



Hope and positive affect mediating the authentic leadership and creativity relationship[☆]



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ABSTRACT

The study analyzes how authentic leadership (AL) predicts employees' creativity both directly and through the mediating role of employees' positive affect and hope. Two hundred and three employees working in Portuguese retail organizations participate in the research. Employees report their hope and positive affective states, as well as the AL of their supervisors. Supervisors report the employees' creativity. The main findings are: (a) AL predicts employees' creativity, both directly and through the mediating role of employees' hope; (b) AL also predicts employees' positive affect, which in turn predicts employees' hope and, thus, creativity. The study enriches the understanding of the processes through which AL improves employees' creativity, and provides valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners. By promoting AL, and employees' hope and positive affect, organizations may increase employees' creative performance, creativity being an important path to organizational performance.

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1. Introduction

Global competition, economic uncertainty, and rapid technological change make creativity, the “cornerstone of innovation” (Klijn & Tomic, 2010, p. 322), a crucial organizational resource and a path to organizational performance and survival (Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004; Shalley & Gilson, 2004; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Creativity in the workplace is the production of *novel* and *useful* ideas or solutions concerning products, services, processes, and procedures (Amabile, 1997; Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Zhou & George, 2001, 2003; Zhou & Ren, 2012). Zhou and Ren (2012) state: “from top executives to rank-and-file employees, and working in different functional areas,

from research labs to the manufacturing floor, all have the potential to be creative.” By promoting their employees' creative performance, organizations are more able to solve problems and take advantage of business opportunities, to adapt to changing customer needs, to competitively innovate, and to improve organizational effectiveness (Amabile, 1997; Merlo, Bell, Mengüç, & Whitwell, 2006; Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004; Zhou & Ren, 2012). Thus, organizations need not only identify and select creative employees (i.e., individuals with personal attributes that make them more creative), but also create contextual conditions that facilitate or promote creativity. Leadership is one such condition.

Several researchers focus on identifying the role of specific leadership behaviors and leader characteristics in supporting, suppressing, facilitating, or inhibiting creativity. These behaviors/characteristics include transformational leadership (Shin & Zhou, 2003), emotional intelligence (Rego, Sousa, Cunha, Correia, & Saur, 2007), empowering leadership (Zhang & Bartol, 2010), benevolent leadership (Wang & Cheng, 2010), close monitoring (Zhou, 2003), developmental feedback (Zhou, 2003), supportive supervision (Oldham & Cummings, 1996), unconventional leader behavior (Jaussi & Dionne, 2003), and noncontrolling supervision (Oldham & Cummings, 1996). This paper focuses on authentic leadership (AL). AL is “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,

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fostering positive self-development” (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008, p. 94).

