

Intrapreneurial Self-Capital: A Promising Resource for Human Capital Sustainability Leadership Beyond Personality Traits in Workers

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Abstract

This study examined the association between intrapreneurial self-capital (ISC) and human capital sustainability leadership (HCSL), controlling for personality traits. 146 workers completed the *Big Five Questionnaire*, the *Intrapreneurial Self-Capital Scale*, and the *Human Capital Sustainability Leadership Scale*. Results indicated that ISC explained additional variance in HCSL beyond personality traits, underscoring its relevance for future research and interventions in organizations.

Keywords

Intrapreneurial self-capital, Human capital sustainability leadership, Personality traits.

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Intrapreneurial Self-Capital: Una risorsa promettente per la Human Capital Sustainability Leadership oltre i Tratti di Personalità in lavoratori

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Sommario

Questo studio ha esaminato l'associazione tra l'*Intrapreneurial Self-Capital* (ISC) e la *Human Capital Sustainability Leadership* (HCSL), controllando per gli effetti dei tratti di personalità. 146 lavoratori hanno completato il *Big Five Questionnaire*, la *Intrapreneurial Self-Capital Scale* e la *Human Capital Sustainability Leadership Scale*. I risultati hanno indicato che l'ISC spiega una percentuale aggiuntiva di varianza in relazione alla HCSL oltre quella attribuibile ai tratti di personalità, evidenziando la sua rilevanza per future ricerche e interventi nelle organizzazioni.

Parole chiave

Intrapreneurial Self-Capital, Human Capital Sustainability Leadership, Tratti di Personalità.

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Introduction

In the twenty-first century, the labor market is characterized by globalization, economic transformations, continuous challenges, and a general sense of instability (Blustein et al., 2019; Peiró et al., 2012). Within this rapidly changing context, both organizations and workers are required to constantly adapt to new circumstances (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016), as these transformations may pose significant risks to individuals' well-being (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2016b; Di Fabio & Peiró, 2023). Consequently, it becomes essential to identify innovative strategies and psychological resources that enable people to successfully cope with the demands of the modern labor market (Blustein et al., 2019). In the postmodern society, change can thus be conceptualized not merely as an obstacle, but as an opportunity for growth, development, and self-improvement (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016).

In today's world, fostering the sustainable development of human resources has become a pressing priority for building healthy organizations (Di Fabio, 2017a, 2024; Di Fabio et al., 2020; Peiró et al., 2019, 2021) within the framework of the psychology of sustainability and sustainable development (Di Fabio, 2017b, 2021; Di Fabio & Cooper, 2023; Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018, 2023; Di Fabio & Rosen, 2018, 2020; Rosen & Di Fabio, 2023). This emerging area, part of the wider transdisciplinary discipline of sustainability science (Komiyama & Takeuchi, 2006; Sahle et al., 2025; Takeuchi et al., 2017), enriches the field by integrating psychological insights into sustainability processes. Recognizing the psychological dimension involved in the processes is increasingly promising to better understanding how sustainable development can be achieved and maintained (Di Fabio & Rosen, 2018).

Within this framework, intrapreneurial self-capital (ISC) (Di Fabio, 2014) emerges as the core of a crucial psychological resource that facilitates individuals in dealing with transitions and changes by promoting innovative problem-solving and adaptive coping strategies. ISC encompasses a set of intrapreneurial personal characteristics that allow individuals to act as entrepreneurs of their own lives, capable of managing continuous changes, generating creative strategies and turning environmental barriers into personal and professional resources.

According to Di Fabio (2014), ISC can be defined as a positive self-evaluation involving the perception of one's own ability to commit to meaningful goals, to experience a sense of control over life events, to approach challenges creatively, and to make thoughtful and adaptive decisions. It reflects an internalized sense of agency and flexibility that enables individuals to face uncertainty and complexity in a constructive way.

ISC is conceptualized as a higher-order construct composed of seven aspects, each of which contributes to the individual's capacity for adaptive functioning in the context of change:

a) Core self-evaluation: a positive self-concept encompassing self-esteem, self-efficacy, an internal locus of control, and optimism; b) Hardiness: the psychological resilience to stress, reflecting commitment, control, and challenge as fundamental attitudes for coping with adversity; c) Creative self-efficacy: the belief in one's ability to approach and solve problems creatively; d) Resilience: the capacity to recover from difficulties and to employ adaptive strategies to overcome adversity; e) Goal mastery: the pursuit of personal and professional development through continuous skill enhancement; f) Decisiveness: the perceived ability to make effective and timely decisions in various life situations; g) Vigilance: a decision-making style characterized by the careful and adaptive search for relevant information and the evaluation of available options before making a choice (Di Fabio, 2014, pp. 100-102).

