Implications of core self-evaluations for a changing organizational context

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A B S T R A C T

There is a need for individuals who have the confidence and assertiveness to adapt to and create positive change in contemporary organizations. The concept of core self-evaluations provides one way to conceptualize this requisite positive self-construal. This article begins by covering the concept of core self-evaluations, highlighting what has been learned about the relationship between core self-evaluations and attitudes, motivation, performance, and career progress. After this review, implications of the core self-evaluation construct for challenges in contemporary organizations are reviewed. Specifically, the potential importance of core self-evaluations for creative performance, transformational leadership, coping with organizational change, and managing "boundaryless" careers is discussed.

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The transformation of industrial age into the information and services age has created dramatic changes in the manner in which organizations are structured and managed. The traditional notion of the "job" with a fixed set of tasks has eroded significantly, to be replaced with a collection of constantly varying work demands that call for general competencies (Bartram, 2005). This transformation of the workplace means that understanding the functioning of organizations in the future will depend more heavily on understanding the people who make up these organizations than on understanding a static hierarchy of formal roles. In such organizations, employees cannot be purely reactive in hopes of ascending through a career path based on seniority; they need to create new possibilities for themselves and the organization as a whole (De Vos & Soens, 2008; Hall, 1996). Employees must act independently, as shapers of their own work environments and careers.

Researchers in the area of positive psychology have described an equally dramatic shift away from research that examines the negative aspects of personality, and toward research that investigates human capacity for growth, development, creativity, resilience, and happiness (Bonanno, 2004; Roberts, 2006). A failure to account for these positive sides of life means that we will have only a partial understanding of the functioning and capabilities of the human person. This positive perspective means that in understanding the functioning of individuals, we need not just only know about the characteristics that predispose people to worry, anxiety, and depression, but also understand those characteristics that lead to successful management of one's environment. For organizational research, this means devoting at least as much time to topics like motivation, satisfaction, learning, and adaptation as is spent on topics like stress, conflict, withdrawal, and turnover (Luthans, 2002).

Tying together these seemingly disparate themes, the current review describes how the positive psychology perspective on personality traits has implications for a changing organizational context. Research has started to identify people who fit an active, positive, and agentic profile. This research has come to revolve around a set of *core self-evaluations*. Although there is a considerable body of research illustrating the usefulness of core self-evaluations as a predictor of attitudes, motivation, and behavior, there has not been much attention to the implications of core self-evaluations for the management of organizations. Our goal is to review the research that has been conducted on these constructs to date with an eye toward application in changing organizations. The review will begin with the foundations of core self-evaluation research, and its relationship with other areas of

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personality. After reviewing this foundational material, there will be a discussion of how core self-evaluations are related to job attitudes, motivation and job performance, and career success. Then we will discuss questions regarding the measurement and malleability of core self-evaluations, which raises questions about how core self-evaluations might be managed in organizational settings. Finally, we discuss the potential implications of core self-evaluations for four topics especially important in a changing organizational context: creative performance, transformational leadership, adapting to change, and boundaryless career management.

1. What are core self-evaluations?

The first description of core self-evaluations came from Judge, Locke, and Durham (1997), who argued that a key characteristic that differentiates people from one another is the fundamental evaluations we make about ourselves and how we relate to our environment. These fundamental beliefs are called "core self-evaluations." People who have positive core self-evaluations see themselves positively across a variety of situations, and approach the world in a confident, self-assured manner. They believe that they are capable of solving problems (high self-efficacy), worthy of respect and regard (high self-esteem), in control of and responsible for what happens to them (internal locus of control), and prone to be optimistic and free from doubts and worries (high emotional stability) (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2002; Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998).

Several studies have demonstrated that these characteristics of self-efficacy, self-esteem, internal locus of control, and emotional stability tend to be closely related to one another. For example, one investigation compiled the findings from a large number of previous studies and found that these four traits were correlated, on average, at $r = 0.64$ which is comparable to the correlations between alternative measures of other personality traits (Judge et al., 2002). Other research has applied factor analysis to demonstrate that these four characteristics show up as a single construct, with much shared variance across measures (Erez & Judge, 2001; Judge, Bono, & Locke, 2000; Judge, Locke, et al., 1998). At the same time, these traits tend to be correlated to a similar degree and in the same direction with outcomes like subjective well-being, job satisfaction, and job performance (Judge et al., 2002). Erez and Judge (2001) and Judge et al. (2002) found that putting these four traits together did a better job of predicting outcomes than using the traits separately as predictors.

How do core self-evaluations relate to other personality scales? If core self-evaluations are redundant with other established personality traits, there is likely to be little practical utility in studying them. Some have argued that core self-evaluations could be a little more than a combination of three of the Big Five traits (Schmitt, 2004). Indeed, Judge et al.'s (2002) investigation found that the sub-traits of core self-evaluations are substantially correlated with extraversion and conscientiousness. However, the magnitude of these correlations was comparable with the correlations of neuroticism with the other Big Five traits. Thus, core self-evaluations appear to be distinct from other commonly used personality measures. More importantly, other research shows that when used as a predictor in regression equations along with the Big Five traits, core self-evaluations remain predictive of important outcomes like job satisfaction and job performance (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003).

