustrated, more focus on positive comments is a successful strategy. These findings link in part to Kim and colleagues who emphasised that in order to re-build trust, that is, in this case political capital; one needs to focus on positive expectations (Kim et al., 2006).

No Comeback

For those leaders who did not make a comeback, more than half of their comments were negative. Of those negative comments made nearly all were External, Uncontrollable, and Stable causes, suggesting that the leader was excusing themselves from the outcome (Kim et al., 2006; Scott & Lyman, 1968; Weiner, 1994). This in part links to Tomlinson and Mayer's (2009) finding that blaming external factors as a cause of the leadership loss will likely result in further devaluation of remaining political capital. As Wu and Coleman (2014) found, even though positive comments can increase political capital, negative comments can be even more detrimental and decrease what political capital leaders have left at a faster rate. Moreover, excusing themselves from the outcome as well as blaming others can lead to an increase in negative face (Goffman, 1955) which can result in further harm to face. These negative comments were based around the media and tension within the party.

Furthermore, Weiner (1986) states that those who identified the cause of failure as Stable are likely to hold future expectations as unchangeable. Those leaders who did not make a comeback attributed the cause to their leadership loss to factors, which they are not held responsible for, and will not change over time. In regard to the positive comments made by these leaders, over two thirds of these comments were internal, that is, they claimed to have achieved successes by themselves. These included statements around generic and specific personal achievements of these leaders. Interestingly, not one positive comment made by these leaders was attributed to external factors alone, that is, praising others (such as individuals) for successful achievements. These leaders' only positive comments that included others also included themselves and were grouped within the Collective dimension. In regard to building political capital to lead again in the future, these leaders' initial press conferences focused on the cause of leadership loss in a negative attributional way and did not predominantly focus on re-building their political capital for a potential future comeback. The behavioural causes that were assigned provide an explanation of those leaders' failure to come back to leadership. This may likely cause a potential decrease in the party's own belief in the leader's capability to lead again in the future.

Differences

The reason for the outcome can be attributed to a number of causes that could result in psychological impacts (Schunk et al., 2008; Weiner, 1986, 1992) resulting in a change of political capital. Comparing the two groups of leaders' immediate press conferences, the results show important differences between the two groups. While those who made a comeback focused exclusively on positive comments, the leaders who did not make a comeback were much more negative in their comments. Concerning the positive comments, the leaders who made a comeback focused almost exclusively on the External or Collective causal attributional dimensions, while the leaders who did not make a comeback predominantly focused on the Internal causal attributional dimension.

Translating these differences into the re-building of political capital for a potential future comeback, it is clear that focus needs to be on positive comments focusing on the External and Collective causal attributional dimensions. Comments made by leaders who made a comeback were predominantly in this category, while the leaders who did not make a comeback also made comments in the positive Collective dimension. However, those leaders who did not make a comeback made far more positive comments in the Internal causal attributional dimension, as well as negative comments in the External Uncontrollable Stable causal attributional dimension, thereby eroding political capital gained from the few positive comments made in the Collective dimension. Such behaviour conforms to Scott and Lyman's (1968) findings that, those leaders who did not make a comeback, almost all of their attributional causal negative comments were deemed to be excuses, that is, they were External to the individual (blaming

other actors and factors). For those leaders who did make a comeback, no attributional causal negative comments were made as justification or excuses.

For leaders to make a comeback the positive attributional comments need to be made within the External locus of causality dimension, as opposed to the Internal locus of causality. Furthermore, it was also discovered that the comments made did not only fit in to the External or Internal locus of causality dimensions (as discussed earlier). This resulted in a third category within this dimension, namely the Collective locus of causality. The results show that for leaders to make a comeback, the positive attributional comments need to be made either within the External or Collective locus of causality.

