Authentic Leadership and its Psychological Concomitants

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Abstract

The idea behind this paper is to explore, understand and conceptualize the new construct of authenticity and authentic Leadership. As this is comparatively a new construct in the domain of leadership especially in the Indian context, it could be helpful in eliminating the unethical and unwanted practices that have become quite common today. Various researches and studies indicate that authentic leaders can positively affect the overall performance of employees'. This in turn can gradually create a positive organizational climate which is driven by values and high performance. The main aim is to research and understand the constructs-authenticity and authentic leader- and how do affect and promote certain psychological factors. It will be interesting to know that when leaders who drive an organization turn authentic, then to what degree are they able to create a difference in an organization's subsequent performance as compared to the organization's previous performance.

Keywords: Authenticity, authentic leadership, psychological concomitants

Introduction

Over the past five years, people have developed a deep distrust in leaders increasing the need for a different kind of leader. Bill George challenged the new generation to lead authentically in his book named- 'Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the Secrets to Creating Lasting Value (2003)'. There is a wide range of opportunities; businesses need new ways to create value, organizations need contemporary solutions to age-old problems, schools need to serve as a source of inspiration for the new bunch of learners, and communities need to focus on improving the quality of life of its members. Leaders are needed to pursue the opportunities of the 21st century, because problems are becoming increasingly global, interrelated, and complex.

All these indicate towards one question, 'What is it that a 21st century leader should have, to stand out from the rest?' The answer probably is that the same leader now needs to be authentic, unique and original. Authentic leaders exhibit genuine leadership, lead from conviction, are self-made and not copies of others, and are value-driven. They establish long-term, meaningful relationships that go a long way in getting best results.

F.Walumbwa et al. (2008) spoke of authentic leaders as people who are characterized as: (a) being a leader is the central component of their self-concept, (b) they have attained a high level of self-concept clarity, (c) their goals are consistent with self, and (d) their behavior is self-expressive". They assert that authentic leadership is

a relatively new leadership theory that has developed as a result of the ethical and moral leadership crisis that have become common today.

According to Shamir and Eilam (2005), 'The overt display of one's beliefs and values in one's behaviour (which may be good or bad) is known as authenticity.' According to Goffee & Jones (2005), 'Authenticity is better understood as a quality than a personality trait and if one is authentic in his/her actions then others' perception and belief must develop about this authenticity and others must attribute it to the person.'

Authentic leadership is defined as "a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development" (Luthans & Avolio, 2003, p. 243).

Gardner and Schermerhorn (2004) opine that authentic leaders have a strong influence on people's ability that stimulates them to perform better. As a result, such individuals perform extremely well reaching the peak of their strength and efforts.

The main reasons for studying this construct are to get some insights into the questions:

• Whether, an enhanced perception about authentic leadership can help in the employees to focus on factors that can alter their attitudes and opinions regarding the organization in a positive direction.

• What are the possible ways by which such leaders on how such leaders can motivate and drive employees thereby affecting the organizational output, and

• How to develop more authentic leadership to gain competitive advantage in the industry.

Authentic Leadership and its Dimensions

This multidimensional construct has 4 major features:

a. **Internalized moral perspective or 'Doing the right thing'**: Such leaders exhibit high levels of moral development and their actions are not driven by external pressures but by internal moral standards and values. Leaders high on moral perspective would generally think more openly and intensely about ethical matters, when faced with similar challenges (Werhane, 1999). Such leaders have a tendency to act in accordance with their value structures.

b. **Self-awareness or 'Knowing Thyself'**: Such leaders promote self-understanding i.e. awareness of values, ideals and beliefs, as well as strengths and weaknesses. Self-awareness is one of the most fundamental concepts of authentic leadership. Researchers like Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008; Avolio et al., 2004; Gardner et al., 2005, have considered it as the starting point of such a leadership practise.

c. **Relational transparency or 'Just being genuine'**: This refers to the quality of the leader to develop healthy relations and bonds through disclosures and maintaining a balance between his speech and actions. In short it's a leader's ability to be honest and transparent in his dealings with others at the workplace.

d. **Balanced processing or 'Fair-mindedness'**: It involves analyzing available information objectively and exploring other people's opinions before drawing conclusions or coming to a decision. Such leaders prefer utilizing their time by trying to comprehend what led to certain issues and the corresponding outcomes; hence helping followers understand what should be attributed to internal and external causes of ethical behavior and performance (Gardner et al., 2005).

