

Authentic Leadership Development: How It Can Relate To Corrections

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Management Development for the Future

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## Abstract

This research paper was written as part of a Management Development for the Future program, hosted by the Delaware Department of Correction and taught by the U.S. Department of Justice National Institute of Corrections. The focus of this paper will be on authentic leadership development and how it can relate to corrections. The intent of this paper is to discuss what it means to be an authentic leader, what authentic leadership development consists of, the importance of positive psychological capital and the development of the self. In my conclusion, I will discuss the need for authentic leadership amongst correction agencies, specifically Delaware Department of Correction.

### Authentic Leadership Development: How it can relate to Corrections

There appears to be a prevalent belief that our country is faced with a leadership dilemma and in need of a makeover. According to the article written by Woolley, Caza and Levy (2011) “over 7 in 10 Americans agree or strongly agree that there is a leadership crisis in the United States” (p. 438). Factors such as our country’s economic fall, political turmoil and cultural changes have left our leaders faced with numerous burdens leaving them with the challenge of doing more than just managing and giving orders, they need to be in touch with their self, their values, morals and ethical perception by others (Clapp-Smith, Vogelgesand & Avey, 2009). In addition to world events, individuals tend to be reevaluating their lives and work as they search for a deeper meaning leading some in pursuit for self development (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). As mentioned in the article by Avolio & Gardner (2005), “authentic leadership theories have emerged as a central component to positive leadership since its conceptualization in the late 1970’s” (p. 315). Researchers in leadership stress the importance of promoting leadership studies and practices that value a holistic, collective approach rather than the traditional hierarchical, leader-centric approach (Clapp-Smith, Vogelgesand & Avey, 2009). In addition, great emphasis is placed on the need for leaders to have a solid moral and ethical foundation (Woolly, Caza & Levy, 2010). What is defined as an authentic leader does not appear to be a trait one is born with, it seems to be a never ending process. A process in which the leader must be committed to focusing on positive development within themselves and their followers while facilitating a positive work environment and encouraging high gains (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

### **To be an Authentic Leader**

Authentic means to be genuine, not fake, true to one's own personality, spirit and/or character. Leadership means to have the power or ability to lead and guide others. With that said, authentic leadership means to genuinely want to serve others through one's personal leadership (Michie & Gooty, 2005). An authentic leader is someone who is truly interested in empowering the people they lead to make a difference. In fact, they are more interested in inspiring their group to move towards personal achievement than their personal power, money or prestige (Woolley, Caza & Levy, 2010). They are led equally by the compassion and their intellect and they lead others with purpose, passion and values (Michie & Gooty, 2005). In addition, authentic leaders have extremely strong people relations skills. As mentioned in the article by Shamir & Eilam (2005) people that follow authentic leaders willingly do so because they are dependable, resilient, trustworthy and loyal. They are dedicated to personal growth, development and education because they believe that becoming a solid leader takes a lifetime. Authentic leaders also embrace one's weaknesses and build on one's strengths. And when they are wrong or make a mistake, they admit their shortcoming and take full responsibility (Shamir & Eilam, 2005).

### **Authentic Leadership Development**

To summarize the previous section, authentic leadership is about being true to one's self, acting with passion and integrity, having respect and love for others, and not following the crowd but inspiring the crowd to move toward achieving a great vision with optimism. According to Avolio & Luthans, (2006) authentic leadership development is

defined as “the process that draws upon a leader’s life course, psychological capital, moral perspective, and a ‘highly developed’ supporting organizational climate to produce greater self-awareness and self-regulated behavior, which in turn fosters continuous, positive self-development resulting in veritable, sustained performance” (p. 2). This positive state of development is centered on supporting and aiding human growth and is contributed to improved performance (Woolley, Caza & Levy, 2011). It appears that this type of authentic leadership development is impossible or at best difficult to teach in a class room alone given it involves hereditary factors, life experiences and self-awareness (Avolio & Luthans, 2006). It combines one’s personal leadership philosophy, style and idea on how they want to lead and inspire others (Avolio & Luthans, 2006) It is also important to mention that achieving positive authentic leadership development is only possible when followers believe their leaders are truly authentic and not simply putting on a show for personal gain (Clapp-Smith, Vogelgesang & Avey, 2009). When our leaders and followers invest in each other for anticipated future gains, they function at their prime, have a better understanding of their organization’s mission and hurdles (Clapp-Smith, Vogelgesang & Avey, 2009) and develop self awareness, regulation and trust (Fiona Beddoes-Jones, 2012). Traditionally the impact of a leader was measured solely by financial gains and other tangible assets, however in recent years researchers and leaders have begun to recognize the importance of intangible gains such a human capital and achieving a positive state of development (Avolio & Luthans, 2006).

