1. Introduction

Authentic leadership (AL) is “as a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development” (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008: 94). In recent years, the topic is a target of great interest both among scholars (e.g., Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008) and practitioners (e.g., George, 2003). Both argue that AL promotes positive employees’ attitudes and behaviors and contributes to organizational performance. More empirical research is necessary for continuing to test this premise.

This paper merges the AL, psychological capital (PsyCap; Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007), and creativity literatures, and shows how AL predicts employees’ creativity both directly and through the mediating role of PsyCap (Fig. 1). PsyCap is an individual’s positive psychological state of development characterized by: “(1) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success” (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007: 3). The study answers calls to integrate AL and PsyCap literatures (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005; Yammarino, Dionne, Schriesheim, & Dansereau, 2008) and helps to understand the process through which AL contributes to employees’ creativity.

Studying the antecedents of employees’ creativity is important because, to survive and prosper, organizations need to take full advantage of their employees’ creative potential, so that innovation, change, learning, performance, and competitiveness can be sustained. Creativity in the workplace represents the production of novel and useful ideas or solutions concerning products, services, processes, and procedures (Amabile, 1988, 1997; Oldham & Cummings, 1997). The goal of creative performance is to solve problems, to roll out new products and services, to take advantage of business opportunities, and to improve organizational effectiveness.

Individual creativity is a function of individual and social/contextual factors (Egan, 2005; Oldham & Cummings, 1997; Shalley & Gilson, 2004). One of the most relevant contextual factors is leadership. Several researchers focus on identifying the role of specific leadership behaviors and leaders’ characteristics in supporting, suppressing, facilitating, or inhibiting creativity (e.g., Hirst, van Dick, & van Knippenberg, 2009; Mumford, Scott, Gaddis, & Strange, 2002; Oldham & Cummings, 1997; Rego, Sousa, Cunha, Correia, & Saur, 2007; Reiter-Palmon and Illies, 2004; Shalley &...
2. Theory and hypotheses

2.1. The authentic leadership construct

The AL construct comprises four dimensions: (1) Self-awareness is the degree to which the leader expresses an understanding of how (s)he derives and makes sense of the world and is aware of his or her strengths, limitations, how others see him or her, and how (s)he impacts others (Kernis, 2003; Walumbwa et al., 2008); (2) Balanced processing is the degree to which the leader objectively analyzes the relevant data before coming to a decision and solicits views that challenge deeply held positions (Gardner et al., 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008); (3) Internalized moral perspective refers to the degree to which the leader sets a high standard for moral and ethical conduct, guides actions by internal moral standards and values (versus group, organizational, and societal pressures), and expresses decision making and behaviors that are consistent with such internalized values (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al., 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008); (4) Relational transparency is the degree to which the leader presents his/her authentic self (as opposed to a false or distorted self) to others, openly shares information, and expresses his/her true thoughts and feelings, reinforcing a level of openness with others that provides them with an opportunity to be forthcoming with their ideas, challenges, and opinions.

Empirical evidence (e.g., Kernis & Goldman, 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008, forthcoming) shows that a core AL factor can emerge from the relationships among the four dimensions. Walumbwa et al. (2008, forthcoming) finds that individual factors do not add any meaningful incremental validity beyond the common core higher factor, thus suggesting that the variance attributable to overall AL is more important than the variance imputable to each individual dimension of the AL construct. Considering AL as a core construct is also conceptually plausible, the literature proposing that the four AL dimensions are self-regulatory processes governed, partially, through leaders’ internal standards and their evaluations of their own behavior (Gardner et al., 2005).

Therefore, the study hypothesizes considerable overlap among the four dimensions, and that the higher order AL construct will help to explain the conceptual and empirical overlap discussed above. Some research (Walumbwa, Luthans, Avey, & Oke, 2009; Walumbwa et al., 2008) also finds effects of AL on important work attitudes and behaviors, after controlling the effects of ethical and transformational leadership. Although the present study cannot include these latter constructs (because some organizations that participate in the study require applying a short survey), evidence suggests that the construct has incremental validity regarding those “older” leadership constructs.

2.2. The PsyCap construct

The PsyCap construct comprises four dimensions: self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience. PsyCap meets conceptual and empirical criteria of being distinct from other constructs (Luthans, Avolio, & Norman, 2007; Youssef & Luthans, 2007). While Peterson and Seligman’s (2004) character strengths and virtues are “trait-like” (relatively stable and difficult to change), the PsyCap is “state-like,” and thus relatively malleable and open to development. Both theory-building and prior research on hope, resilience, optimism, and efficacy indicate that such personal strengths are amenable to development (Luthans, Avey, Norman, & Combs, 2006; Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007; Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007). Such a state-like nature also differentiates PsyCap from positively-oriented organizational behavior trait-like constructs, such as “Big Five” personality dimensions or core self-evaluations (Judge, Bono, Erez, & Thoresen, 2003).

Earlier research suggests that commonalities among the four dimensions allow considering PsyCap as a core construct (Luthans, Avey, & Patera, 2008; Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007). This higher-order core construct has both conceptual (Luthans & Youssef, 2004; Luthans, Youssef et al., 2007) and empirical (Luthans, Norman, Avolio, & Avey, 2008; Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007) support. As a core construct, PsyCap represents “one’s positive appraisal of circumstances and probability for success based on motivated effort and perseverance” (Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007: 550).
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