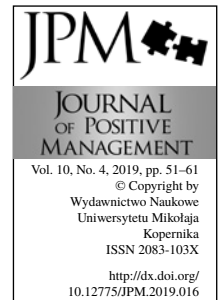


HAPPY FOLLOWERS OF POSITIVE LEADERS. THE EFFECT OF POSITIVE LEADERSHIP ON WELL-BEING OF FOLLOWERS

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of the paper is to propose the framework of effects of various aspects of positive leadership on components of long-term well-being, specifically psychological well-being, sometimes referred to as eudaimonic well-being or optimal functioning.

Methodology/approach: The paper is conceptual in nature. I use the established frameworks considered as related to positive leadership and propose the effect of each of their dimensions on components of followers' psychological well-being.

Findings: There are complex relationships between aspects of positive leadership: transformational leadership, authentic leadership, servant leadership and fundamental state of leadership and components of followers' psychological well-being (self-acceptance, autonomy, positive relationships with others, environmental mastery, purpose in life, personal growth). In essence, I propose that positive leadership behaviors have significant potential of enhancing long-term well-being of followers.

Implications/limitations either for further research, for practice, or for society: The paper opens the ground for the empirical investigation of the effect of positive leadership behaviors on well-being of followers. This investigation in turn could have some practical impact for leaders on how to support psychological well-being of the followers. It is critical that leaders recognize strong and weak components of well-being of their followers and support them. This, in turn, will have positive effect on employee's performance according to happy-productive principle.

Originality/value of the paper: The paper contributes to the literature in leadership and well-being in a couple of ways. It contributes to the growing literature of positive leadership by considering previously ignored effect of long-term well-being of followers, it contributes more generally to the literature of leadership by showing the possible advantage of positive style of leadership, and adds to the discussion on well-being by suggesting how it might contribute from certain behaviors of the leader.

Keywords: positive leadership, transformational leadership, servant leadership, fundamental state of leadership, psychological well-being

Paper type: Conceptual paper

1. Introduction

Most of the authors conceptualize positive leadership as the type of leadership that boosts well-being of followers as one of the effects (Hannah et al., 2009; Kelloway et al., 2012). However, most of the research so far focuses on short-term well-being such as positive affect (Kelloway et al., 2012) or satisfaction with life (Nel et al., 2015). It has to be noted that some of the research (e.g. Kelloway et al., 2012) takes into consideration the ‘extended affect’, but still it concerns rather fast-changing phenomena. I argue that the research in positive leadership should be extended with considering long-term effects, especially long-term well-being. Therefore, the main research question that I ask is: What is the effect of positive leadership on long-term well-being. The purpose of the paper is to propose the framework of effects of various aspects of positive leadership on components of long-term well-being.

The paper is conceptual in nature. I use the established frameworks considered as related to positive leadership: transformational leadership, authentic leadership, servant leadership and fundamental state of leadership and assess the effect of each of their dimensions on components of followers’ psychological well-being (self-acceptance, autonomy, positive relationships with others, environmental mastery, purpose in life, personal growth). The effect is the framework which could be the starting point for further research. By providing it, this study contributes to the literature in leadership and well-being in a couple of ways. First, it contributes to the growing literature of positive leadership by considering previously ignored effect of long-term well-being of followers. Second, it contributes more generally to the literature of leadership by showing the possible advantage of positive style of leadership. Finally, it adds to the discussion on well-being by suggesting how it might contribute from certain behaviors of the leader. The research was carried out within research project 2017/27/B/HS4/02172 funded by National Science Centre, Poland.

2. Various perspectives of well-being

Well-being at the workplace has been a matter of scholarly investigation for a couple of decades (Danna and Griffin, 1999). In this perspective, also the effect of leaders’ behaviours has been taken into consideration. (Hannah et al., 2009; Kelloway et al., 2012). However, the effect has been mainly considered for well-being captured in the short run: positive affect (Kelloway et al., 2012) or satisfaction with life (Nel et al., 2015). This approach neglects well-being in the long run. Diener and colleagues (2018) present a useful distinction between various types of well-being and, apart from broader terms like ‘quality of life’ and fuzzy terms like ‘happiness’, there is a clear difference in time frame between those types. The one that has the shortest span is ‘hedonic well-being’ which is based on presence of positive affect and absence of negative affect, which could

be summed up as feeling good. This affective aspect along with cognitive or evaluative aspect (satisfaction with life also referred to as evaluative well-being) form subjective well-being, perhaps the most commonly used conceptualization. Diener and colleagues describe it as “general term referring to the various types of subjective evaluations of one’s life, including both cognitive evaluations and affective feelings” (2018, 3). I argue that this ‘short-term bias’ is caused by performing most of the research in developed, Western societies, where there is strong emphasis on immediate results. Moreover, Western, developed societies are rather individualistic that is reflected in highly subjective approach to WB. That results in “pleasantness bias” of life satisfaction measures (European Social Survey, 2013). That makes the research biased by cultural perspective. As Nikolaev et al. following Ryan and Deci (2000) and Seligman (2012) state, SWB fails to reflect the richness of what it means to live a fully functioning life (2019, p. 4).

