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Virtuous leadership, organizational commitment and individual performance

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Abstract In a hypercompetitive world, the affirmation of virtuosity has faced considerable resistance. However, ethics and morality, voices rise up in defense of a virtuous leadership, capable to give significantly positive contributions to organizations and their employees. Starting from this premise, this research aims to analyze, based on perceptions of the followers, the impact of virtuous leadership in organizational commitment, as well as the contribution of the latter on individual performance. Sustained on a quantitative methodology, we inquired, in a first phase, 113 employees from organizations located in the Portuguese territory, in order to ascertain which virtues are most valued in a leader. The data for hypothesis testing were collected using a battery of tests with 351 employees. The results suggest that the employees' perceptions, around three dimensions of leadership virtuosity (values-based leadership, perseverance and maturity), contribute to organizational commitment, especially in its affective and normative dimensions, and the latter, in turn, is able to positively influence individual performance.

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1. Introduction

Profuse literature has demonstrated that leadership is one of the most important factors for the performance of an organization, influencing, dynamically, on individual

and organizational interaction (Obiwuru, Okwu, Akpa, & Nwankwere, 2011), so that any reflection around the phenomenon of leadership can provide a capital contribution to any organization.

Concomitantly, the organizational manifestations of virtuosity and its consequences remain underdeveloped theoretically and empirically (Rego & Cunha, 2010). In today's hypercompetitive world, the virtuosity easily falls for the latest plan on the scale of organizational priorities, rarely acknowledging, "the enormous value of the practice of the virtues for the effective exercise of leadership" (Rego &

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Cunha, 2011, p. 23). However, management practices devoid of virtues can generate traumatic effects on the reputation and performance of leaders, led and organization as a whole (Rego & Cunha, 2011).

Finally, given the competitive advantage of commitment, this study may represent a relevant contribution to scientific knowledge, relating this phenomenon to leadership.

Based on the framework described, which supports the relevance of this study, we seek to meet two basic objectives: (1) understand the extent to which an established leadership virtues may favor the organizational commitment; (2) analyze the impact of organizational commitment; on the performance of employees.

2. The virtuosity in leadership

The word virtue derived from the Latin *virtus* meaning ‘‘virtue’’ or ‘‘excellence’’ (Rego, Vict3ria, Magalh3es, Ribeiro, & Cunha, 2013). The virtue or virtues (as there are many and varied) are rules of moral character that motivate and guide behavior toward the end of an ethical order.

At the organizational level, and according to Cameron, Bright and Caza (2004) a virtuous organization enables and supports virtuous activities – good habits, desires and actions – from its members. It incorporates the actions of individuals, collective activities, cultural attributes and other processes that allow the dissemination and perpetuation of virtuousness of the organization. These organizations not only promote virtuous relationships among its members, but also instigate it in people’s management: when defining its strategy, worry about being good and doing good; when they develop a process of downsizing, they do it with care and compassion; when facing crises, they do it with maturity and tolerance; and even facing difficulties, they can flourish (Cameron & Caza, 2002).

Rego and Cunha (2010), anchoring in several studies (Cameron, 2003; Cameron et al., 2004; Wilson, Dejoy, Vandenberg, Richardson, & McGrath, 2004), highlight that virtuosity contributes to organizational health, manifested in intentional, systematic and collaborative efforts that maximize productivity and well-being of employees, in a supportive organizational environment, where there are accessible and equitable opportunities for progression and where easily identify the meaning of work.

Concerning the relationship between virtuousness and organizational effectiveness, Cameron et al. (2004) conducted a survey involving 18 organizations and showed that organizational virtuousness – analyzed at the level of trust, integrity, forgiveness, compassion and optimism – relates positively and significantly to organizational performance, particularly in terms of innovation, customer retention, turnover, quality and profitability. The authors based the explanation of these results in those they consider to be the key attributes of virtuosity: *amplifying effects* – that can instigate an escalation of positivity – and *buffering effects* – capable of protecting the organization from negative intrusions.

Rego and Cunha (2011) argue that the leader can fully contribute to the success of the teams and organizations ‘‘since endowed with virtues and psychological forces such as courage, humility, perseverance, integrity, prudence,

curiosity, vitality, confidence and passion’’ (p. 29). Although the existence of these virtues is not by itself sufficient for business success, these increases, in the medium and long term, the odds of being effective leaders and achieve better results. At the same time that increases the performance of organizations, the virtuous leaders can be happier, elevate the happiness of the led, the progress of the organization and society. On the other hand, the exercise of leadership lacking virtues can generate traumatic effects on leaders, followers and organization as a whole.

3. The organizational commitment

Allen and Meyer (1996) define organizational commitment as the psychological bond that characterizes the connection between the individual and the organization, reducing the chances of his departure.

Although initially the organizational commitment has been approached as a one-dimensional construct (Mowday et al., 1982, cited in Nascimento, Lopes, & Salgueiro, 2008), several other studies point to its multidimensionality, including the most widespread (Allen & Meyer, 1990, 2000; Meyer, 1997; Meyer & Allen, 1991), which covers three dimensions: affective, normative and instrumental. The affective dimension refers to the identification, involvement and emotional attachment of the individual to the organization; the normative relates with the sense of obligation or moral duty of staying in the organization; and the instrumental with the maintenance of the connection of the employee to the organizations considering costs associated with leaving the company. Common to the three dimensions – affective, normative and instrumental – it is the fact that all connect the individual to the organization; divergent is the nature of each of these connections. When affectively committed, the employee remains in the organization because *he wants to*, when normatively committed, remains because *he has to*, and when committed instrumentally, remains because *he needs* (Allen & Meyer, 1990).

Rego and Souto (2004) reported that among the antecedents that contribute to reinforce the normative commitment and, especially, the emotional, we can highlight: the affective ties, the transformational leadership, the support of the company, leader and colleagues, the performance feedback, the receptivity of management to suggestions from employees, the challenge inherent to the role, the perceptions of justice and the perception that the organization is guided by humanist and visionary values, that it is fair and socially responsible.

Regarding the impacts of commitment, although all three forms of commitment relate negatively to turnover intentions, these manifest themselves differently in other relevant conduct in the employment context, such as assiduity, performance and organizational citizenship behaviors. More specifically, it is expected to observe a stronger positive relationship between these behaviors and affective commitment, followed by normative commitment; in contrast, it is expected instrumental commitment to be independent, or negatively related with these desirable work behaviors (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). Of the three types of commitment, affective commitment entails

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