

Effects of emerging leadership styles on engagement. A mediation analysis in a military context

Paper published in

Leadership & Organization Development Journal

Full citation to this publication:

Ruiz Moreno, A., Roldán Bravo, M.I., García-Guiu, C., Lozano, L.M., Extremera Pacheco, N., Navarro-Carrillo, G. and Valor-Segura, I. (2021), "Effects of emerging leadership styles on engagement – a mediation analysis in a military context", Leadership & Organization Development Journal, Vol. 42 No. 5, pp. 665-689.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/LODJ-05-2020-0222>

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Abstract:

Purpose – This paper aims to report the findings of a study examining the relationship between different leadership styles and engagement through the mediating role of proactive personality.

Design/methodology/approach – Servant leadership, paradoxical leadership, authentic leadership, employee engagement, and proactive personality were assessed in an empirical study based on a sample of 348 military personnel in Spain. The questionnaire data were analyzed through SEM using EQS and bootstrapping analysis using the PROCESS macro for SPSS.

Findings – The results reveal that servant leadership style in officers partially impacts their cadets' engagement through proactive personality but that authentic and paradoxical leadership styles do not mediate the relationship. We also verify a direct relationship between proactive personality and engagement.

Practical implications – The study implications advance the literature on leadership in emphasizing new leadership styles to increase proactive personality and engagement in the military context. This study verifies the importance of military leaders fostering servant leadership as an antecedent of proactive personality. Finally, we show that servant leadership partially impacts engagement through proactive personality.

Originality/value – This study explores the relationship among servant, paradoxical, and authentic leadership styles, proactive personality, and engagement--relationships that have not been explored theoretically and tested empirically in the military context.

Keywords: servant leadership, paradoxical leadership, authentic leadership, engagement, proactive personality

Paper type- Research paper

Introduction

Military institutions have a unique culture compared to other organizations or industries. They are conventionally characterized as intensely hierarchical structures in which traditional leadership styles predominate (Campbell et al., 2010). Today's military leaders must prepare and lead their units to face a wide range of missions and to balance welfare and safety with the need for successful missions (Morath et al., 2011). The context in which officers operate has changed in recent decades, and today's military profession faces the challenge of hybrid threats and asymmetrical conflicts. Military organizations

have decentralized responsibility and authority to small units and lower-level leaders (Firing et al., 2009). In institutions where spirit of service, duty, vocation, and authenticity must coexist with paradoxical military situations, however, hybrid contexts present a challenging emerging academic and experiential field in higher education in which to explore new developments in leadership skills.

Many organizations have been compelled to shift their traditional pyramid-shaped, top-down concept of control towards more flexible, participatory managerial formulas. This change in managers' roles and responsibilities seems to require a corresponding regeneration of the types of leadership behaviors they employ. Leaders must now be more adaptable and people-oriented. New leadership strategies are needed to motivate the 21st-century workforce and increase its positive psychological capital (Deloitte, 2014). Among new, emerging leadership styles that adopt a more participatory philosophy, we find servant leadership (Linden et al., 2015), paradoxical leadership (Zang et al., 2015), and authentic leadership (Zhang et al., 2018), among others. These leadership styles arise as promising managerial approaches to generating better employee performance.

Alongside this trend, work engagement emerges as a significant construct in the management literature because it has been shown to promote employee well-being and performance (Van De Voorde et al., 2016). Engaged employees perform better in their assigned tasks, exhibit increased extrarole behaviors, and have lower turnover intentions (Saks, 2006). Despite these compelling outcomes of employee engagement, the Gallup Organization reports that employee engagement levels within the U.S. workforce averaged less than 33% over the past 15 years. It is thus critical to determine how to maximize employee engagement in the workplace to facilitate or improve organizational effectiveness in the military units (Woods and Sofat, 2013).

To advance this field, our study proposes the influence of three types of leadership: paradoxical, servant, and authentic. Values, education, and leadership competencies are fundamental to military academy curricula. All members, and especially officer cadets, receive leadership training, which continues throughout their career (Kirchner and Akdere, 2017). Yet the authentic (Avolio and Gardner, 2005), servant (Greenleaf, 1977), and paradoxical leadership (Kark et al, 2016) formulated in the modern era have received less attention in the field of contemporary military leadership. Bartone et al. (2007) argue that the developmental processes underlying military education are not well understood and recommend greater attention to understanding the basic processes of human psychosocial development that influence leader performance.

