THE AUTHENTIC LEADER
AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL
IN THE MILITARY ENVIRONMENT

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"Authentic leadership" is a significant area of research. Based on the theory, which explains how individuals establish a social and professional relationship, we have postulated a statistical relationship between authentic leadership and psychological capital. Thus, the implications of this type of relationship for theory and practice are discussed in the paper.

In this study, we intend to conduct an exploratory study to demonstrate not only the role of authentic leadership in the military organization, but also how it is achieved. The study aims to identify whether there is a significant relationship between authentic leadership and psychological capital. Why is such research important in the military environment? Because military leaders can motivate subordinates both inside the organization and outside the chain of command. Being an authentic leader is much more complex than simply "giving an order". An authentic leader's influence on other colleagues or subordinates can take many forms.

Keywords: authentic leader; psychological capital; resilience; military organization; power of example;

INTRODUCTION

In the tense situation in which Romania currently finds itself, the armed forces have increasingly become an important component not only for national security, but also for NATO. In this context, we consider that the military environment needs effective leaders who, through the decisions they adopt, can win or lose any type of classical or modern *"warfare"*, such as the economic or technological ones. To *"lead a battle to victory"* leaders must provide a clear vision and value to the members of the groups they belong to. That is why the leadership of the armed forces is seen as the first key factor in the formation of authentic leaders. Authentic leadership is one that provides positive value, influences changes in the members' behaviour and attitudes, and can demonstrably improve their performance.

The research works based on the role of the leader regarding its direct or indirect influence on relationships, psychology, and behaviour are in full development, representing an academic interest. Studies are needed to identify the importance of authentic leadership in the military environment and to determine its effectiveness.

Authentic leadership places special emphasis on the moral values of an authentic leader, being associated with positive psychological capital. Authentic leadership is based on various initiatives associated with trust, hope, and positive thinking.

In the current international economic and social context, the military organization responsibly gives priority attention to the study of the constitutive factors of authentic leadership. Within authentic leadership, theoretical research identifies three perspectives: the human internal perspective, the relational perspective, and the developmental perspective (Kaya, Karatepe, 2020; Wirawan et al., 2020; Novitasari et al., 2020; Khan, 2022). The first approach, one related to an emotional point of view, *"focuses on the inner side of the authentic leader"* (Malik, Mehmood, 2022; Szydo et al., 2022),

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a key element of the self-concept. The second approach is a relational one, from the point of view of *"the interpersonal relationships established between the authentic leader and his or her subordinates"* (Crawford et al., 2020; Wirawan et al., 2020). Authentic leadership is defined as *"authentic behaviour and balanced information processing"* and indicates a true social relationship-oriented leader. The third approach is a developmental one, in which the authentic leader *"is raised by a significant event, which he experiences"* (Mira, Odeh, 2019; Malik, Mehmood, 2022). Essentially, the three directions of study focus on the concept of an authentic leader that promotes positive psychological competence, an ethical atmosphere, a type of behaviour that encourages a positive self-development through high self-awareness, a relationship transparency, a moral point of view, as well as a balanced processing of information, at the level of the social group they belong to (Farid et al., 2020; Novitasari et al., 2020; Khan, 2022; Malik, Mehmood, 2022).

THE AUTHENTIC LEADER

All effective methods of *"authentic leadership"* are thought to be based on the leadership theory of the Authentic, which emphasizes the notion of leading by *"the power of example"* (Shah et al., 2019; Todt et al., 2019; Hutagalung et al., 2020; Waters et al., Iqbal et al., 2020). It highlights four elements of genuine leadership as follows:

❖ Knowing one's strengths and shortcomings as well as one's values and views is a sign of *self-awareness*. Authentic leaders possess a solid sense of self-awareness. Authenticity, honesty, and sincerity are frequently used interchangeably in the authentic leader hypothesis (Einola, Alvesson, 2021).

❖ Presenting one's real self to others is an example of *relational transparency*, which helps co-workers create trust, cooperation, and teamwork.

❖ The capacity for impartiality in a leader is a sign of *balanced thinking*.

❖ The personal morals and values of leaders that are consistent with their conduct are a sign of their *internalized moral vision*.

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Theoretical and empirical data from earlier studies suggest that, to varied degrees (Alvesson, Einola, 2019; Nübold et al., 2020; Kaya et al., 2020), the association between the four above-mentioned components can also be used to identify the true leader.

