Chapter 15

Empathy and Mindfulness: Exploring the Possible Predictors of Authentic Leadership

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ABSTRACT

The upheavals in the current times are driving us toward a purposeful need for more effective and “genuine” leadership skills so as to enhance business sustainability. This chapter empirically investigates the concept of authentic leadership and considers the pathways to develop authentic leadership by exploring and examining empathy and mindfulness as predictors of authentic leadership. An intense literature review reflects that only a few studies have been conducted that focus on the antecedents of authentic leadership. The study attempts to fill this void. A questionnaire was completed by 250 respondents from the IT industry. Regression analysis was applied to study the inter-relationships among the variables. Findings reveal that while empathy of a leader is significantly related to the development of authentic leadership, mindfulness is not. Wider geographical selection and replication of the study in other industry is recommended. The chapter promotes development of OB interventions intended to foster the development of authentic leaders for positive organizational outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

The recent economic crisis in Greece as well as scams such as Vyapam in India calls for leaders who do not deny responsibility, defy their stakeholders or hide information but instead lead with authenticity and integrity. Authentic leadership (AL) that emerges from the earlier theories of social intelligence (Thorndike, 1920) and multiple intelligence (Gardner, 1983; Salovey and Mayer, 1990) has attracted...
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the attention of researchers and practitioners worldwide. Demand for authentic leadership has been on rise due to rising social costs globally and the need for authenticity (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, and Walumbwa, F. 2005, Klenke 2007). Researchers have added that the integration of ideas is paramount to understanding (Tsur, Berkovitz, and Ginzburg, 2016). Empathy and mindfulness have been noted to significantly associate with the development of effective leaders (Wolff, Pescosolido, and Druskat, 2002). While empathy significantly contributes to the leadership success (Cooper and Sawaf, 1997; Yukl, 1998), mindfulness too has been related to leadership (Boyatzis and McKee, 2005). In order to remain competitive, it has become indispensable for business managers to acquire empathy skills so that they can interact effectively with employees from diverse backgrounds and achieve the goals of the organization (Kayworth and Leidner, 2002). There is a need for more effective and ‘genuine’ leadership skills for the survival of business in current times. Also, mobilising and influencing the followers is a path that treads towards a successful attainment of leadership objectives. One such leadership is authentic leadership. This chapter explores the construct of authentic leadership and seeks to examine how the two constructs of empathy and mindfulness contribute to its development. Authentic leadership, empathy and mindfulness are human constructs and are likely to share relationship among each other. It is therefore important to find how these mentioned variables are interrelated and are likely to contribute towards the development of authentic leadership.

This study aims to test the theoretical relationships among empathy, mindfulness and authentic leadership in millennials aged 18-34 who are eager to take the leap. With more and more millennials joining the work force, managers must ensure that new joinees are regularly challenged and satisfied in the organization. Although many studies and a variety research has been done, there is still room for clarity on what leadership styles are best suited to serve millennials (Lee, C. C., Mullins, K., and Cho, Y. S., 2016). A poll study shows that one in five of millennials plan to quit their day job to start their own business since they are wary and tired of scams (Ellevate, 2015). Millennials already think they have the right skills to become a leader as 55% of them think that relationship building is the most important skill which is closely related to relational transparency of AL (Workplacetrends.com, 2015). They want to learn online and have mentors to develop leadership as a skill. They also stress on the need of companies to create stronger leadership programs (Ellevate, 2015). Young generation, millennials, in particular strongly believe that leaders should be more authentic, approachable, who are able to give proper reasoning and justification behind every decision they make and are open to questions if any, when raised by the followers (Taylor, 2016).

The same motivates the researchers to explore the antecedents that are pivotal in development of the Authentic Leadership in the work force that majorly comprises of millennials.

The authors ask here two research questions: a) how mindfulness relates to authentic leadership, and b) how empathy contributes to the development of authentic leadership. The chapter begins with developing hypothesis and goes on to present method and findings. Finally, the chapter is concluded by discussing the limitations and implications for academicians and practitioners.
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