Various authors stress the need to deepen knowledge of the variables that mediate the relationship between engagement and its antecedents. Akhtar et al. (2015) advise incorporating personality traits. Research has focused more on the Big Five personality traits however, with very little research on who possesses a proactive personality or who regularly demonstrates proactivity (McCormick, 2019). To address this gap, this study analyzes how different leadership styles influence engagement mediated by proactive personality.

The general purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of different leadership styles and followers' proactivity on engagement. Its specific objectives are, first, to expand the growing literature on leadership by investigating new leadership styles in the military context (paradoxical, servant, authentic); second, to deepen knowledge of the antecedents that explain specific work behavior in military employees, such as engagement; and, third, to identify mechanisms that mediate the different leadership styles, such as the followers' proactive personality in an environment with a tradition of autocratic leadership.

Literature review

Self-determination and Trait activation theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) helps us to understand how managerial behaviors related to their leadership style affect individuals at work (Huertas et al., 2019).

This theory proposes the existence of three innate individuals' psychological needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness) that should be fulfilled by managers to generate subordinates' "intrinsic motivation, overall well-being, and positive work feelings" (Gardner et al., 2013, p. 320). In our study, we pose that leaders' behaviors inherent in their leadership style can strengthen subordinates' self-determination motivating/prompting them to be proactive and develop a proactive personality. Proactive personality is defined as "the relatively stable tendency to effect environmental change" (Bateman and Crant, 1993, p.103). Individuals with a proactive personality are inclined to change their circumstances intentionally, including their physical environment.

In addition, trait activation theory (TAT) argues that situational context motivates employees' performance through trait activation (Tett and Burnett, 2003). TAT predicts primarily that latent traits will be activated to influence performance in reaction to trait-relevant contextual cues yielding intrinsic rewards. Traits include both personality factors and abilities (Tett et al., 2013). Our study focuses on proactive personality as a latent trait.

TAT identifies three sources of trait-relevant cues in situational context: task-level, social-level, and organizational-level. For Tett and Burnett (2003, p. 505), the most obvious way that each type of cue (task, organizational, and social) triggers the trait activation process is by creating demands, performance, or behavior, which they define as “opportunities to act in a positively valued way”. Liang and Grant (2010) analyze the basic principles of TAT, stressing that personality traits such as proactive personality are latent tendencies to behave in a certain way. Since traits are devised in response to relevant situational signals, such as different leadership styles, trait and situation are two sides of the same coin (Kenrick and Funder, 1988): “the trait influences behavior only in relevant situations.” Employees thus express their traits in response to important signals of traits (Tett and Burnett, 2003).

Drawing on theory and empirical evidence, this study aims to verify and explain the existence of some latent personality traits--proactive personality, which appears in different work-related behaviors--and engagement--which occurs only when relevant trait signals, leadership styles, are present in performance of the task. We thus seek to determine whether engagement occurs when characteristics of both person and situation are activated. Engagement is defined as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p.74). Engagement is thus a holistic concept since it requires simultaneous occurrence of the three dimensions in a connected way, not separately (Kahn, 1990). While many organizations stress the need of identifying ways to raise the level of engagement among their employees, few have analyzed the processes that contribute to increasing it (Wollard and Shuck, 2011).

The research model proposes that military followers’ perceptions of the different types of leadership their leaders show is related to engagement and that this relationship is mediated by proactive personality based on TAT, as depicted in Figure 1. Likewise, it argues the relationship between military follower’s perceptions of the different types of leadership and proactive personality based SDT.