Core self-evaluations are understood to be personality traits, and as such, to understand what core self-evaluations are, it is first necessary to understand exactly what a personality trait is. There are several key characteristics that differentiate personality traits from more ephemeral mental states (McCrae et al., 2000; Roberts, O'Donnell, & Robins, 2004). First, traits must possess the quality of temporal invariance—that is, they must not vary greatly within the same person over a long period of time. A person's traits measured early in life should be similar to levels of those same traits many years later. Second, traits must be observed across a variety of situations. A trait should influence a person to behave in certain characteristic ways whether the situation is going to school, behaving at work, and in one's non-work time. By implication, we should expect that individuals who are high in a trait-like core self-evaluations will show some consistency in behavior long after they have been hired, and in a variety of jobs and work roles.

So are core self-evaluations traits? There are several streams of research that help to answer this question. Most research suggests that the core traits that make up core self-evaluations are not readily amenable to substantial, global changes. There is considerable evidence of rank-order stability in neuroticism (Soldz & Vaillant, 1999) and self-esteem (Trzesniewski, Donnellan, & Robins, 2003) over time. There is also evidence from the field of behavioral genetics suggesting that there is a substantial heritability for the sub-traits of self-esteem (Neiss, Sedikides, & Stevenson, 2002), locus of control (Pedersen, Gatz, Plomin, Nesselroade, & McClearn, 1989), and neuroticism (Viken, Rose, Kaprio, & Koskenvuo, 1994). Future research will surely be needed to verify the extent to which core self-evaluations are stable across the life course, but if these studies of sub-traits are any indication, it appears highly likely that the trait-like nature of core self-evaluations will be supported.

Besides the evidence showing long-term stability in the sub-traits, emerging evidence based on the direct measures of core self-evaluations has also begun to appear. One study has demonstrated that core self-evaluations measured in childhood and early adulthood are related to job attitudes in middle adulthood, demonstrating the longitudinal robustness of the trait (Judge et al., 2000). We will show evidence in the careers section of the paper also demonstrating that core self-evaluations measured early in life are predictive of major life outcomes many years in the future, again suggesting that there are certain invariant characteristics that are having their impact over time.

Do these core self-evaluations really matter? There has been considerable controversy regarding this issue. Self-help gurus exalt the power of a positive self-concept, flooding bookstore shelves with titles such as: *Love Yourself, Heal Your Life*; *Be Who You Want, Have What You Want;* and *Success and the Self-Image*. One book notes: "If you have a positive, healthy self-image, you'll expect the best of yourself, and your consciousness will create that in reality" (Taylor, 2006, p. 124). On the other hand, after an extensive review of the self-esteem literature, Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, and Vohs (2005) commented positive self-regard

fails to "offers society any compensatory benefits beyond the seductive pleasure it brings to those engaged in the exercise" (p. 92). As this review will show, counter to the pessimistic appraisal offered by Baumeister et al., the effects of core self-evaluations seem to be fairly robust and consistent across a variety of work domains.

2. Core self-evaluations and job attitudes

Up to this point, we have reviewed basic definitional and conceptual grounds for the core self-evaluations construct. We now turn our attention to the relationship of core self-evaluations with job attitudes. Employee job attitudes are important in their own right, of course, but such attitudes as satisfaction and commitment have been shown to be substantially related to behavior like job performance (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001), work withdrawal (Hanisch & Hulin, 1990), citizenship behavior (Organ & Ryan, 1995), and turnover (Trevor, 2001).

Early research on core self-evaluations was particularly focused on the relationship of core self-evaluations with job satisfaction. The premise underlying these investigations was that people's appraisals of the world are at least partially a product of the assumptions that people hold regarding themselves, other people, and the world around them (Judge et al., 1997). People who see themselves as good and competent will react more positively to job responsibilities than will people who see themselves as bad or incompetent. Those who see the world as a basically benign place will make similarly positive appraisals of their workplaces. One of the first empirical investigations of the topic examined the relationship between the traits that make up core self-evaluations and job satisfaction, as rated both by the focal participant and their significant others, and found a significant relationship (Judge, Locke, et al., 1998). This research found that part of the relationship between core self-evaluation traits and job satisfaction was mediated by perceptions of job characteristics. However, the relationship between core self-evaluations and job satisfaction is still found even when objective job complexity and subjective job characteristics are taken into account (Judge et al., 2000). Best, Stapleton, and Downey (2005) furthered this line of inquiry by determining that perceptions of organizational constraints mediated the relationship between core self-evaluations and job satisfaction.