In 1990s Ryff and Keyes (1995) proposed to revise the works of Aristotle (mainly Nichomachean Ethics, 350 BC) and redefine the modern understanding of the term ‘Eudaimonia’. They claim that true happiness is to know oneself and to follow the true self. Their concept of well-being, referred to as eudaimonic well-being or psychological well-being is founded on that finding. In Aristotle’s view eudaimonia is the highest of all goods achievable by human action. Ryff (2008) states that the term “eudaimonia” was improperly translated as “happiness” and that this translation misses the distinction between hedonia and eudaimonia (Ryan and Deci, 2001). She further points out that “even more troubling was that the essence of eudaimonia – the idea of striving toward excellence based on one’s unique potential – was left out” (Ryff, 2008, p. 14). Ryff in her paper explains the origins of her six-dimensional framework of well-being but the central point of her reference to Aristotle is that achievement of eudaimonic happiness “is activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with the highest virtue; and this will be that of the best thing in us” (Aristotle, 350 BC: 263 in: Ryff, 2008, p. 17). It has to be said that for Aristotle virtue is a state of character concerned with choice in which deliberate actions are taken to avoid excess or deficiency. In that sense Aristotelean virtue differs from what is conceptualized by Peterson and Seligman, but understanding the virtue as “the best thing in us” brings us closer to the model of virtues and character strengths. Two other aspects of Aristotelean eudaimonia and virtue are important in connection with Peterson and Seligman’s framework. First, it stresses “knowing thyself” – self-awareness and “choosing yourself” – self-acceptance. This is also starting point for positive psychology perspective of happiness that builds on recognizing signature strengths and virtues. Peterson and Seligman (2004) highlight that the necessary condition to use the signature strength is the belief that it is one of one’s core attributes. Self-awareness and self-acceptance are also reflected in one of the dimensions

of psychological well-being according to Ryff (1989; 2008). Second, there is an emphasis on action, practicing virtues in relationships with other people. This is also consistent with positive psychology view, in which signature strengths should be practiced that results in being invigorated rather than exhausted while using it and feelings of joy, zest and enthusiasm when using the strength.

There are a couple of approaches to eudaimonic well-being (Deci and Ryan, 2008; Ryff, 2019) under various terms: psychological well-being (Ryff, 2014), functioning and flourishing as ‘high-end’ of functioning (ESS, 2013), psychological functioning (Nikolaev et al., 2019). I focus on the first approach as the oldest, the most strongly founded and the most often used in the research. Ryff’s (2019) framework consists of six dimensions: (1) self-acceptance, (2) autonomy, (3) positive relationships with others, (4) environmental mastery, (5) purpose in life, and (6) personal growth. Self-acceptance is the knowledge and acceptance that people have of themselves, including awareness of their personal limitations. Autonomy is viewing oneself as living in accord with one’s personal convictions. Environmental mastery is the feeling of being in control of one’s life and the environment, the ability to choose and transform the environment, and also managing life situations well. Positive relationships with others are deep connections based on love, friendship and trust. Purpose in life is the extent to which one feels his or her life as rich in meaning, purpose and directions. Finally, personal growth is the extent to which one feels as making use of one’s personal talents and potential.

Deci and Ryan (2008) trace two views of well-being (hedonic and eudaimonic) to being founded on different approaches to human nature. The hedonic approach uses as the standard social science model (Tooby and Cosmides, 1992), which considers the human organism initially to be relatively empty and thus malleable, such that it gains its meaning in accord with social and cultural formation. In contrast, the eudaimonic approach ascribes content to human nature and works to uncover that content and to understand the conditions that facilitate versus diminish it. There is a high degree of overlap between two concepts of well-being and high level of statistical covariance (Waterman et al., 2008; Bauer et al., 2008). Waterman et al. (2008) claim that if a person experiences eudaimonic living he or she will necessarily also experience hedonic enjoyment; however, not all hedonic enjoyment is derived from eudaimonic living.

An important observation about the nature of well-being is done by Huta and Waterman (2014). In their considerations on hedonic, subjective and eudaimonic well-being they point to the fact that hedonia and eudaimonia are treated asymmetrically. Hedonia is most often assessed in terms of cognitive-affective experiences while eudaimonia is assessed in terms of indices of positive mental functioning or orientations. That leads to lack of comparability of those two

concepts. Researchers should be aware of that, and, in fact, in some frameworks eudaimonia is placed as the antecedent of hedonia (e.g. Nikolaev et al., 2019).