“Insert figure I”

Authentic leadership

Based on SDT and in line with Ilies et al. (2005), we propose that authentic leaders provide support for followers’ self-determination and hypothesize that authentic leadership promotes proactive behavior in the military context. Along these lines, the recent study by Zhang et al. (2018) argues that authentic leaders support an organizational

climate in which employees feel free to perform actions that go against the status-quo, and thus behave proactively. We extend this line of reasoning to infer that every dimension of authentic leadership stimulates employees' inclination to behave proactively in the military context. First, authentic leaders honestly admit their own mistakes and encourage subordinates to express their true thoughts openly. Both actions enable interpersonal understanding and strengthen the quality of the relationship between leaders and followers, and ultimately their need for relatedness (Zhang et al., 2018). Second, authentic leaders know how to impact their subordinates to increase subordinates' sense of competence. Such leaders show high personal mastery (Senge, 1990), as they understand themselves and their moral values well. Zhang et al. (2018) shows that authentic leaders who want to share information can stimulate subordinates' internal motivation and sense of competence. Third, authentic leaders attend to subordinates' opinions before making decisions, stimulating subordinates' autonomy and competence.

Taken together, authentic leaders fulfill their subordinates' needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy, motivating them to behave proactively in their work environment, as stated in the following hypothesis.

H1. Authentic leadership is positively related to proactive personality.

Servant leadership

Servant leaders' attitudes and actions are guided by their desire to serve all of their stakeholders' interests and to inspire subordinates to follow their example and avoid primarily serving self-interests (Panaccio et al., 2015).

In meeting some of subordinates' psychological needs, servant leadership influences their behavior (Huertas et al., 2019). We propose that it can promote proactive behavior in the military context based on SDT. First, servant leaders prioritize subordinates' needs, enhancing their wellbeing (Varela, 2019; Panaccio et al., 2015), need for relatedness, and ultimately psychological safety (Bande et al., 2016). Under this style of leadership, the chance of being liked by one's subordinates increases, increasing subordinates' motivation to behave proactively (Mostafa and El Motalib, 2019). Second, servant leaders promote collaboration, as they work well with those who show initiative (Bande et al., 2016) and use their power in ethical ways, enhancing their employees' sense of competence and autonomy. Since authentic leaders consider their subordinates' opinions when making decisions (Murari and Gupta, 2012), we expect servant leadership to foster subordinates' proactivity. Taken together, servant leadership positively impacts

subordinates' self-determination due to its orientation to assist, empower, and enable others to flourish (Varela, 2019). Along these lines, literature suggests that empowering behaviors can reinforce proactivity (Bande et al., 2016). Liden et al. (2014, p.366) summarize the abovementioned arguments in the following terms: "servant leaders, with their focus on service versus authority and power, are particularly well situated to allow those followers with proactive personalities to shine." Further, when military cadets see their leader as empathic and committed to their growth, they identify with his/her values and behave proactively, behavior that benefits the whole organization. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2. Servant leadership is positively related to proactive personality.

Paradoxical leadership

Paradoxical leaders are "expected to treat followers uniformly and consistently, while considering individual needs and sometimes making exceptions; they must also maintain control by enforcing organizational rules and procedures, while allowing employee flexibility" (Zhang et al., 2015, p. 538). In the military context, Kark et al. (2016) suggest that paradoxical leadership can attend effectively to competing expectations and paradoxical tensions in hybrid confrontations or threats. These authors also demonstrate the clear, necessary advantages of paradoxical-hybrid leadership in the army and its implications for commanders' performance as military leaders. Paradoxical leaders can induce proactive behavior in followers by teaching them how to confront tensions and contradictions and broadening subordinates' understanding of their job requirements and demands (Detert & Burris, 2007).

Being "gentle and soft, but also persistent and powerful" (Lee, Han, Byron, & Fan, 2008, p.93) gives followers a clear understanding of what to do and how to do it. Further, followers are not afraid of making mistakes, as they gain flexibility and autonomy at work, increasing their tendency to work proactively (Parker et al., 2006). Structural issues and individuality constitute two interdependent and synergetic sides of paradoxical leadership. When leaders focus only on structural issues, their followers are less likely to be adaptive and proactive because they are taught to follow strict rules. Stressing individuality, in contrast, may create chaos at the expense of proficiency (Zhang et al., 2015).

Paradoxical leadership thus nurtures proactive behavior as stated in the following hypothesis:

H3. Paradoxical leadership is positively related to proactive personality.