Since this initial investigation, subsequent research has largely confirmed the importance of the core components and the aggregated core self-evaluations construct in the prediction of job attitudes. The average meta-analytic correlation of the four aggregated component traits with job satisfaction was shown to be $r = 0.41$ (Judge & Bono, 2001). Other studies have found similar levels of relationship using core self-evaluations measured directly (Best et al., 2005; Heller, Judge, & Watson, 2002; Judge & Bono, 2001; Judge, Bono, Erez, & Locke, 2005; Judge et al., 2000, 2002; Rode, 2004). These findings have also held up across cultures. Judge, Van Vianen, and De Pater (2004) found that the relationship of core self-evaluation scales with job satisfaction in the Netherlands was similar to relationship found in the United States, and Piccolo, Judge, Takahashi, Watanabe, and Locke (2005) found a similar relationship in the Japanese sample as well.

In addition to being more satisfied with their working conditions, people with high core self-evaluations may find their work more satisfying because they choose personally meaningful goals. Self-concordance theory predicts that when goals are pursued because they fulfill personal values, they will increase happiness, whereas goals that are pursued for extrinsic reasons (e.g., because others value them) lead to dissatisfaction and unhappiness (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sheldon & Elliot, 1998). Because individuals with high core self-evaluations have more confidence in themselves and their opinions, they might be less prone to follow goals simply because they are valued by others. To test this proposition, two longitudinal studies involving were conducted that tracked student goals and the self-concordance of goals two months later (Judge et al., 2005). In these studies, goals which fulfilled personal values mediated the relationship between core self-evaluations measures and goal attainment. In other words, individuals with core self-evaluations were seeking goals that they truly valued, which made it more likely that they would meet with success.

What are the implications of this research for a changing organizational context? For starters, in organizations that are in a state of constant change and development, employee buy-in is likely to be especially important. Employees who are satisfied with their working conditions are less likely to complain when new challenges arise. It is also likely the case that a positive attitude towards one's job will help alleviate uncertainty about organizational changes, as we will discuss later. The need for a positive attitude toward work is likely to be even greater in organizations that organize employees in teams, because of the tendency for moods, both positive and negative, to be contagious (Ilies, Wagner, & Morgeson, 2007; Totterdell, Kellett, Teuchmann, & Briner, 1998). The recent emergence of job engagement literature (Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010) further emphasizes the importance of positive attitudes for organizational functioning.

3. Core self-evaluations, motivation, and performance

The evidence we have reviewed thus far demonstrates that core self-evaluations are related to employee attitudes. We now turn our attention toward the bottom line, to demonstrate the effects of core self-evaluations on motivation and performance.

There is reason to expect that individuals who are higher in core self-evaluations will be more motivated and diligent at work. Individuals who are highly confident in themselves and believe in their own capabilities will see themselves as likely to succeed, and this belief in the likelihood of success should enhance effort levels (Judge, Erez, & Bono, 1998). This sets up a mediating model, in which core self-evaluations will lead to setting more ambitious goals, which in turn should relate to higher levels of performance. Research bears out this prediction. A study with salespeople found that those with higher levels of core self-evaluation were both more persistent in their tasks and also put forth greater efforts toward achieving success (Erez & Judge, 2001). Similar results were obtained in a more controlled laboratory setting as well.

Individuals who have a more positive view of themselves are also likely to be more secure in the face of criticism, and therefore will be able to use such feedback effectively. Bono and Colbert (2005) found that individuals high in core self-evaluations were more satisfied, compared to those with low core self-evaluations, when they received multi-source feedback. Those with high core self-evaluations were also more committed to goals when their own self-ratings did not match the ratings provided by others, whereas those with low core self-evaluations were more committed to goals when their ratings did match the ratings provided by others. To put this in a different way, those with high core self-evaluations learned more when others gave them information that was different from their own opinions, whereas those with low core self-evaluations seemed to prefer hearing opinions that were consistent with their own.

With the erosion of traditional task-based jobs, a self-directed capacity to set goals and motivate oneself is likely to become increasingly important. There is a need for research examining how individuals who are high in core self-evaluations regulate their own performance in a complex, ambiguous environment. One would expect that those who are higher in core self-evaluations will be better able to direct their behavior independently because they are more confident in their own opinions and capacities. Individuals who are high in core self-evaluations will be less prone to worry about the potentially negative consequences of doing something on their own, so they will be more likely to be self-starters when the situation calls for it. Later in the paper, we will also propose that core self-evaluations are likely to be especially important for motivation and performance in creative contexts.

4. Core self-evaluations and career success

In contemporary organizations, it is important for employees to be able to proactively manage their own careers. Decades of downsizing, rightsizing, mergers, acquisitions, and de-layering have left the traditional hierarchical career path as an anachronism seen by relatively few private sector workers (Kalleberg, 2009). Instead, employees need to be able to proactively build up a set of career skills over time, strategically finding opportunities to learn and grow, which will in turn lead them to become more valuable employees (Hall, 1996, 2002). Although research has yet to examine how core self-evaluations are related to progress in organizational career paths, there are reasons to believe that individuals with positive core self-evaluations will indeed be better suited to the contemporary career landscape than those who have less positive core self-evaluations.

