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Authentic leadership extends beyond work: A multilevel model of work-family conflict and enrichment

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the work-home resources model, we develop a multilevel framework of individual and team perceptions of authentic leadership in relation to followers' work-family conflict (WFC) and enrichment (WFE). Our model suggests that authentic leadership buffers followers' WFC and drives their WFE. In addition, leaders' WFC and WFE are examined as moderators to test the boundary conditions of these relationships. We collected data from 33 leaders and 128 followers at two points of measurement and analyzed them with hierarchical linear modeling. At the individual level, authentic leadership related negatively to WFC and positively to WFE. At the team level, authentic leadership related positively to WFE, but not to WFC. Cross-level interactions indicated that leaders' WFC strengthens the relationship between authentic leadership and followers' WFC. These findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of authentic leadership as a resource at multiple levels in organizations and demonstrate its outcomes beyond work.

Introduction

In the face of the blurred boundaries between work and private life domains, modern organizations are challenged to preserve and enhance the well-being of their employees (Fleetwood, 2007; Morganson, Litano, & O'Neill, 2014; Munn, 2013). Both, scholarly (Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005; Macik-Frey, Quick, & Cooper, 2009) and practitioner (George, 2003) literature highlight the importance of authentic leadership. Scholars argue that authentic leadership, “extends well beyond bottom-line success” and thereby contributes to advancements “in the greater society by tackling public policy issues and addressing organizational and societal problems” (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004, p. 802).

We extend the current theoretical views on authentic leadership by positioning it as a resource at multiple levels in organizations that enables followers to better balance demands between their work and private lives. According to the work-home resources (WH-R) model by ten Brummelhuis and Bakker (2012), individuals can face demands at work, which drain resources in their private life domain (i.e., work-family conflict, WFC) or gain resources at work, which increase their resources in the private life domain (i.e., work-family enrichment, WFE). Hobfoll (1989) defined resources “as those objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued by the individual or that serve as a means for attainment of these objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies” (p. 516). We build on this theory to argue that authentic leaders possess key resources (e.g., confidence, optimism,

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resiliency; Luthans & Avolio, 2003), which allow authentic leadership to function as an individual-level social support resource and a team-level macro resource for followers.

Conceptually rooted in positive organizational behavior (Luthans, Luthans, Hodgetts, & Luthans, 2001), authentic leadership characterizes leaders who “know who they are, what they believe and value”, and who, “act upon those values and beliefs while transparently interacting with others” (Avolio et al., 2004, p. 802). Authentic leadership is “an important organizational resource” (Laschinger & Fida, 2014, p. 20). Positive psychological resources are inherent qualities of authentic leaders (e.g., self-knowledge, self-concept clarity, self-transcendent values; Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Authentic leaders are “deeply aware of their values and beliefs, they are self-confident, genuine, reliable and trustworthy, and they focus on building followers’ strengths” (Ilies et al., 2005, p. 374). Above and beyond leaders’ own resources, authentic leadership represents a resource for followers as it “positively influences self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of both leaders and followers” (Ilies et al., 2005, p. 376). Authentic leaders interact with followers in ways that focus on “emphasizing people’s strengths rather than weaknesses” (Laschinger & Fida, 2014, p. 20). They have been described “to be in tune with the needs of their followers” and “to play a protective role” against followers’ resource losses (e.g., burnout; Laschinger & Fida, 2014, p. 21). These processes specifically revolve around three positive psychological capacities that authentic leaders instill in others (i.e., hope, trust, optimism; Avolio et al., 2004). Empirical evidence links authentic leadership positively to followers’ psychological capital as well as to their psychological well-being (Clapp-Smith, Vogelgesang, & Avey, 2009; Rego, Sousa, Marques, & Cunha, 2012) and health (Macik-Frey et al., 2009) as well as negatively to burnout and stress (Laschinger, 2014; Laschinger & Fida, 2014; Laschinger, Wong, & Grau, 2013; Rahimnia & Sharifirad, 2014).