Relationships among proactive personality, engagement, and leadership

Despite the rich knowledge about proactivity's beneficial outcomes, we have yet to fully understand how and why proactive personality influences employee attitudes and behaviors (Greguras and Diefendorff, 2010). This article focuses on how and why proactive personality influences behavior, specifically, employee engagement.

According to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007), job demands and job resources play a vital role in developing engagement. The JD-R model seeks to explain that individual strain is determined by work demands and availability of resources to perform those demands. This model can explain employee engagement through job demands, availability of work resources (e.g., job autonomy, social support, performance feedback), and personal resources (e.g., self-efficacy, optimism), such that high levels of job demands combined with high levels of resources lead to high levels of engagement (e.g., Bakker et al., 2007).

Xanthopoulou et al. (2007) extend the JD-R model by incorporating personal resources (next in importance after job resources)—psychological characteristics or aspects of the self that include self-efficacy and proactive behavior. Proactive personality can thus be considered a personal resource; employees who have a proactive personality will be more likely to experience high work engagement. Proactive personality can thus be conceived as a personal resource for reducing job demands, achieving work goals, and fostering personal goals, all of which increase work-related engagement.

In addition, authors like Zhou et al. (2017) explain that certain personality traits can influence energy management, and these traits can lead to employee engagement, since employee engagement is the end state of employing and stimulating personal energy in the work role. Among personality traits, we highlight proactive personality, which is related to adoption of flexible roles (Parker et al., 2006) and improved motivation to learn (Major et al., 2006), possibly accounting for increases in energy investment at work (i.e., engagement). Similarly, Ilke and Warr (2011) argue that aspects of personality that are more activated and energized should manifest themselves in engagement, which itself reflects high activation and energy. Proactivity appears to be such a high energy personality trait.

We argue that proactive personality is related to employee engagement primarily because proactive employees create resources through proactive behaviors and thus are more likely to be engaged at work. Employees who change their work environment are likely to become deeply immersed in their jobs (Bateman and Crant, 1993) and be more engaged

(Ghorbannejad and Esakhani, 2016). In light of this prior research, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4. Proactive personality is positively related to engagement.

The three leadership styles -authentic, servant, and paradoxical- usually show concern for their subordinates' wellbeing and encourage subordinates' involvement by developing supportive environments that encourage employee participation (Huertas et al., 2019). Maslach et al. (2001) and subsequently Sakes (2006) show perception of support from the organization and one's supervisor to be antecedents of engagement.

An employee with a proactive personality can be expected to behave proactively at work regardless of work context, due to his or her natural tendency to be a self-starter, take initiative to go above and beyond, take charge, and seek opportunities and feedback (Bateman and Crant, 1993; Li et al., 2011; Major et al., 2006). Moreover, TAT, mentioned above, suggests that personality traits such as proactive personality do not in themselves explain specific employee behaviors, such as engagement. Rather, personality traits combine with the situation in the environment or context to determine different employee behaviors. As a result, proactive employee behaviors can emanate from internal or external traits or signals. More exhaustive analysis shows that employees not predisposed to behave proactively can be motivated by the effects of a situation to behave in a particular way, independently of their inherent personality traits (Mischel, 1973). This sometimes occurs because "the external environment inhibits a person's freedom to behave idiosyncratically" (Barrick and Mount, 2003, p.112), and situational signals dictate the behavior needed and required (Stewart and Barrick, 2004).

Other authors stress that employees with higher levels of proactive personality will behave proactively even in the absence of situational signals consistent with this behavior, while employees with lower levels of proactive personality will not behave proactively. But in a contextual situation in which a leadership style or work climate fosters proactivity, employees are expected to behave proactively, independently of their respective levels of proactive personality (McCormick et al., 2019)

Tett and Burnett (2003) use TAT to explain how the situational context motivates people's behavior by triggering their inherent personality characteristics to manifest themselves in behavior. At times, we must revert to other variables to explain how specific personality traits motivate specific workplace behavior. Organizations may undertake to induce employee proactivity by developing the kinds of leaders who can

induce proactive behavior in employees (McCormick et al., 2019), as well as other types of behavior, such as engagement.