### **Positive State of Development**

A positive state of development, which is commonly referred to as Positive Psychological Capital (PsyCap) is based on self-efficacy, hope, resilience and optimism

(Avolio & Gardner, 2005). To better understand what positive Psychological Capital is let's break down its components. Self-efficacy is trusting in one's ability to perform specific tasks. According to Clapp-Smith, Vogelgesand & Avey (2009) when a person has high self-efficacy, they believe they have the ability to take action and control their environment to achieve success, no matter how cumbersome the task may be. The article also mentions that hope is defined as one's drive to attain the goal in addition to seeking out the avenues to attain the desired goal, which can lead to high levels of performance. Furthermore, optimism is one's ability to pull from positive experience and grow from negative experience resulting in an encouraging mindset and positive product (Clapp-Smith, Vogelgesang & Avey, 2009). Finally, there is resilience which is the ability to quickly recover from difficult or traumatic situations. In terms of authentic leadership development, PsyCap is going above investing in the human self so one can evolve and achieve the benefits of their highest potential and a greater self (Avolio & Luthans, 2006).

### **The Benefits of Achieving Positive PsyCap**

According to Wooley, Caza & Levy (2011) the components of PsyCap positively affect individual confidence (self-efficacy), their belief in their potential to succeed (optimism), their eagerness to take on projects with the expectation of success (hope) and their ability to bounce back from failures or hurdles (resilience). By focusing on the positive versus the negative, we build constructive moments in our lives which build positive personnel, teams and work environment, which is known to produce huge rewards. Therefore, authentic leaders should behave in ways that foster their own psychological capital which in turn will impact the development of their follower's psychological capital and have a positive impact on the agency's growth and wellbeing

(Avolio, Luthans, 2006). By doing so, leaders encourage hope by paving the way for individual growth and career progress. They encourage their followers to voice their opinions and suggestions giving them a strong connection with the organization which in turn develops resilience (Woolley, Caza & Levy, 2011). When an employee or follower feels a positive association with their company, the agency profits since high PsyCap employees are known to perform better, have better attitudes and produce higher outcomes than low PsyCap employees (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

### **The “Self” Concept**

True authentic leadership development starts with the individual getting in touch with their self, who they truly are and what they believe is achievable (Avolio & Luthans, 2006). Leaders who consider all sides of an issue, uphold their personal morals, clearly communicate their ideas and are aware of their own strengths and weakness will encourage a positive organizational culture which typically contributes to the development of followers (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Furthermore, authentic leadership development involves understanding the actual self, believing the possible self and behaving in a way to narrow the gap between the two. The concept behind Positive psychological capital and the development of the self is intertwined because the conditions involved in positive PsyCap are believed to foster improved self-awareness, self-regulatory and self-transcendence behaviors which is critical in developing successful individuals, teams and organizations (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Self-awareness is acknowledging one’s own personality traits, morals, biases, strengths and weakness and understanding how it effects how one thinks, feels and behaves (Ilies, Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2005). “Self-awareness is not a destination point, but rather an

emerging process where one continually comes to understand his or her unique talents, strengths, sense of purpose, core values, beliefs and desires” (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 324). Self-regulation is the process in which authentic leaders exert self-control by establishing acceptable outcomes, assessing inconsistencies between what is desired and what is exhibited, and developing a course of action for resolving the differences (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). This self-discipline is essential to authentic leadership development as we attempt to achieve our highest possible self. Self-transcendence is defined as the ability to focus attention on doing something for the sake of others, as opposed to doing something for personal gain. Examples of self-transcendent behavior are treating others equally, with admiration, being receptive to other’s thoughts and relinquishing self-serving concepts to serve the need of others (Michie & Gooty, 2005).

### **ALD and Delaware Department of Correction**

As public servants and leaders of the largest law enforcement agency in Delaware, the administration within the Department of Correction is faced with a very cumbersome task. According to the Delaware Department of Correction website, the Department employs over 2,500 employees, supervises approximately 6,500 – 7,000 inmates housed in prisons/work releases and supervises approximately 17,000 probationers living within our community. Managing such a high quantity of employees, inmates and probationers is a huge challenge alone. When we add factors such as politics, the changing nature of crime, budget cuts, staffing deficiencies, and organizational cultures, the complexity of management increases therefore being an effective leader becomes even more taxing. The development of authentic leaders within the Delaware

Department of Correction appears to be essential for success and well being of our agency.

Given our nation's economic state, lack of funding is affecting every part of Government. The field of Corrections is faced with the challenge of doing more with less. To the employees, less money means reduced salaries, equipment shortages, less training, salary, lower staff to offender ratios and increased workloads. From my experience, when an employee feels over worked and under paid, they tend to develop high levels of stress, decreased self worth, and their quality of work tends to diminish. This in turn leads to low moral which has a negative effect on our organization's work culture, quality and quantity of work. To restore trust in our leadership, gain a sense of self-worth and improve motivation, I feel that the correction field, including Delaware Department of Correction needs upcoming leaders to know and understand the core philosophies of authentic leadership development and use them in a way to maintain and transform our organizations current culture. What seems to set authentic leadership development apart from other leadership theories is its primary focus on who you are, what your life story has lead you to become, who you could be at your highest potential, how to get there and how the true authentic you can touch and inspire others to move towards a higher level of achievement. Because corrections truly a people business, ALD's focus on human capital seems to be a great start to an approved culture for corrections in general and within the Delaware Department of Correction.

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