Why might people with higher core self-evaluations be more able to manage their own careers successfully? There are several reasons. First, as we have already shown, individuals with more positive core self-evaluations tend to perform their jobs more effectively and to be more goal directed. Additionally, those with higher self-regard may attain success based on their own desire to demonstrate their positive characteristics to themselves and others. Swann (1983) proposed in his self-verification theory that people seek out environments and interactions that enable them to maintain their self views, even when those views are negative. A positive self-image can create a self-fulfilling prophecy, in which a person who believes that they are effective, in control, and worthwhile will be more prone to behave effectively over the course of his or her life (Chen & Klimoski, 2003). Thus, people with high core self-evaluations take on jobs that are perceived as being challenging, rewarding, and which society perceives as "high status" because they think that they will succeed in these roles (Judge et al., 2000), and doing so serves to confirm their positive self-image.

So what is the evidence regarding core self-evaluations and career success? Some evidence can be gleaned by looking at research on the sub-traits that make up core self-evaluations. Wallace (2001) found that internal locus of control was positively related to career satisfaction and self-reported promotional opportunities of female lawyers. Turban and Dougherty (1994) found that internal locus of control was positively associated with perceived career success and self-reported promotions. Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, and Barrick (1999) found that emotional stability was positively associated with extrinsic success. People with lower levels of self-esteem are also more likely to be in jobs that do not have increasing wage profiles (Schroeder, Josephs, & Swann, 2006). Kammeyer-Mueller, Judge, and Piccolo (2008) found that self-esteem measured in high school was predictive of occupational attainment and income seven years later. Not all evidence regarding core self-evaluation sub-traits and career success is affirmative, however; there appear to be some limitations on these findings. For example, Seibert and Kraimer (2001) found that emotional stability did not predict salary or promotions. Boudreau, Boswell, and Judge (2001) found that emotional stability was positively associated with salary, promotion, and job level among American executives but not among European executives. Melamed (1996) found that self-confidence was positively related to salary and job level among men, but surprisingly, not for women.

Several more recent studies have added to this body of research by demonstrating that measures of the whole core self-evaluation construct are related to career success. Judge and Hurst (2007) looked at the relationship of income with core self-evaluations, socioeconomic status, and academic achievement. Their results showed that core self-evaluations were not only related to income, but that core self-evaluations also increased the relationship of income with socioeconomic status and academic achievement. The authors concluded that those who have more positive core self-evaluations are better able to use their advantageous life circumstances to their benefit. Judge, Hurst, and Simon (2009) also found that core self-evaluations were associated with higher levels of income and lower levels of financial strain. One study also found that among individuals who were unemployed, higher levels of core self-evaluations were associated with higher levels of job search intensity (Wanberg, Glomb, Song, & Sorenson, 2005).

The evidence that core self-evaluations contribute to career success is consistent across a variety of settings and operationalizations of the construct. Overall, it appears that those who are higher in core self-evaluations achieve success by taking better advantage of the resources at their disposal. The research on core self-evaluations among the unemployed further suggests that individuals who are high in core self-evaluations achieve success through their persistence in the face of difficult

situations. In the same way that unemployed individuals use positive core self-evaluations to fuel persistence in the face of setbacks, employees whose jobs have been radically redesigned may be better able to persist in their work efforts, finding new ways to apply their skills and abilities.

5. Measurement and malleability: for selection or development?

Given the importance of core self-evaluations for job attitudes, job performance, and career success, the question arises how managers can put this information to use. In many organizations there is an ongoing question of whether to try to select people with the "right stuff" or to try to use developmental experiences like training, coaching, or challenging assignments to try to help employees develop the required attitudes and abilities. Like the classic nature vs. nurture debate, the selection vs. development choice might not be the most informative way to frame the discussion though. Rather, it is more helpful to consider both selection and development, and the interaction of the two, as they might influence behavior at work.

For selection purposes, the most obvious concern is identifying people who have these positive core self-evaluations. Fortunately, Judge et al. (2003) have developed and validated a 12-item measure of core self-evaluations called the Core Self-Evaluation Scale (CSES). The items address the components of generalized self-efficacy, self-esteem, emotional stability, and internal locus of control in a wholistic, integrated manner. Additional research has further supported the construct validity and predictive utility of the scale when compared with the original measures of the four sub-traits (Gardner & Pierce, 2010).