Wu and Parker (2017) identify “leader support” as the focal determinant of whether leadership will positively predict employee proactivity, describing specifically how some types of leader support effectively promote employee proactivity. Significantly, they note that individual employee differences make some employees more receptive than others to leader support – and thus more likely to behave proactively in response to such support. The literature review performed leads us to expect that these three styles of leadership as relevant trait signals activate proactive personality, which is manifested in behaviors such as engagement. This theory can explain and help us to understand how situational factors (leadership styles) facilitate activation of employees’ traits (proactive personality) in their behaviors (engagement). Following this logic, we expect proactive personality to mediate in the relationships between managerial leadership style and follower engagement level, as stated in the following hypotheses:

H5. Proactive personality mediates the positive relationship between authentic leadership and engagement.

H6. Proactive personality mediates the positive relationship between servant leadership and engagement.

H7. Proactive personality mediates the positive relationship between paradoxical leadership and engagement.

Methodology

Sample and data collection

A survey questionnaire was prepared to measure the perceptions of military personnel. The scales were drawn from prior studies, adapting some measures to military context. Prior to final administration, and to ensure comprehensibility of the questionnaire, a pretest with the final translated versions of the measures was piloted on a sample of 437 soldiers. The questionnaires were administered, and we received a total of 363 responses. After eliminating incomplete questionnaires, we obtained 348 valid questionnaires, a validity rate of 72.5%.

The data collection process consisted of administering the questionnaires in paper format to a group of cadets at the Zaragoza General Military Academy, a school within the Spanish Army Command Unit for Training and Indoctrination. The sample included personnel in the third and fourth years of military training for officers. These groups,

platoons, were composed of a specific number of students and a section leader who was directly responsible for their instruction and training and performed the direct task of permanent orientation and guidance for the military personnel serving him/her.

Table I summarizes the most significant data and characteristics in the sample.

“Insert here table I”

Measures

Paradoxical leadership was measured using the instrument developed by Zhang et al. (2015). This 22-item scale has five subscales that correspond to its five dimensions: (1) treating subordinates consistently but also permitting individual variation, (2) combining self-centeredness with other-centeredness, (3) controlling decision-making and permitting some autonomy, (4) enforcing regulations for performing tasks but also granting flexibility, and (5) maintaining both hierarchical authority and mutual respect.. The scale yielded a Cronbach Alpha of 0.946.

Servant leadership. The questionnaire administered was SL-7 (Servant Leadership-7), the short version recently formulated by Liden et al. (2015) from the servant leadership scale (SL-28). Using this instrument, respondents ranked their level of agreement with the elements posed in the 7 questionnaire items, using a 7-point Likert format ranging from (1) Disagree completely to (7) Agree completely. This format measured the military personnel’s perceptions of their sections leaders’ form of leadership through statements. The scale yielded a Cronbach Alpha of 0.866

Authentic leadership. This variable was measured by adapting the ALQ developed by Walumbwa et al. (2008). The questionnaire used 16 items to measure the following dimensions: relational transparency (5 items), , internalized moral perspective (4 items), , balanced processing (3 items), , and self-awareness (4 items),. The response scale ranged from 0 («Never») to 4 («Always»). The scale yielded a Cronbach Alpha of 0.933.

Proactive personality. This construct was operationalized using the scale developed by Wu et al. (2018). This four-item scale has been applied in proactivity studies like that of Parker and Collins (2010). A 7-item Likert scale was used to record responses from (1) Disagree completely to (7) Agree completely. The scales yielded a Cronbach Alpha reliability of 0.745.

Engagement was assessed with the UWES (*Utrecht Work Engagement Scale*) in the Spanish adaptation developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002). Respondents ranked their

agreement with the statements posed in the 15 questionnaire items using a 7-point Likert response format ranging from (1) Never to (7) Every day to evaluate the three dimensions of the construct: vigor, dedication, and absorption. The scales yielded a Cronbach Alpha of 0.932.

Control variables. Four characteristics of military personnel were controlled in this study; Napierian log of age, log of number of years at the academy, log of number of years with the section leader, and log of number of persons in the section.