3. Positive approach to leadership

The idea of positive leadership is rather unclear. This often leads to critique of this domain as not being conceptualized enough and because of that lacking academic rigour and being limited in its impact (Alvesson and Einola, 2019). As said before, the main expected results are well-being and high performance of the followers (Hannah et al., 2009; Kelloway et al., 2012; Finny, 2019; Li et al., 2020; Kruszewski, 2020). This is where the convergence between approaches end and the authors use various existing concepts as having positive inclination. Out of many, four are especially explored, two of them are well-established (transformational leadership, servant leadership), one is a hot topic (authentic leadership) and the last is genuinely positive, but rather unexplored (fundamental state of leadership). It has to be said that two out of four concepts of positive leadership were developed even before the birth of positive organizational scholarship. However, they were under the influence of humanistic management and positive psychology, and, the formation of positive organizational scholarship should be perceived as a process, in which those concepts of leadership also played a role. The most widespread model of transformational leadership was proposed by Bass (1985), who stressed following aspects: (1) Individual consideration – the degree to which leaders attend to followers’ needs, act as mentors or coaches, and listen to followers’ concerns. (2) Intellectual stimulation – the degree to which leaders challenge assumptions, take risks, and solicit followers’ ideas. (3) Inspirational motivation – the degree to which leaders articulate visions that are appealing to followers. (4) Idealized influence – the degree to which leaders behave in charismatic ways that cause followers to identify with them.

Servant leadership philosophy was founded by Greenleaf (1977) who never formally defined servant-leadership, others have described it as valuing individuals and developing people, building community, practicing authenticity, and providing leadership that focuses on the good of those who are being led and those whom the organization serves. Liden, Wayne, Zhao and Henderson (2008) developed a multidimensional measure and multi-level assessment of servant leadership consisting of seven dimensions: (1) emotional healing – being sensitive to the personal setbacks of followers, (2) creating value, (3) conceptual skills, or the problem-solving abilities and task knowledge that are prerequisites for providing help to followers, (4) empowering, (5) helping subordinates grow and succeed, (6) putting subordinates first, and (7) behaving ethically.

Authentic leadership is an approach to leadership that emphasizes building the leader’s legitimacy through honest relationships with followers which value their input and are built on an ethical foundation. The most robust model of

authentic leadership was proposed by Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing and Peterson (2008). They highlight and introduce a measure of four principles of authentic leadership: (1) Self-awareness: An ongoing process of reflection and re-examination by the leader of own strength, weaknesses, and values; (2) Relational transparency: Open sharing by the leader of own thoughts and beliefs, balanced by a minimization of inappropriate emotions; (3) Balanced processing: Solicitation by the leader of opposing viewpoints and fair-minded consideration of those viewpoints; and (4) Internalized moral perspective: A positive ethical foundation adhered to by the leader in relationships and decisions that is resistant to outside pressures.

Fundamental state of leadership that was created a little bit later by Quinn (2005) is more difficult to grasp. Fundamental state of leadership should be treated as a higher state of awareness, that, however, can be achieved by combining four components: (1) results orientation, (2) internal direction, (3) other focus, and (4) external openness. Two more attributes of fundamental state of leadership should be noticed. First, Quinn argues that it might not be fully conscious. People could enter fundamental state of leadership without even knowing it. Second, it is a temporary state. People enter and exit it as victims of entropy.

4. Psychological well-being in positive leadership perspective

For further conceptual considerations of I take the most well-established conceptualization of eudaimonic well-being proposed by Ryff (2019) with six dimensions: (1) self-acceptance, (2) autonomy, (3) positive relationships with others, (4) environmental mastery, (5) purpose in life, and (6) personal growth. That approach was also widely used in the research, including the Mid-life in the US study (MIDUS). There are suggestions and evidence that psychological well-being is only achievable in social setting. Ryff (2008) refers to Mill (1893/1989) and looks for the interpersonal aspect of eudaimonic happiness. Mill states that happiness cannot be achieved if it is the final objective. It can only be achieved “by the way”, in the pursuit of happiness of other people or the improvement of mankind. That observation is very important in researching well-being and happiness of entrepreneurs. In Mill’s perspective their happiness is therefore dependent on the happiness of other people around them. Those people are relatives, but also customers, employees and business partners. Also Ryan, Huta and Deci (2008) claim that people high in eudaimonic living tend to behave in more prosocial way, benefitting the collective as well as themselves. They also state that conditions within family and society contribute toward strengthening the degree to which people live eudaimonic lives. This brings us to the question of contribution to well-being by leadership behaviours. Therefore, which specific behaviours lead to achieving components of psychological well-being by the followers.