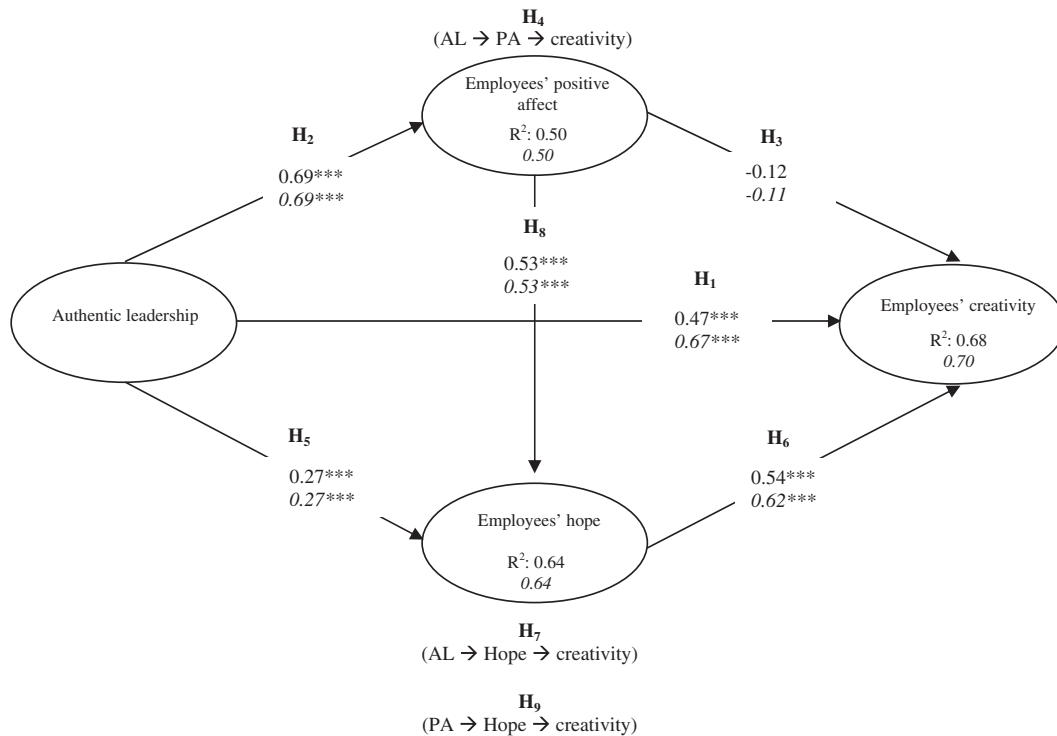
Although AL receives considerable theoretical support, more empirical research is necessary to understand the mechanisms through which authentic leaders influence effective employees' behaviors (Avolio & Mhatre, 2012; Gardner, Cogliser, Davis, & Dickens, 2011). Creativity is one these effective behaviors, but very few empirical studies (Rego, Sousa, Marques, & Cunha, 2012a) focus on the relationship between AL and employees' creativity. A recent review of the organizational creativity literature by Zhou and Ren (2012) makes no reference to AL. And recent reviews of AL literature (Avolio & Mhatre, 2012; Gardner et al., 2011) make no mention of employees' creativity. This gap between the literatures is worth filling in for at least four interrelated reasons.

First, as the paper mentions above, creative performance is crucial for employees' effective performance, while also being a path to organizational innovation, competitiveness, and performance (Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004; Shalley & Gilson, 2004; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Second, the apparent degradation in the quality of the “overall moral fabric of contemporary leadership” (Avolio & Mhatre, 2012, pp. 773–774) creates a need for new theories that, like AL, focus on promoting what is right rather than focusing only on short-run profits without ethical considerations. That is to say, exemplary/authentic leadership behaviors that help to restore trust in leaders and in/within organizations (Avolio &

Mhatre, 2012; George, 2003) may also promote creativity. Third, employees' creativity is a potential outcome of AL because creativity represents, to a certain degree, a route through which employees may express their own authenticity (Edmondson, 1999; Michie & Gooty, 2005), literature suggesting that leaders' authenticity “reverberates” on followers' authenticity (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005).

Fourth, concepts like authenticity and virtuousness have been “out of favor in the scientific community” (Cameron, Bright, & Caza, 2004, p. 2) and out of the focus of practitioner's attention (Rego, Ribeiro, & Cunha, 2010). Although scholars themselves start putting such topics back on the table, more empirical research is necessary for “legitimizing” them, in both the scholarly and practitioner communities (Cameron & Winn, 2012). Without (empirically demonstrated) “pragmatic outcomes” (Cameron et al., 2004, p. 5) AL is less likely to capture attention in either community. In summary, in times of a crisis of confidence in corporations (Avolio & Mhatre, 2012; George, 2003) studying and promoting AL are crucial: beyond stimulating confidence in businesses, such leadership behaviors are able to promote “pragmatic outcomes”, and employees' creativity (a kind of “soft criterion” of performance; Yammarino, Dionne, Schriesheim, & Dansereau, 2008) is one of these outcomes.

With these ideas in mind, this study hypothesizes (Fig. 1) that (a) AL predicts employees' creativity through the mediating role of employees'



***p<0.001

RMSEA: 0.08; GFI: 0.99; AGFI: 0.94; CFI: 0.99; IFI: 0.99.

Notes:

(a) Standardized path coefficients are shown over the arrows. Values in italics correspond to a model that controls for the impact of the common method variance factor.

(b) Paths referring to the control variables (including the common method variance factor) are not shown.

Fig. 1. Testing the hypothesized model through structural equation modeling.

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