Results

Common method issues

Common method bias was tested using Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003). We loaded all variables in the exploratory factor analysis, constraining the number of factors to 1. As the first component accounts for less than 36% of all variables, common method variance is not a serious problem in our sample.

Construct and indicator reliability

We conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) through EQS by evaluating the measurement model. The overall indices suggested good fit: normed chi-square ($\chi^2/df=1.97$), RMSEA=0.042, NFI=0.804, NNFI=0.910, and CFI=0.914 (see Table II). First, we verified reliability (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) of the scales used, confirming that all scales had a Cronbach Alpha above 0.7 and an average variance extracted (AVE) greater than 0.5. Since composite reliability was greater than 0.7, internal consistency of the construct items is good. Factor loadings of less than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010) were deleted (SL1; PL 6, 7, 16, 17, and 20; AL 4, 5, and 8; ENG 11 and PP 3). The remaining item loadings were higher than the recommended value, suggesting acceptable convergent validity. Since the square root of the AVE for each construct is greater than any correlation, we obtain evidence of discriminant validity. Finally, Table III presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations and shows acceptable corrected item-total- correlation (CITC) values of higher than 0.3. Altogether, we confirm the internal reliability of all scales and the absence of construct reliability concerns regarding the measurement model.

“Insert here table II”

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Hypothesis testing

After performing the scale validation process, we estimated the model proposed, using structural equations modelling (SEM). We chose Covariance-Based SEM with EQS 6.2 to simplify structural modelling by providing different ways to create models. First, we assessed the fit values of the structural model and obtained the following fit indexes: normed $\chi^2 = \chi^2 / \text{degrees of freedom} = 2330.897 / 1348 = 1.7$, CFI= 0.918, IFI=0.919, root mean square error of approximation RMSEA=0.054 (≤ 0.08), adjusted goodness of fit index AGFI=0.784, goodness of fit index GFI= 0.804, normed fit index NFI= 0.827, and non-normed fit index NNFI=0.913. Based on the minimum values required for good model fit, fit is satisfactory.

The estimation values and respective significance levels for the standardized coefficients of parameters representing each hypothesis are displayed in Table IV and Figure 2. First, servant leadership shows a significantly positive association with proactive personality ($\beta = 0.319$, $p < 0.001$), providing evidence for Hypothesis 2. However, Hypotheses 1 and 3 predicting a positive relationship of authentic and paradoxical leadership to proactive personality are not demonstrated empirically. Second, the results for the relationship of proactive personality to engagement are positive and significant ($\beta = 0.424$, $p < 0.001$), enabling acceptance of Hypothesis H4.

“Insert here Table IV”.

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Mediation analysis (Hypotheses 5 and 7)

We analyzed Hypotheses 5, 6, and 7 following Rhee et al. (2010) in performing decomposition of effects. Decomposition establishes that the total effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable is disaggregated into its indirect and direct effects (Rhee et al., 2010). A significant indirect effect indicates that a significant part of the relationship between the dependent and independent variables is explained through the mediating variable. Acceptance of H4 led us to seek evidence for the possible mediating effect of proactive personality in the relationship of the different leadership styles to engagement, and thus support for H5, H6, and H7.

To confirm this possibility, Table V reports the results for the structural model, including the direct and indirect effects for all paths.

“Insert her Table V”.

Estimating the indirect effects enables us to verify H6. The results show that engagement is positively influenced by servant leadership through proactive personality ($\lambda = 0.135$,

$t=3.007$). To analyze the total mediating effect of proactive personality, we examined the direct relationship of the variable servant leadership to engagement. The result ($\lambda=0.684$, $t=5.644$) reveals a significant relationship, indicating that the relationship of servant leadership to engagement occurs partially through proactive personality, which exercises a partial mediating effect.

Since we reject H1 y H3, there is no evidence that styles leadership influences engagement indirectly via proactive personality, and thus no evidence to support H5 and H7. However, the acceptance of H4 led us to try to provide evidence for the possible mediating effect of proactive personality, and thus for H5 and H7. Estimation of the indirect effect did not enable us to verify Hypotheses 5 and 7, however. Since the indirect effect is not significant for either authentic or paradoxical leadership ($\lambda=-0.089$ and $\lambda=-0.008$, respectively), we cannot confirm the relationship of authentic or paradoxical leadership to engagement through proactive personality and thus reject Hypotheses 5 and 7.