However, the measurement of personality traits in the selection process could be affected by self-presentation biases. Job applicants know that they are being observed, and tailor their actions to meet the expectations of interviewers. Giving employees self-report measures of their personality traits has the same self-presentation problems. Many researchers question whether it is realistic to expect that employees will accurately describe themselves when they know that a job is on the line (Morgeson et al., 2007). On the other hand, predictive studies have shown that personality traits do show substantial relationships with job performance in actual hiring settings, suggesting concerns about faking may be exaggerated (Ones, Dilchert, Viswesvaran, & Judge, 2007).

A second implication of personality traits for management is in the development and career tracking of employees. As we have noted, individuals who have higher levels of core self-evaluations will be more likely to proactively manage their careers and apply themselves towards opportunities to demonstrate their positive self-image both to themselves and to the external world. It therefore is likely that individuals with positive core self-evaluations will be more well-suited to jobs and occupations that require a great deal of personal initiative. Individuals who have valuable skills but who have low core self-evaluations may need to receive additional assistance from managers to apply themselves on the job.

Although we have focused on the implications of stability in core self-evaluations for management, much of management is about trying to mold the attitudes and motivation of individuals who are already working in a job. Is it possible for managers to change employees' core self-evaluations? As we have noted, most research suggests that there is a highly stable, genetic component to individuals' core self-evaluations that is not likely to fluctuate greatly over time. However, there is also evidence that self-concept can change over time in response to specific stimuli. Many studies have shown that feedback can alter self-efficacy for specific tasks (e.g., Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Although less research has examined the stability of the global core self-evaluations, there is one study that has investigated how feedback can shape core self-evaluations. Schinkel, van Dierendonck, and Anderson (2004) gave Dutch undergraduates bogus job tests and then divided them into two conditions. One group received feedback on their performance, whereas another group received no feedback. The undergraduates who received feedback had a decrease in core self-evaluations, but those who did not receive feedback had an increase in core self-evaluations.

The combination of long-term stability with momentary fluctuations might seem to paint a contradictory picture of the stability of core self-evaluations. However, it might be that like body weight or moods, most people's self-evaluations are relatively stable around a certain set point, but that there can be significant momentary fluctuations above and below that point. Management techniques like providing employees with positive feedback, giving employees opportunities to have success at simpler "starter" tasks, observation of successful role models, and pep talks can provide a temporary boost to employee's self-evaluations (Bandura, 1997). It is also possible that managers can have a particularly strong influence on core self-evaluations during certain critical phases of organizational life. Sociologists who examine self-esteem measures over long periods of time note that although the self-concept generally appears to be stable over time; there are key periods of disturbance where changes in self-image can be profitably examined (Mortimer, Finch, & Kumka, 1982). Job transitions, added responsibilities, and international assignments might all be occasions that will be more likely to produce lasting changes in core self-evaluations.

6. Implications for a changing organizational context

The research we have reviewed so far has demonstrated both the conceptual and empirical bases of the core self-evaluations concept. In this section of the paper, we will expand upon those themes to suggest potential implications and future research directions as they apply to a changing organizational context. We cover the implications of the core self-evaluations construct for creative performance, transformational leadership, coping with organizational change, and management of boundaryless careers.

6.1. Creative performance

Creative performance is defined as the generation of novel and useful outcomes (Amabile, 1988). With the growth of professional employment and a rapidly changing environment for business, being able to create and execute these new

possibilities is imperative. In such an environment, individuals who have confidence in their own ideas, believe that they are in control of implementation of these ideas, and who are not prone to worry and doubt in the face of uncertainty will likely be more successful. Areas of high growth in the economy, including professional services and research and development, are especially in need of individuals with the ability to produce creative solutions.

There is some research that helps to bolster the idea that individuals high in core self-evaluations will exhibit more creative performance at work. Although there has been comparatively less research examining the role of the sub-traits of core self-evaluations on creative behavior, evidence from studies that look at psychological states that correspond to the more enduring traits is suggestive of a possible relationship. First, prior research has established that domain-specific self-efficacy is a correlate of creative behavior at work (e.g., Gong, Huang, & Farh, 2009; Tierney & Farmer, 2002). Research has also demonstrated that individuals in negative mood states are less creative (e.g., Grawitch, Munz, Elliott, & Mathis, 2003; Isen, 1999). Because core self-evaluations result in higher levels of generalized self-efficacy and emotional stability, these studies do suggest that core self-evaluations will be related to higher levels of creative performance at work, with the transitory state levels of self-efficacy and negative affect acting as mediators.

6.2. Transformational leadership

Questions also remain about the effects of core self-evaluations on managerial style or behavior. Most of the research on core self-evaluations has focused on individual job satisfaction, motivation, and performance. However, it is also possible that individuals with higher levels of core self-evaluations will undertake different leadership behaviors than those with lower levels of core self-evaluations. Research in recent years has explored the concept of transformational leadership (e.g., Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003). This leadership style is marked by inspirational appeals, helping followers look at problems in new ways, promoting expectations, and instilling pride in others. Followers tend to respect and trust transformational leaders more, and groups led by transformational leaders tend to show higher levels of performance (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). These effects appear to be at least partially mediated by team potency, which is a team's belief about the capabilities of the team to perform across a variety of tasks (Schaubroeck, Lam, & Cha, 2007).