A person who exemplifies the qualities of an authentic leader is someone who is able to put their team members' needs first in order to produce positive results in the future (Johnson, 2019; Kaya et al., 2020; Covelli et al., 2020).

The military organization is inclined to authoritarian rule; this is the fundamental difference between the military and the majority of society. A common understanding is established throughout the structure when commanders express their intentions through mission orders, empowering leaders at all levels to exercise disciplined initiative when unanticipated challenges occur. This mission command philosophy's core idea is trust. Authentic, connected, and compassionate leaders provide the trust required for any mission to successfully accomplish its stated objectives.

According to Avolio, *"it does not matter what kind of leader you are; authentic leaders can be directive, participative, or even authoritarian"* (Novitasari et al., 2020, p. 32). What is essential is that the authentic leader adapts to circumstances, employees, and subordinates, so that they can be effective and, above all, influential. This fact often requires an adjustment of behaviour (Alvesson, Einola, 2019). To lead, authentic leaders are able to face organizational, societal, and personal challenges, having also the ability to do so without the desire for status or personal rewards (Ib.). The behaviour of the authentic leader could sensitize both the leadership functions and the execution ones within the military organization. Thus, authentic leaders consider the fulfilment of professional tasks and the development of subordinates as equally important. They are constantly developing so that the development of the military is seen as authentic and part of the professional training process.

Since authentic leadership is a very important concept, it is advisable to make it part of the existing training programme, in the education systems for both officers and non-commissioned officers.

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The authentic leader development is not *"learning to lead in a day programme"*; therefore, formal education is needed (Bilgetürk, Baykal 2021). In addition to formal education, an authentic leader needs an ongoing commitment to development. The military, for example, tend to imitate or model themselves after the leaders who inspire them. Ultimately, authentic leaders shape and transform. The authentic leader genuinely cares about the development of the subordinates as well as the success of the organization (Hutagalung et al., 2020).

Another important aspect indicates that there are some characteristics that group authentic leaders according to certain traits. That is, there is a sense of purpose that keeps them motivated to be passionate about the work they do and about the purpose of their work. Their values are strong enough to know how they will behave and do the right thing, professionally.

Secondly, authentic leaders build a professional relationship that allows them to build a connection with others. Authentic leaders develop self-control, a form of self-discipline that allows them to have control and consistency and to remain calm and balanced. Ultimately, this can be considered a sensitive characteristic, which allows them to be full of balanced but intense compassion to help, support, and care for other colleagues or subordinates (Curran, 2019; Nübold et al., 2020; Bilgetürk, Baykal 2021; Northouse, 2022).

PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL

Psychological capital (PsyCap) is defined as a positive mental state characterized by the existence of high efficacy, optimism, resilience, and hope. Psychological capital is described by four dimensions (Bogler, Somech, 2019; Waters et al., 2020; Putra et al., 2020; Stoffers et al., 2020; Ogunyemi et al., 2020; Zyberaj et al., 2022).

Hope entails having a clear plan and goal for the future, and perseverance in achieving the goals when necessary.

Optimism is related to having a positive outlook on life events, and a positive attitude towards success in the actions we undertake now and in the future.

Resilience refers to the ability to maintain high performance in any situation, regardless of problems or setbacks.

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's ability to use the internal resources to solve problems and the confidence to take on and invest the effort needed to overcome complex tasks.

A first idea indicates that *"psychological capital"* is defined as a positive psychological approach in the field of psychological sciences. According to Luthan, 2007 (Supriyadi et al., 2020; Santisi et al., 2020), *"psychological capital"* is a conceptual model of a positive workplace approach, also known as *organizational behaviour theory*.

Another observation is that scientific research has developed the concept of *"psychological capital"* to expose the psychological abilities of individuals, which can be measured but also used to improve individual and group performance. *"Psychological capital"* is an approach characterized by dimensions that can be optimized. The potential that individuals have to help the performance of the organization in general and the military organization in particular is a characteristic (Mahfud et al. 2020; Supriyadi et al. 2020) that supports the positioning of *psychological capital* as an important resource for optimal team functioning.