We also analyzed goodness of fit in the structural model by examining various indices and their minimum recommended values: normed $\chi^2=2147.071/1200=1.78$, CFI=0.919, IFI=0.919, RMSEA=0.048 (≤ 0.08), AGFI= 0.787, GFI=0.807, NFI=0.834, NNFI=0.914. All fit indices obtained exceed the required minimum values.

To ensure robust results, we ran an additional mediation analysis following Darlington and Hayes (2016) and employing the PROCESS macro for SPSS. This macro enables us to investigate the mediation model and obtain bootstrapped confidence intervals (CIs) for each indirect effect. We conducted bootstrapping analysis to assess the indirect effects of proactive personality in the servant leadership-engagement relationship. After conducting 10,000 bootstrap replicates, we calculated the effect size of engagement as 0.225 with 95% bias-corrected CIs [0.1271, 0.3385]. According to this analysis, the association between servant leadership and engagement is mediated through proactive personality and is significant, as the bias-corrected CIs did not include zero.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of different leadership styles on followers' proactivity and engagement. The first hypothesis, that authentic leadership positively influences employees' proactivity, was not supported. This result may be due to the fact that the influence of authentic leadership on followers' performance depends on the types of values the leader holds, as the components of authentic leadership are not

necessarily paired with benevolent values (Qu et al., 2019). Our study context may explain this result. Authentic leadership may be limited in some military contexts, as authentic military leaders have high power values that can shrink subordinates' proactivity. In a setting where task-orientation and sharing common goals among cadets is vital, narcissistic behavior in which the leader puts him-/herself at the center must be avoided and can lead to confusion unless the leader's convictions align with various interest groups' beliefs (Alvesson and Einola, 2019). Centralized command, single-head responsibility, and situations of leadership in the military academy can reduce application of core aspects of authentic leadership such as balanced information processing and relational transparency between leader and followers.

Our second hypothesis posited that servant leadership positively influences employees' proactive behavior. This hypothesis was supported and aligns with Milton and Van Dierendonck (2014), which demonstrates that servant leaders lead their subordinates to become agents of change. This result is especially noteworthy because traditional hierarchical military contexts could inhibit military cadets from feeling empowered by their servant leaders. We demonstrate, however, that "supportive supervision is an environment that facilitates proactive work behaviour" (Varela et al., 2019, p.12).

Contrary to expectations, no relationship was found between paradoxical leadership and employees' proactive behavior, leading us to reject our third hypothesis. This result can be explained by the specific context of our study. The army has a hierarchical and autocratic structure, and paradoxical leadership style may be better suited to more organic workplace structures, as Zhang et al. (2015) demonstrate. The cadets surveyed in this study thus may not be prepared to benefit from paradoxical leadership. They may be confused as to the actual intentions of their superiors (Huertas et al., 2019) and not respond proactively to ambiguous behaviors inherent in this style of leadership. Cadets are young officers with no real experience in unit command. Despite the necessary advantages of paradoxical leadership in the military context, Kark et al. (2016) highlight that "the ability to experience, cope and lead in a manner that will always address the paradoxes is complex and a burden for many commanders" (p.183).

Evidence was found for the positive relationship of proactive behavior to engagement. This finding aligns with previous research (Crant, 2000; Cooper-Thomas et al., 2014; Hakanen et al., 2008) confirming that proactive behaviours can predict work engagement, as proactive cadets identify or create opportunities that enhance individual or team effectiveness. When cadets face high job demands and are proactive, they can excel in

their work and ultimately become more engaged. Taken together, these findings suggest that engaged cadets do not behave passively in their work environment. On the contrary, they can be expected to act as agents of change.

Our fifth, sixth, and seventh hypotheses posited that proactivity mediates the relationship between different styles of leadership (authentic, servant, and paradoxical) and engagement. The fifth and seventh hypotheses were not supported, as conditions for verifying mediation were not met. These results reinforce with prior research showing that employees demonstrate higher levels of engagement when the leader attends better to their needs and interests (Harter et al., 2002). As discussed above, authentic and paradoxical leadership in the military context are not the best styles of leadership to fulfill cadets' needs.

