Repositório ISCTE-IUL

Title: Why do I feel an Impostor? The roles of work alienation, cynicism and work insecurity

There is growing evidence in the literature that the Impostor Syndrome has an impact on a broad range of variables in the private and work life. Defined as high-achieving individuals' failure to internalize accomplishments, we aim to expand on the existing research on this phenomenon by exploring its antecedents by analyzing (1) the relationship between within-person fluctuations in work alienation and cynicism and impostor syndrome and (2) between-person variations in work insecurity as a relevant boundary condition of this relationship.

We explored these relationships on multilevel research that included a cross-sectional study (to gather sociodemographic information and to collect data on the moderating variable, i.e., work insecurity). Data regarding the remaining variables (i.e., work alienation, cynicism, and impostor syndrome) were collected through a diary survey answered for 5 workdays (from Monday to Friday). Participants were 253 workers from different organizational settings.

We used SPSS with the macro-Multilevel mediation (MlMed) to assess the hypothesized moderated mediation model. the results demonstrated that fluctuations in work alienation are positively related to daily cynicism, and this relationship was moderated by employees' work insecurity perceptions, since higher levels of work insecurity exacerbated this relationship. The findings also evidenced a positive relationship between daily cynicism and daily impostor syndrome, as well as a significant indirect relationship between daily variations in work alienation and impostor syndrome via daily fluctuations in cynicism.

This research makes several contributions for theory and practice. Firstly, it expands the content domain of impostor syndrome research and highlights that identifying its antecedents allows proactive measures to support individuals who may be susceptible to impostor syndrome. Secondly, organizations play a pivotal role in creating environments that foster psychological safety and self-assurance, by cultivating a culture of open communication and constructive feedback can also help individuals feel valued and appreciated for their contributions.

Keywords: Work alienation; work insecurity; cynicism; impostor syndrome