We have already shown, in the section on motivation and performance, that individuals who are higher in core self-evaluations are more likely to set ambitious goals for themselves. By extension, it is possible that leaders who are higher in core self-evaluations will also be able to set ambitious goals for followers. The sense of self-confidence that individuals who are higher in core self-evaluations possess may also be translated to followers, who will feel more confident themselves as the mood of the leader is transferred to the mood of the group (Erez, Misangyi, Johnson, LePine, & Halverson, 2008; Sy, Côté, & Saavedra, 2005).

6.3. Coping with organizational change

The transformation of the organizational landscape in recent years has been well-documented. Pressures to reduce costs, expansion of international markets, and the continuing march of new technologies into the workplace have led to a permanent state of change for most organizations. The erosion of traditional career paths, international assignments, increased merger and acquisition activity, downsizing, and outsourcing all have created a profound uncertainty for employees (Datta, Guthrie, Basuil, & Pandey, 2010; Maertz, Wiley, LeRouge, & Campion, 2010). These effects have been exacerbated by international economic turmoil in recent years. Reactions to this uncertainty can include feelings of injustice, attempts to leave the organization, stress, reduced productivity, and increased sickness absence. On the other hand, employees who successfully adapt to this transformed organizational landscape may find opportunities for growth and development.

Individuals with superior core self-evaluations may have superior skills to deal with these transitions. In general, individuals who are higher in core self-evaluations experience lower levels of psychological strain (Kammeyer-Mueller, Judge, & Scott, 2009). In part, this is because they interpret their environment as containing few threats—they are more likely to see threats as opportunities. This is also because individuals with positive core self-evaluations implement more effective coping strategies. As we have noted previously, individuals with higher core self-evaluations also perceive fewer obstacles in their work environment (Best et al., 2005). Prior research has shown that employee adjustment to organizational changes is facilitated by positive self-concept (Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, & Welbourne, 1999).

The management of employee reactions to organizational change can take core self-evaluations into account in two distinct ways. First, organizations in especially dynamic environments may wish to put a greater emphasis on selecting individuals who have higher levels of core self-evaluations. Second, organizations expecting major changes may wish to engage in extensive surveys of employee personality to identify employees with lower core self-evaluations who might benefit from personal counseling or other forms of assistance.

6.4. Managing boundaryless careers

We have reviewed a substantial body of research showing that individuals with higher levels of core self-evaluations are more successful in their careers. The literature on boundaryless and the protean careers has led career researchers to focus much more directly on the characteristics of individuals making transitions (Forrier, Sels, & Stynen, 2009). A boundaryless career is not limited to a single organizational hierarchical promotion chain, but rather, involves movement within and across inter- and intra-organizational boundaries. Models have focused on career relevant skills possessed by individuals who are creating new career

paths outside of traditional physical and psychological boundaries (e.g., Eby, Butts, & Lockwood, 2003; Guthrie, Coate, & Schwoerer, 1998). In these models, individual personality is influencing the degree to which an individual engages in self-initiated career planning as well as exploration and job search.

The ambitious, confident way in which individuals with core self-evaluations approach the world of work has been shown to relate to income, career status, and promotions. It may be that in a world of boundaryless careers, the relationship between core self-evaluations and success will be especially strong. While research has demonstrated that individuals with higher core self-evaluations have more successful careers, the career development strategies independently implemented by individuals with higher levels of core self-evaluations have yet to be explored in depth. Those who have success with boundaryless careers tend to be more confident in their own abilities to adapt to change, are able to independently develop goals, and take the initiative to develop their own competencies (Hall, 2002). There would seem to be a strong argument that individuals who are high in core self-evaluations will have these competencies. Evidence already discussed regarding core self-evaluations and joblessness (Wanberg et al., 2005) also suggests that core self-evaluations will increase persistence and resiliency in the job search process.

7. Past and present: models of core self-evaluations and work and career success

To summarize both where core self-evaluations research has been—and where we think it might profitably head—we provide two conceptual models. We should note that these models are heuristic and hypothetical. They are heuristic in that they do not fully or completely represent the ways in which core self-evaluations impact career success. They are hypothetical in that, while links in the models may have been tested empirically, to our knowledge, the entire models have not.

The first model, shown in Fig. 1, describes what we have learned from past core self-evaluations research. The "hub" of the figure is the link from core self-evaluations to motivation. As we have already discussed, those with positive core self-evaluations set higher goals and have a stronger commitment to them (Erez & Judge, 2001), have higher levels of intrinsic motivation (Bipp, 2010) and self-concordance (Judge et al., 2005), and are more likely to persist in pursuit of goals (Wanberg et al., 2005).