In a nutshell, leaders who are almost close to being authentic hold a deep sense of self unlike those who are not authentic. They are well versed with their capabilities and how these influence others.

The Five Benchmarks of Authentic Leadership: According to Cashman (1998), the five touchstones or benchmarks that make an authentic leader are:

a) **Knowing oneself authentically**: This refers to the ability to 'Know Thyself' which is a common preaching in various religious practices. If one knows himself in and out, then he can be much more effective with others around.

b) **Listening authentically**: This can also be understood in the terms of psychological reciprocity i.e. being generous and open to others opinions and beliefs without being judgmental or opinioned.

c) **Appreciating authentically**: This is one criterion that clearly differentiates between an authentic leader and an unauthentic leader. An unauthentic leader would do too much but appreciate very little, which may help get short-term results but finally create feelings of fear and insecurity in the minds of the followers. On the other hand, an authentic leader would appreciate and energize followers and motivate them to achieve their goals and perceived limits.

d) **Expressing authentically**: This refers to the 'true voice' of the leader that automatically creates an environment of trust and coordination with everyone around.

e) **Serving authentically**: A leader is judged as successful when he serves his organization, followers, customers and community at large, instead of just leading them. Only when a leader serves authentically, does he create values.

Factors influencing Authentic Leadership

The factors can be categorized as:
* Antecedents
* Mediators
* Consequences

Antecedents: The two important antecedents of authentic leadership include leaders knowledge of self and coherence between his beliefs, values and the overt act. Research also indicates that leaders possessing positive psychological capacities like hope, confidence, resilience and optimism have greater chances of emerging as authentic leaders. This idea holds true for many reasons. Firstly, leaders who set effective goals create a more hopeful environment for their followers. Secondly, resilient leaders perform much better in changing and challenging environments. Thirdly, optimistic leaders have a tendency to take situations in a positive stride that gives them an edge in motivating their followers and helping them anticipate future events with ease.

Another antecedent that has been highlighted in literature review is: Self-monitoring. The likeliness of an individual to actively manipulate his image according to the expectation of others is known as 'self-monitoring'. Theory asserts that self-monitoring and authentic leadership are inversely related such that lower the self-monitoring, higher is the degree of authentic leadership. This is because low self-monitors would behave exactly like authentic leaders in terms of being real, genuine and acting in accordance with their beliefs and values.

Mediators: Authentic leadership promotes team potency, which refers to a team's belief that they can succeed in competitive situations, which in turn leads to enhanced team performance. Authentic leaders also stimulate team performance by nurturing a sense of trust in the organization or team. The reason is quite simple: the more trust followers have in their leader, the more loyal they will be towards him and the organization in turn increasing their own as well as the organization's performance at large.

Research on authentic leadership is in its developing phase, but one prominent finding is that such leaders produce an emotional and psychological response from their followers which ultimately enhances individual as well as team/ organization's performance.

Consequences: The most prominent consequence of such a leadership practice would possibly be increased team performance, follower's belief in values (as reflected by the leader himself), and nurturing authenticity in the organization.

Conclusion

The focus of this study has been Authenticity. When this construct is linked with the concept of leadership, it emerges as an even stronger combination. Leadership has always played a crucial role in the prosperity and growth of any organization and this strong relation between authenticity and leadership will help avoid or

atleast reduce unethical and unwanted practices in an organization, creating an environment of trust and connectedness. Authentic leaders act as role models for their followers, motivating them to push their limits and achieving great heights and success.

Therefore, every individual has the capacity of emerging as an authentic leader, because it's not a personality trait but a lifelong learning process shaped by critical life events and experiences.

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