Self-acceptance benefits from variety of positive leadership behaviours. First of all, individual consideration of the leader means strong focus on the follower as an individual which increases self-acceptance as he or she is an object of leader's attention. Similar mechanism is at play concerning balanced processing, when the leader seeks opinion of all of the members of the team. Second, emotional healing might help the follower to get back after experiencing adversity or difficult situation. Finally, self-awareness of the leader transfers to the follower in the mechanism similar to emotional contagion. I therefore argue that:

Proposition 1. Individual consideration, emotional healing, self-awareness and balanced processing of the leader contribute to self-acceptance of the follower.

One of the most important aspects of empowering employees is to ensure their autonomy (Spreitzer, 1995; 1996). Also balanced processing allows to make employees feel autonomous and have impact on organization's activities. Internalized moral perspective of the leader is transferred to employees as autonomous leader also seeks autonomy in his or her followers. Similar process of transfer applies to internal direction of the leader. I therefore propose that:

Proposition 2. Empowering, balanced processing, internalized moral perspective and internal direction of the leader contribute to the autonomy of the follower.

Environmental mastery of the follower is supported by intellectual stimulation and external openness of the leader. Intellectual stimulation is a process through which the leader allows the follower to grow step by step, be independent and control more and more aspects of the environment (Bass, 1985). External openness of the leader allows the employees to feel that they have impact not only on their job but also on decisions that are taken by the leader. I therefore argue that:

Proposition 3. Intellectual stimulation and external openness of the leader contribute to environmental mastery of the follower.

Some of the aspects of positive leadership help to build positive relationships between the leader and the follower. Individual consideration allows the follower to feel special and engage with trust in the relationship with the leader. Idealized influence on the other hand creates the positive and desired image of the leader. Leader's self-awareness and relational transparency make the leader authentic and as such increase the likelihood of building the close relationship (Walumbwa et al., 2008). This is also strengthened by focusing on others by the leader instead of being ego-centric. I therefore propose that:

Proposition 4. Individual consideration, idealized influence, self-awareness, relational transparency and other focus of the leader contribute to positive relations with others of the follower.

Purpose in life in the organizational setting is strongly dependent on perception of the work as meaningful. For this, two aspects of positive leadership are especially relevant. First, inspirational motivation provides vision or goal (Bass, 1985) which is fundamental for the meaningfulness of task and, more generally, of work (Ryff, 2019). Second, the meaning of work is supported by creating by the leader the value for the community, such as encouraging followers to engage in volunteer activities that benefit local communities (Liden et al., 2008). I therefore argue that:

Proposition 5. Inspirational motivation and creating value by the leader contribute to purpose in life of the follower.

Finally, perception of personal growth of the leader is supported by intellectual stimulation together with conceptual skills of the leader and helping subordinates grow. Intellectual stimulation is about challenging the prevailing order, tasks and the follower. What is also important is seeking ideas from the group and encouraging the followers to contribute and learn. This takes employees out of their comfort zones which is the cost of growth. High degree of conceptual skills of the leader is helpful as it provides the resources for the followers to learn. One more ingredient is the willingness of the leader to contribute to the growth of the followers. I therefore propose that:

Proposition 6. Intellectual stimulation, conceptual skills, helping subordinates grow and results orientation of the leader contribute to personal growth of the follower.

5. Conclusions

The matrix of aspects of positive leadership and components of psychological well-being is just an attempt to show that positive behaviours of the leader have long-term effect on flourishing of the follower. It is subject for further development. Moreover, there are possible complex interactions between behaviours of the leader and effects on the employee. For example there is a possibility of mediation by some aspects of the follower's cognitions, such as work engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Other variables, especially those concerning the personality of the follower might moderate the effect of leader's behaviours on the follower's well-being. This might for example concern neuroticism and extraversion (Bakker et al., 2019). The model might be then much more complicated than it seems.

The study has a couple of practical implications. First of all, there is high capacity of positive behaviours of the leader to influence the flourishing of the follower. Leaders should use those behaviours, but it is critical for them to adjust those behaviours to actual needs of every follower. It is therefore necessary to take a very conscious approach to recognizing the current state of psychological well-being of the employee and its components. Then, as servant leadership theory advises, the leader should take the subsidiary approach and supplement the shortages (Liden et al., 2008). Second, according to happy-productive principle and broaden-and-built theory (Fredrickson, 2011), employees who flourish are more effective and creative. It is therefore in the interest of the leader and the whole organization to support their psychological well-being.

The above propositions open avenues for future research. This would demand testing empirically the proposed model. As psychological well-being seems to be quite stable in time, the longitudinal design should be applied to test the extended effect of positive leadership behaviours. Another issue concerns the cross-level interactions. Some organizational level variables might be relevant for the psychological well-being of the followers, like industry or environment. On the other hand, well-being is an individual phenomenon, therefore individual-level variables should be also taken into consideration. This brings to conclusion that multilevel model should be tested with three levels of analysis: organizational, group (level of the leader) and individual (level of the follower).

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