Past research has also identified another set of variables influenced by core self-evaluations—job complexity. As shown in Fig. 1, we assume that part of core self-evaluations affects job complexity directly and indirectly, through motivation. Judge, Locke, et al. (1998) found that core self-evaluations influenced job satisfaction as mediated through perceptions of intrinsic job characteristics (as developed in the Job Characteristics Model; Fried & Ferris, 1987; Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Judge et al. (2000) found that individuals with positive core self-evaluations not only perceived their jobs as higher in intrinsic characteristics, they actually attained jobs that were more complex. Finally, Srivastava, Locke, Judge, and Adams (2010) found that positive core self-evaluations caused individuals to seek out more challenge and complex work. Thus, one might argue that core self-evaluations causes individuals to seek complex and challenging work (because they believe themselves capable of performing such work), they obtain more complex jobs (because of greater beliefs in their ability to perform these jobs, and also perhaps because employers are more likely to select them for such jobs [Judge, Erez, et al., 1998]), and perceive these jobs as more challenging in turn.

Finally, Fig. 1 shows that core self-evaluations also relates to what we term proactive behaviors. Specifically, core self-evaluations has been linked to proactive coping in response to stress (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2009), to entrepreneurial activity and risk taking (Simsek, Heavy, & Veiga, 2010), and to constructive responses to performance feedback (Bono & Colbert, 2005). Fig. 1 shows that we expect, based on past core self-evaluations research, that these three classes of mediators affect job satisfaction and job performance, and mediate the relationship of core self-evaluations on these two criteria.

Fig. 1 summarizes what we now know. In attempt to speculate where we think core self-evaluations research might go from here, we provide Fig. 2. The logic behind many of the links in this figure—the links between core self-evaluations and "job
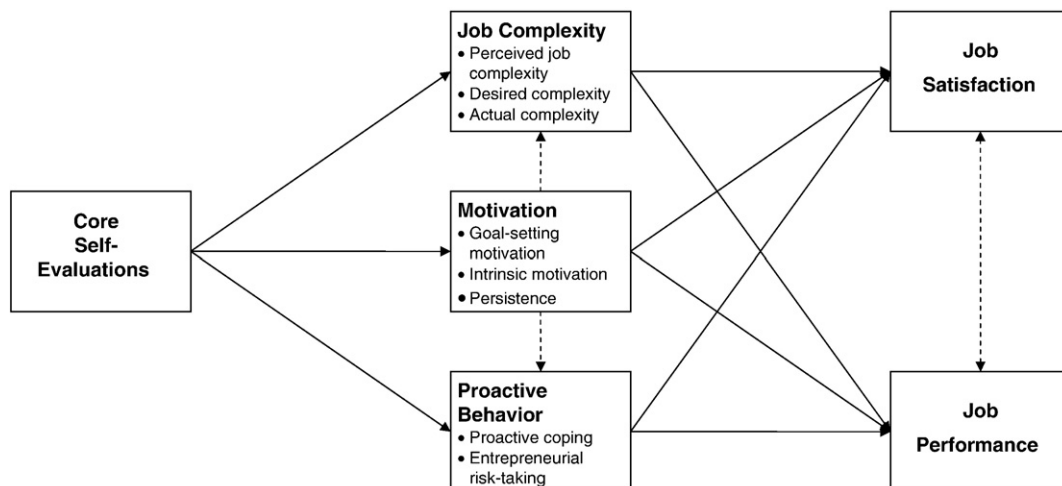

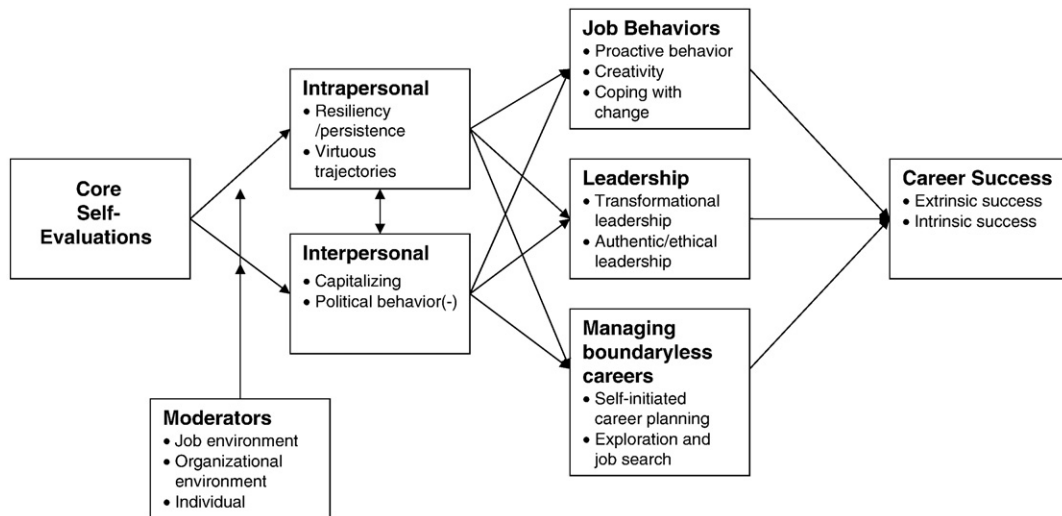**Fig. 1.** Present model of core self-evaluations — career success relationship.