Leaders are not likely to make a comeback if the negative attributional comments made are within the External, Uncontrollable, and Stable dimensions (see Figure 2). Future research will therefore need to examine negative comments further using Weiner's attribution theory to investigate whether negative causal comments can be used to re-build political capital.
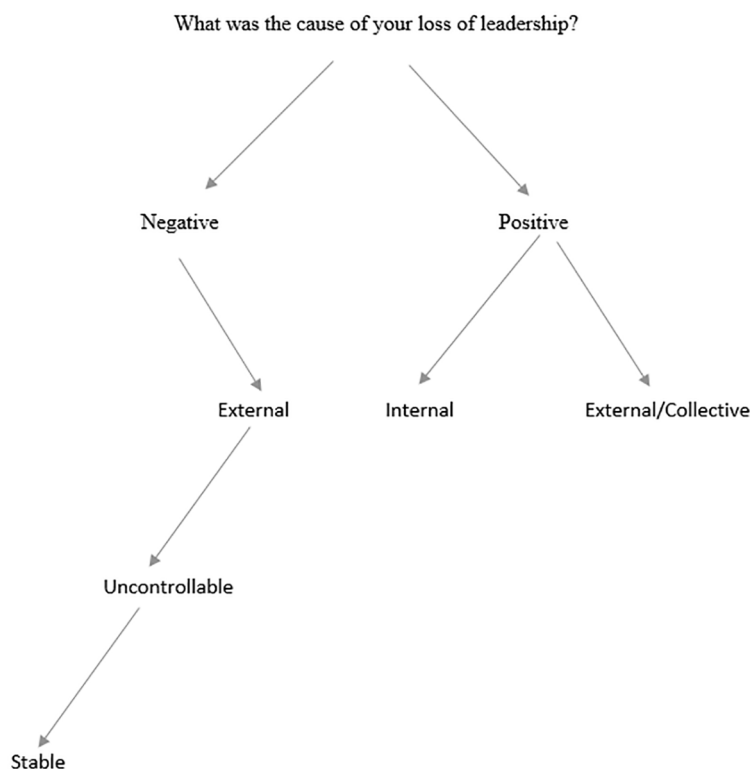

Figure 2. Three-dimensional intra-political attributional causality towards returning to leadership.

While the results to this study were clearly identified, there were limitations which need to be highlighted. The limitations include that the sample was an Australian sample at the federal level only. Thus, the results need to be taken cautiously, as they may not be the same on state or international level.

As stated earlier, the study illustrates an important variable when considering whether an ousted leader could make a comeback or not. Indeed, the party's members of parliament who ultimately elect the party leader are of course important to the leader's ability to stay as leader and has become increasingly important over the past

decades (Brett, 2013). Furthermore, as the leader is being dependent on his or her parliamentary colleagues, the pressure from a range of domestic, international actors, and, increasingly, from the media, which only enhances the dependency on being able to ensure that the colleagues that she or he is equipped to deal with these pressures (Weller, 2014). The media in particular play an increasing role in leadership battles, as discussed in length by Tiffen (2017). Thus, this paper acknowledges that although the first press conference and the attribution of the ousted party leader is important, it is not the only variable that determines whether the leader will succeed to return to the leadership or not. Rather, it is a variable that must be taken into consideration when one analyses political leadership comebacks.

Future Research

The findings in this study can lead to research in a number of directions in the future. First, future research could look at intra-political attribution of party leaders in their first full press conference at a state and local level of government. Furthermore, research can also explore at the international level to see if similar findings are universal or not.

Second, as well as focus on intra-political attribution it would also be useful to look into inter-political attribution (party colleagues, media, commentators etc.) to investigate what others believe the cause to be. Third, future research could also examine any possible correlation between intra-political and inter-political attribution theory at a local, state, national, and international level to see whether any similarities and differences occur between the ousted party leaders and the external actors' attributions.

Conclusion

Within the last decade, Australia has had many leadership challenges across both major political parties. Concern is gradually rising in regard to Australia's stability in leadership. With the pressure rising on leaders to perform in an environment where the amount of political capital is important for survival, rebuilding political capital immediately after having been ousted as party leader is of the utmost importance for any future prospect of returning to the leadership. While attributing to Internal and External factors is important in building political capital immediately after having been replaced, another locus of causality is worth considering in the area of politics. Collective locus of causality can play an important part in building political capital when used appropriately. An ousted party leader with future leadership aspirations would gain political capital by 'accentuating the positive' comments to the Collective locus of causality, as well as External locus of causality. Alternatively, praising Internal causality, results in a decrease in political capital. Furthermore, any negative comments also decrease what remains of the political capital.

This brings into question whether Australia's political leadership crisis nurtures instability and a lack of trust in government. The lesson learned from this paper is that the message sent from the leadership needs to be a positive message of unity and collective rather than division and individual aspirations.

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Competing Interests

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