The resource-based view helps to position authentic leadership relative to other leadership constructs such as leader-member exchange (LMX), ethical leadership, and servant leadership. LMX represents a relationship-based approach to leadership that focuses on the leader, the follower, and their dyadic relationship (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). This unique focus on the leader-follower relationship explains many relevant outcomes (e.g., job performance, satisfaction, role conflict and clarity; Gerstner & Day, 1997). However, LMX does not delineate explicitly which resources leaders bring into the relationship. The dyadic view of LMX relations is also less suited to hypothesize how leaders function as macro resources at the team level. Ethical leadership applies a social learning perspective to leader-follower relationships (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005). Ethical leaders are a “key source of ethical guidance” (Brown et al., 2005, p. 117), demonstrating and reinforcing normatively appropriate ethical conduct. Ethical leadership and authentic leadership “share a common concern for a moral dimension of leadership” (Brown & Treviño, 2006, p. 595). Both leadership styles are likely to help followers when faced with moral dilemmas and ethical leadership may be seen as a resource in this specific domain (i.e., ethical decision-making). However, authentic leadership’s core dimensions (e.g., self-awareness, relational transparency) provide followers with resources above and beyond ethical leadership (e.g., instrumental, informational, emotional or appraisal support; ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). Servant leadership also stresses personal integrity, but its core focus is on serving others (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008). Servant leaders’ priority of “serving others before oneself extends from the workplace to home and community” (Liden et al., 2008, p. 162). However, servant leadership establishes a serving culture through which followers are taught to prioritize the needs of others above one’s own (Liden, Wayne, Liao, & Meuser, 2014). Authentic leadership emphasizes nurturing and protecting followers’ resources.

Three important shortcomings stand out in the authentic leadership literature that we attempt to tackle with the current research. Firstly, despite the continuous increase of empirical work on authentic leadership (Banks, McCauley, Gardner, & Guler, 2016; Gardner, Coglisier, Davis, & Dickens, 2011; Hoch, Bommer, Dulebohn, & Wu, 2016), the outcome criteria remain curiously one-sided. Recent large-scale meta-analyses link authentic leadership to work outcomes such as follower satisfaction and satisfaction with their leader, task performance, and leader effectiveness (Banks et al., 2016), as well to work-related behavioral outcomes (job performance, OCB, deviance), attitudinal outcomes (employee engagement, job satisfaction, affective commitment, organizational commitment), and relational perceptions (trust, leader-member exchange; Hoch et al., 2016). Yet, the question of whether authentic leadership affects attitudes and behaviors beyond the workplace has been largely ignored. This gap in the research is problematic given that organizations are struggling to enhance employees’ health and well-being (Fleetwood, 2007; Morganson et al., 2014; Munn, 2013).

Authentic leadership compared to other positive forms of leadership “reflects a more diffuse focus beyond performance” (Banks et al., 2016, p. 643). It is likely to influence outcomes beyond work as “authenticity has a substantial influence on how one lives one’s life” (Ilies et al., 2005, p. 374). Therefore, we aim to examine the importance of authentic leadership as a resource for followers at the work-family interface and test its potential to buffer *resource losses* in the form of WFC (Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) as well as to promote *resource gains* at work, which in turn affects the private life domain in beneficial ways, that is, WFE (Carlson, Kacmar, Wayne, & Grzywacz, 2006; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

Secondly, authentic leadership has been defined as a multilevel construct (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Cooper, Scandura, & Schriesheim, 2005). However, a review of conceptual articles revealed that only 10 out of 23 publications explicitly represented authentic leadership as a multilevel phenomenon, while 10 implicitly characterized it at the individual level only (Yammarino, Dionne, Schriesheim, & Dansereau, 2008). This conceptual ambiguity is problematic because “only by fully incorporating levels of analysis, in theory, measurement, data analysis, and inference drawing can a more integrative and testable theory of AL [authentic leadership] result” (Yammarino et al., 2008, p. 695). Moreover, from a practical standpoint, modern organizations require leaders “to lead and motivate not only individuals but also teams as a whole” (Chen, Kirkman, Kanfer, Allen, & Rosen, 2007, p. 331). Leaders may differ in how they lead their team as an entity and also adapt their leadership to individual team members.

Recent evidence supports the view of authentic leadership as a multilevel construct (Hannah, Walumbwa, & Fry, 2011; Hmieleski, Cole, & Baron, 2012; Leroy, Anseel, Gardner, & Sels, 2015). Accordingly, we test the links between individuals’ and teams’ shared

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