Overall, intrapreneurial self-capital can be understood as an integrative framework that enhances individuals' adaptability, creativity, and resilience in the face of the challenges of the contemporary labor market (Di Fabio & Duradoni, 2019; Duradoni & Di Fabio, 2019). By fostering a proactive and constructive attitude toward change, ISC contributes to personal empowerment, sustainable employability, and psychological well-being in an increasingly complex and uncertain world (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2018). In this current framework, the concept of human capital sustainability leadership (HCSL) (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018) also offers innovative responses. At its core, HCSL emphasizes the promotion of people who are healthy and flourishing at work, and healthy organizations as thriving environments that sustain both well-being and performance over time. The human capital sustainability leadership (HCSL) model integrates four complementary leadership approaches: ethical, sustainable, mindful, and servant leadership.

Ethical leadership centers on fairness, justice, and integrity, encouraging leaders to align actions with shared values, make equitable decisions, and act with compassion and respect toward others. Sustainable leadership focuses on fostering long-term success by promoting continuous learning, developing human and material resources, valuing diversity, and protecting the environment. Mindful leadership emphasizes present-moment awareness and emotional balance, helping leaders remain centered and conscious of their influence, especially under pressure. Lastly, servant leadership prioritizes the personal growth and well-being of followers, grounded in a genuine sense of care and moral responsibility that extends beyond organizational interests. A potential connection can be identified between intrapreneurial self-capital (ISC) and human capital sustainability leadership (HCSL), as both constructs emphasize the development of psychological resources that foster individual and organizational flourishing. ISC, defined as a set of personal resources promoting proactive adaptation, creativity, and resilience in complex and changing environments (Di Fabio, 2014), aligns closely with the core aims of HCSL, which seeks to sustain human capital through ethical,

sustainable, mindful, and servant-oriented leadership (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018). Leaders with high levels of ISC are likely better equipped to embody HCSL facets, as their self-efficacy, adaptability, and innovative mindset can support leadership styles in real contexts for the promotion of healthy, sustainable organizational contexts characterized by long-term well-being and performance.

The aim of the present study is to examine the relationships between intrapreneurial self-capital and human capital sustainability leadership, while controlling for personality traits. Specifically, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H1. A positive relationship will emerge between intrapreneurial self-capital and human capital sustainability leadership.
- H2. Intrapreneurial self-capital will account for an additional percentage of variance in human capital sustainability leadership beyond that explained by personality traits.

Method

Participants

One hundred and forty-six workers from the Tuscany region with a mean age of 43.82 years ($SD = 10.76$). Among them, 41.10% identified as male and 58.90% as female.

Measures

Big Five Questionnaire (BFQ; Caprara et al., 1993). It consists of 132 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = «Absolutely false» to 5 = «Absolutely true»). Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .81 for Extraversion (e.g., «I think I am an active and energetic person»), .73 for Agreeableness (e.g., «I understand when people need my help»), .81 for Conscientiousness (e.g., «I tend to be very thoughtful»), .90 for Emotional Stability (e.g., «I do not often feel tense»), and .75 for Openness (e.g., «I am always informed about what is happening in the world»).

Intrapreneurial Self-Capital Scale (ISCS; Di Fabio, 2014). It consists of 28 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = «Strongly disagree» to 5 = «Strongly agree». Example items include: «I am able to deal with most of my problems», «Working hard always pays off in the end», «I trust my ability to solve problems creatively», «I am able to achieve my goals despite obstacles», «It is important for me to improve my skills», and «It is easy for me to make decisions». The reliability of the scale, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was .84.

Human Capital Sustainability Leadership Scale (HCSLS; Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018). It consists of 16 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = «Not at all» to 5 = «Very much». The scale measures the higher-order construct of human capital

sustainability leadership, which encompasses four specific leadership styles: ethical (example of item «I act by giving an example of doing tasks in an ethically correct manner», sustainable (example of item «I develop, rather than exhaust, the human resources that work with me», mindful (example of item «I recognize the value of my self-control to my employees, even in stressful situations»), and servant leadership (example of item «I commit myself so my collaborators have all the information to work to the best». The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the scale was .94.

