

DO HUMBLE AND GRITTY LEADERS PROMOTE FOLLOWERS' PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL?

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Abstract

Humility in leaders is crucial for their effectiveness (e.g., Ou et al., in press; Owens & Hekman, 2016; Owens et al., 2015; Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004). Epstein and Buhovac (2008) argued that a leader must demonstrate a combination of humility and ambition in the pursuit of social and environmental goals. Other authors have suggested that humility, a dimension of servant leadership (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011), is a potential predictor of corporate sustainability (Christensen et al., 2014). A possible explanation for these effects is that humble leaders develop the followers' psychological capital (PsyCap: self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism). In two studies, we test if humility in leaders predicts follower PsyCap (study #1), and how this relationship is moderated by their grit (Duckworth et al., 2007; studies #1 and #2). The first study, with an experimental design (experimental group: n=136; control group: n=129), shows that individuals assigned to the experimental condition (humble leader) report higher PsyCap than those assigned to the control condition (transactional leader). In the second study, 101 individuals described the humility and grit of their leaders one week before describing their own PsyCap. The findings show that individuals working with humble leaders develop higher PsyCap, this relationship being stronger when leaders are also gritty (i.e., the follower PsyCap is particularly high when leaders are simultaneously humble and gritty). The research contributes to the understanding of (a) the effect of leaders' humility on followers and (b) the conditions that strengthen/mitigate this effect..

Keywords: leadership; humility; grit; psychological capital.

Reference:

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