- **Research sample**

To carry out the research, two questionnaires were applied on a total of 50 people, employees from different departments (training, technical support, planning, logistics, instructors with experience between 1 and 25 years), from military units in Bucharest, Romania. All respondents agreed to participate in the study, verbally consented to participate in the research, and were assured of data confidentiality. Of them:

- 95% are men; 5% are women (with postgraduate studies);
- aged between 20-29, a total of 16 respondents (32%); 30–39, a number of 24 respondents (48%); 40–49, a number of 9 respondents (18%); 50–59, a number of respondents 1 (2%);
- having high school education, 19 respondents (38%); post-secondary education, 8 respondents (16%); university education, 14 respondents (28%); postgraduate studies, 9 respondents (18%);

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– having work experience between 1 and 5 years: 11 respondents (22%); between 6 and 10 years: 9 respondents (18%); between 10 and 15 years: 12 respondents (24%); between 16 and 20 years: 13 respondents (26%); and spanning for more than 21 years: 5 respondents (10%);

Two questionnaires were administered: the *Authentic Leadership Questionnaire* (Walumbwa, 2008; Avolio, 2020; Iqbal et al., 2020) consisting of 16 items, and the *Psychological Capital Assessment Questionnaire* (Wirawan et al., 2020; Parwantu et al., 2021) consisting of 24 items.

❖ *The Authentic Leadership Questionnaire* (Shah et al., 2019; Todt et al., 2019; Iqbal et al., 2020) measures the level of authenticity of leadership. The aspects measured were *self-awareness* (items 1, 5, 9, 13), *transparency of relationships* (items 4, 8, 12, 16), *balanced processing* (items 3, 7, 11, 15) and *internalized moral perspective* (items 2, 6, 10, 14).

❖ *The Psychological Capital Assessment Questionnaire* includes the following dimensions: *self-efficacy* (items 1-6), *hope* (items 7-12), *resilience* (items 13-18), and *optimism* (items 19-24) (Putra et al., 2020; Stoffers et al., 2020; Ogunyemi et al., 2020; Parwantu et al., 2021). A 5-point Likert scale (from 1, strongly disagree, to 5, strongly agree) was used for the survey (Wirawan et al., 2020; Parwantu et al., 2021).

The Authentic Leadership Questionnaire measures the level of authenticity of leadership. The aspects measured were self-awareness, transparency of relationships, balanced processing and internalized moral perspective.

The Psychological Capital Assessment Questionnaire includes the following dimensions: self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism.

• **Data Analysis**

The objective of the present study is to examine the statistical relationship between authentic leadership and the psychological capital of military employees in the Romanian armed forces. The data collected using the applied questionnaires have been processed using the statistical-mathematical tool Excel in order to confirm the formulated hypotheses.

Research questions

Q1: What is the relationship between authentic leadership and the psychological capital of military employees?

H$_0$: There is no statistically significant relationship between the degree of leadership authenticity and the psychological capital of employees in the military environment.

H$_1$: Authentic leadership has a statistically significant positive relationship with the psychological capital of military employees.

Q2: Which of the following variables – self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism – significantly (or most) influence authentic leadership?

H$_0$: There is no statistically significant relationship between the authentic leader and the predictors (self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism).

H$_1$: At least one of the following dimensions of psychological capital – self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism – predicts the degree of leadership authenticity.

The first step in data exploration is to analyse the scatterplot. A scatterplot's main purpose is to show how strong (intense) the statistical relationship or statistical correlation is between the two variables (psychological capital and authentic leadership). The closer together the data points are along a straight line, the higher the correlation. In *figure 1* we can see that there is a significant correlation between the two variables.

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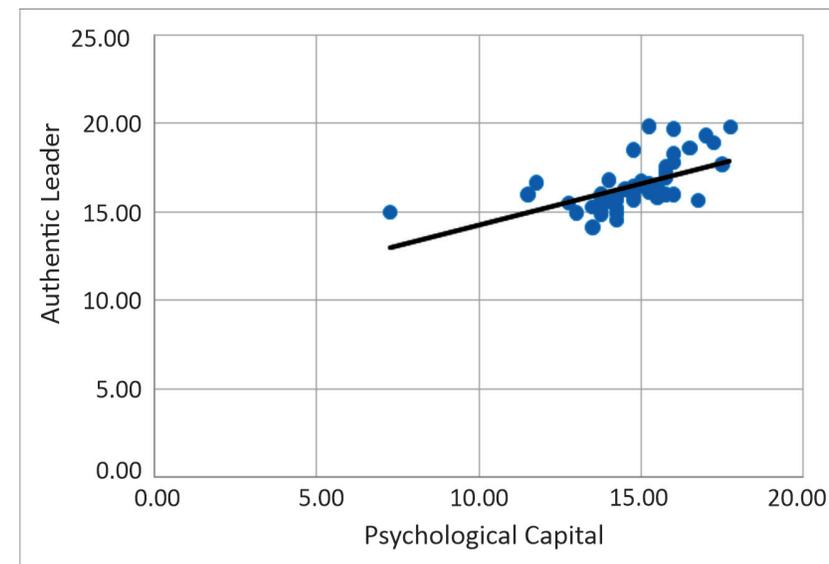