Fig. 2. "Future" (hypothetical) model of core self-evaluations – career success relationship.

behaviors" (proactive behavior, creativity, and coping with change), the links between core self-evaluations and "leadership" (transformational leadership), and the links between core-self-evaluations and "managing boundaryless careers" (self-initiated career planning, exploration and job search)—was discussed previously and will not be repeated here.

There are a few new features to this proposed model. First, the purpose of the model is different from the "present" model in Fig. 1. Rather than explaining job satisfaction and job performance—toward which we have made considerable progress—the model in Fig. 2 is oriented toward explaining career success. Typical of most research (Judge, Higgins, et al., 1999; Judge, Thoresen, et al., 1999), career success has both intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions.

Second, we add leadership variables that we have not discussed previously. Specifically, in addition to its link with transformational leadership, we think core self-evaluations might well affect authentic/ethical leadership. Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, and Peterson (2008) define authentic leadership as "A pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development" (p. 94). Because this is a broad and expansive definition, core self-evaluations might well influence some aspects of authentic leadership more clearly than others. We can see more clearly, for example, that core self-evaluations might foster positive self-development, than it might greater self-awareness. In their development of core self-evaluations, Judge et al. (1997) clearly postulated that core self-evaluations would foster accurate self-knowledge, and they cautioned against false positive self-regard. Research on self-esteem, however, suggests that high self-esteem individuals often choose favorable feedback over accurate (Swann, Chang-Schneider, & McClarty, 2007). As far as ethical leadership is concerned—defined as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making" (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005, p. 120)—we believe, on balance, those with high core self-evaluations should be more ethical, and more interested in promoting an ethical culture, because ethical leadership rests not only on the embodiment of integrity, but in the willingness to be proactive (communicating, rewarding, punishing, and emphasizing ethical standards) in positively influencing followers (Mayer, Kuenzi, Greenbaum, Bardes, & Salvador, 2009). Walumbwa and Schaubroeck (2009) found that leaded neuroticism was weakly, negatively related to ethical leadership ($r = -0.12$), though, as with other research, it is possible that the overall core self-evaluations measure would have a stronger relationship than an individual core trait. More generally, we acknowledge that the link between positive self-regard and ethics is quite complex, and of course there are situations when positive self-regard has been channeled toward venal goals.

Third, we add two proposed classes of mediators that are most proximally situated to core self-evaluations. First, we believe it likely that one of the reasons those with positive self-evaluations are better leaders and exhibit more effective job behaviors is because they have more constructive *intrapersonal* processes: they are more proactively motivated at work (see Grant & Ashford, 2008), they are more resilient and persistent (Wanberg et al., 2005), and they are more likely to have "virtuous trajectories" in their attitudes over time (Judge & Hurst, 2008). Second, individuals with positive core self-evaluations should be more effective in an *interpersonal* sense. First, they should be more likely to capitalize, socioeconomically (Judge & Hurst, 2007) and interpersonally (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004), at work. Second, because they are predisposed to view their work environments positively (Kacmar, Collins, Harris, & Judge, 2009), individuals with positive self-evaluations are less likely to perceive their work environments as political, and therefore less likely to behave politically at work.

Finally, as shown in Fig. 2, we do not believe that the effects of core self-evaluations are unaffected by the work environment. Indeed, research has begun to show that this is the case (Grant & Sonnentag, 2010; Grant & Wrzesniewski, 2010; Judge & Hurst, 2007; Kacmar et al., 2009). Broadly speaking, these moderators may be job-based (perceived prosocial impact; Grant & Sonnentag,

2010) or organization-based (perceptions of organization politics; Collins, 2010), and may be objective features of the environment (socioeconomic background; Judge & Hurst, 2007), or subjective perceptions of the work environment (perceived favorability of the work environment; Kacmar et al., 2009). Finally, as shown by Grant and Wrzesniewski (2010), other individual differences may moderate the effectiveness of core self-evaluations. Although not shown in the model, it is also possible, of course, that in some cases core self-evaluations act as a moderator variable (Ng & Feldman, 2010; Tsaousis, Nikolaou, Serdaris, & Judge, 2007).

8. Conclusion

As we have shown, there is a stronger need than ever for organizations to seek out individuals who are confident in their own abilities and who believe that they can control their own fates than ever. Individuals who are higher in core self-evaluations may be especially valuable in the less hierarchical, more flexible organization of the future. Future research will be needed to definitively establish the relationship of core self-evaluations with creative performance, transformational leadership, coping with organizational change, and management of boundaryless careers.

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