Hypothesis six was supported, confirming that servant leaders partially impact cadets' engagement by activating their cadets' proactivity rather than having a direct effect. This finding is consistent with previous research (Panaccio et al., 2015) in that servant leadership indirectly affects organizational performance as a result of behavioral benefits that subordinates gain from servant leaders. We confirm that supportive leadership nurtures an environment in which cadets are more engaged to behave proactively and thus feel more engaged with their workplace. Under this leadership style, cadets feel they are part of a community (Greenleaf, 1977; Kahn, 1990) and find their work more interesting and challenging (Spears and Lawrence, 2002). In addition to identifying predictors of engagement, our current study demonstrates, for a military context, that servant leadership is the style that activates proactive workplace behavior in cadets. This finding is consistent with Hoch et al. (2018, p.502), which maintains that "servant leadership showed more promise –than authentic leadership and ethical leadership- as a stand-alone leadership approach that is capable of helping leadership researchers and practitioners better explain a wide range of outcomes."

Implications

From a theoretical perspective, we advance the literature on leadership by emphasizing new leadership approaches to increase proactivity and engagement in the military context. We also contribute to understanding the influence of authentic, servant, and paradoxical leadership on proactivity and engagement in the military context.

First, this study demonstrates the importance of military leaders in cultivating a supportive leadership style (servant leadership), to activate their cadets' proactivity, answering calls in the literature to identify additional antecedents to proactive behavior

(Martin et al., 2013). This result points toward servant leadership as influencing proactivity.

Second, this study is among the first to analyze antecedents to cadets' engagement. Our findings demonstrate that servant leadership may partially impact cadets' engagement by activating their proactivity. We thus answer the question of whether the effectiveness of servant leadership in this context is universal or depends on other factors (Varela et al., 2019). Taken together, our results underscore the importance of considering servant leadership as the most useful style by which leaders of military units can facilitate proactivity in their cadets and, indirectly, achieve work engagement. Third, the study increases understanding of how proactive personality relates to engagement and highlights the importance of cadets' proactive work behaviors.

Both SDT and TAT and JD-R help to explain the study's findings on improving cadets' engagement. Since servant leadership better satisfies cadets' needs for self-determination and competence, military leaders should grow their cadets' engagement, among other issues, by activating cadets' proactive behavior.

As to practical recommendations, although the best-known leadership constructs have been explored (Borgmann et al., 2016), it is important to investigate other leadership constructs in educational and military contexts, as they may identify new issues to include in the curricula of military academies and innovative approaches to leadership. We recommend that military leaders be trained in servant leadership style, which can be demonstrated through empowerment and development of people by expressing humility, authenticity, and interpersonal acceptance (Van Dierendonck, 2011). This style would improve cadets' engagement, a key issue in achieving the best performance of a military unit (Pastor-Álvarez et al., 2019). The results of the mediation analysis indicate that training military leaders in servant leadership enables military units to inspire change-oriented cadet behavior (Bande et al., 2016). Training programs in military leadership skills thus should be redesigned to acquire more proactive cadets. As proactive work behavior is positively related to work engagement, military leaders should ensure that cadets are aware that their proactivity is valued and continuously encourage it, even considering proactive personality when selecting them. Military units might also match cadets' proactive personalities with military leadership styles to maximize work engagement.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

This study has some limitations. First, self-report measures can suffer from common method bias. Future studies should include responses from other parties, such as the military leader. Second, the study is cross-sectional, evaluating cadets' responses at a specific moment in time, and perceptions can change. It is thus advisable to conduct a longitudinal study in the future.

Third, future research could take into account the influence of personality on certain contextual and employee perceptions and experiences in the workplace. Future research must also continue to advance understanding of the role of military leadership by extending our findings and including additional leadership styles, such as empowering leadership or charismatic leadership. This study thus opens a stream of potential research seeking to understand how other leadership behaviors result in employee well-being in the military.

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