Figure no. 1: Scatter Plot

In a simple linear regression, the model used to describe the relationship between a single dependent variable Y (authentic leader) and a single independent variable X (psychological capital) is $Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1$ with "i" being 50, and β_0 and β_1, parameters.

Regression Statistics	
Multiple R	0.577
R Square	0.334
Adjusted R Square	0.320
Standard Error	1.401
Observations	50

Table no. 1: Regression Model

Based on the data obtained in *table no. 2*, the value of "*psychological capital*" (R Square) is 0.333, which means that the variable of psychological capital can be explained by the authentic leadership of the leader in proportion to 33.3%, while the remaining 66.7% is explained by other variables not addressed in this study.

ANOVA	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F
Regression	1	47.159	47.159	24.018	**0.000**
Residual	48	94.247	1.963		
Total	49	141.406			

Table no. 2: Anova's Model

	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value
Intercept	3.078	2.385	1.291	0.203
Psychological capital	0.706	0.144	4.901	**0.000**

Table no. 3: P-values and Coefficients

From the results of the tests mentioned in *tables 2* and *3*, it can be seen that there is a positive and significant influence of authentic leadership on the psychological capital of subordinates F [(1.48) = 24.01, p<0.001].

The resulting coefficient was a positive 0.706 one, with a *t-statistic* of 4.901. It means that the hypothesis H_1 of this study was accepted

and the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected. We can also answer the first research question, namely that there is a positive statistical relationship between authentic leadership and psychological capital.

This research is in line with previous research that supports the fact that the authentic leader has a significant effect on the psychological capital of subordinates in the organizational environment (Nübold et al., 2020; Bilgetürk, Baykal 2021; Northouse, 2022; Stoffers et al. et al., 2020; Ogunyemi et al., 2020; Zyberaj et al., 2022).

In this study, we have intended to identify which of the four dimensions of psychological capital predict the level of leadership authenticity. A linear regression analysis is performed using the predictor variables, the dimensions of the psychological capital of the subordinates, and as a criterion variable, the level of authenticity of the leader in the act of leadership.

Regression Statistics	
Multiple R	0.642
R Square	0.412
Adjusted R Square	0.360
Standard Error	1.360
Observations	50

Table no. 4: Multiple Regression Model

ANOVA	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F
Regression	4	58.230	14.557	7.876	**0.000**
Residual	45	83.176	1.848		
Total	49	141.406			

Table no. 5: Anova's Model

	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value
Intercept	2.188	2.368	0.924	0.360
Self-efficacy	1.083	0.693	1.563	0.125
Hope	-0.297	0.944	-0.315	0.754
Resilience	2.156	0.739	2.917	**0.005**
Optimism	0.084	0.878	0.096	0.924

Table no. 6: P-value Model

Through multiple regression, we have evaluated all four predictor variables and their significance levels for: self-efficacy (p = 0.125), hope (p = 0.754), resilience (p = 0.005) and optimism (p = 0.924). The general regression model has been identified as significant $F_{(4.45)} = 7.87, p<0,001$. The only independent variable that predicts the level of leadership authenticity of the leader is *"resilience"* (β= 2.188, p =0.005). It means that the hypothesis H_1 of this study was accepted, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected. As a result, we can answer the second question from the research by observing that only one variable, namely the level of resilience of subordinates, predicts the level of authenticity of the leader in the act of leadership with certainty.

The only independent variable that predicts the level of leadership authenticity of the leader is "resilience". The level of resilience of subordinates predicts the level of authenticity of the leader in the act of leadership.

CONCLUSIONS

Therefore, it is confirmed that there is a positive, statistically significant relationship between subordinates' psychological capital and an authentic leadership style. In this context, the level of resilience of subordinates is a strong indicator of the degree of authenticity of the superior's exercise of leadership.

The current research also suggests that other academic initiatives are needed to capture the statistically significant relationship between the leader's (leadership's) authenticity and the subordinates' psychological capital.

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