Procedure

The questionnaires were administered in group settings. Participants provided informed consent prior to participation. All procedures complied with current Italian privacy legislation regarding data protection. To control for potential order effects, the sequence of questionnaire administration was counterbalanced across participants.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved the use of descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation coefficients, and hierarchical regression models, carried out with IBM SPSS Statistics.

Results

Table 1 shows the correlations among BFQ, ISCS, and HCSLS.

Table 1
Correlations among BFQ, ISCS, and HCSLS

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. BFQ Extraversion	–						
2. BFQ Agreeableness	.14	–					
3. BFQ Conscientiousness	.20*	.15	–				
4. BFQ Emotional Stability	.16	.24**	.14	–			
5. BFQ Openness	.42**	.28**	.24**	.18*	–		
6. ISCS	.46**	.33**	.28**	.36**	.33**	–	
7. HCSLS	.37**	.37**	.28**	.25**	.37**	.63**	–

Note. N = 146. * < .05, ** < .01. BFQ = Big Five Questionnaire. ISCS = Intrapreneurial Self-Capital Scale. HCSLS = Human Capital Sustainability Leadership Scale.

A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted with human capital sustainability leadership (HCSL) as the dependent variable. Personality traits (BFQ) entered in Step 1 explained 32% of the variance in HCSL. When intrapreneurial self-capital was added in Step 2, the model remained significant and accounted for an additional 14% of the variance, yielding a total R^2 of .46.

Table 2

Hierarchical Regression. The Contribution of Personality Traits (BFQ) and Intrapreneurial Self-Capital (ISC) to Human Capital Sustainability Leadership

	β
<i>Step 1</i>	
BFQ Extraversion	.21**
BFQ Agreeableness	.27***
BFQ Conscientiousness	.21**
BFQ Emotional Stability	.13
BFQ Openness	.13
<i>Step 2</i>	
ISCS	.48***
R^2 step 1	.32***
ΔR^2 step 2	.14**
R^2 total	.46***

Note. $N = 146$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. BFQ = Big Five Questionnaire.
ISCS = Intrapreneurial Self-Capital Scale.

Discussion

The present study aimed to analyze the associations between intrapreneurial self-capital (ISC) and human capital sustainability leadership (HCSL) while controlling for personality traits. The study's hypotheses were confirmed. Consistent with the first hypothesis, a positive relationship emerged between ISC and HCSL, which remained significant even after controlling for personality traits, confirming also the second hypothesis. Thus, ISC accounted for an additional percentage of variance in HCSL beyond that explained by personality traits.

The persistence of the relationship between ISC and HCSL in this study, after accounting for personality traits, suggests that individuals with higher levels of intrapreneurial resources (Di Fabio, 2014) may enact leadership behaviors

aligned with the principles of sustainability, ethics, mindfulness, and service to collaborators (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018). In this sense, ISC could be considered as a psychological resource that facilitates leaders in promoting flourishing, resilience, and long-term well-being among employees.

Although the findings of the present study are promising, one limitation concerns the characteristics of the participants, who consisted of workers from Tuscany and therefore not representative of the broader Italian workforce. Future research could extend the examination of the association between ISC and HCSL to employees from other geographical regions in Italy. Moreover, it would be valuable to replicate the study in other countries to enable cross-cultural comparisons.

If future studies confirm these results, new perspectives for leadership development could emerge within the framework of prevention perspectives, particularly primary prevention (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2016a; Kenny & Hage, 2009; Hage et al., 2017) and strengths-based prevention perspectives (Di Fabio & Saklofske, 2021). Unlike personality traits, which have been shown to be relatively stable (Costa & McCrae, 1992), intrapreneurial self-capital can be enhanced through specific interventions (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016; McIlveen & Di Fabio, 2018). Therefore, ISC could serve as a valuable factor in the early enhancement of human capital sustainability leadership, facilitating healthier and more sustainable leadership practices within organizations. Intrapreneurial self-capital emerges in this study as a promising psychological resource that sustains human capital sustainability leadership. ISC seems promising for equipping leaders with the intrapreneurial strengths necessary to promote sustainable HR leadership practices within organizations.

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