

Authentic Leadership and Staff Performance Mediated by Work Engagement; Case of Marketing Firms in Oman

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Abstract

Authentic leadership and its employee and productivity outcome is a topic gaining growing attention from academia and practitioners. However, the question remains relatively less explored as how authentic leadership impact employee productivity. Based on this literature gap, the present study is about testing the effect of authentic leadership on the staff performance. Therefore, significance of this study is that it tests authentic leadership & its employee outcome within a new context and utilizes a process approach by testing work engagement as a mediator. The methodology of the study is cross-sectional, quantitative, and survey-based methods of data collection. Data collection is based on staff of selected marketing firms operating in the Sultanate of Oman (n=105). The reliability and validity are established by performing the confirmatory factor analysis through AMOS. The path analysis is used for hypothesis testing and result indicate that authentic leadership dimensions exert a positive and significant influence on staff job performance and work engagement. Additionally, the result shows support for the mediating effect of work engagement between authentic leadership dimensions and employee job performance. The findings suggest that the concept of authentic leadership is of greater importance and should be practiced in the organizational context.

Keywords: authentic leadership, marketing firms, behavior, job performance, Oman, work engagement

Introduction

Literature on leadership commonly cites leadership styles such as transactional, transformational, autocratic, & democratic leadership styles. New leadership styles also emerging in literature such as authentic leadership, servant leadership, & pacesetter leadership styles. In this study, the main focus is on authentic leadership style as it is an emergent concept and relevant to the developing world where leadership sometimes lacks credibility. The concept of authenticity is based on an individual's relationship with another individual (Gardner, Karam, Alvesson, & Einola, 2021). Thus, authentic leadership emphasize on developing a positive ethical climate at workplace. Self-awareness, authentic behavior

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& authentic relational orientation and unbiased processing are the four keys confirmed dimensions of authentic leadership (Avolio, Wernsing, & Gardner, 2018). Accordingly, self-awareness refers to understanding of a leader about his/her strengths and weak points; relational transparency is about adopting an authentic trust-based relationship approach; balanced processing is about objective-based decision making and data analysis; and internalized moral perspective is about internal regulation of one's conduct.

Authentic leadership and employee outcome are investigated in various studies; however, two research gaps including contextual (Oman) and methodological (process approach) is not addressed adequately in previous studies. The present study addresses these two gaps by testing the outcome of authentic leadership going on staff performance arbitrated by work engagement among the sales staff from the marketing firms in Oman. The justification of the study is that marketing firms play important role in identifying the current market trends, understanding customer needs, and promoting the firm's products. Since marketing firms do not deal with a physical inventory by themselves, rather it provides services to other firms. Therefore, the marketing firms are predominantly service-based firms mainly depending on their workforce. In such a situation, marketing firms are required attention to their human resource matters to remain competitive in the marketplace. How marketing firms can improve their employee performance and consequently ensure its survival, competitiveness, and growth is the main focus of the present study. More specifically the study aims to test the influence of a leadership-related factor namely authentic leadership on staff.

- To test if employee job performance is predicted by authentic leadership.
- To test if employee work engagement is predicted by authentic leadership.
- To test if employee job performance is predicted by employee work engagement
- To test the interceding role of employee work engagement amongst the association of authentic leadership & employees job performance.

Thus, theoretical implication of the study is that it tests authentic leadership and its employee outcomes in the form of job performance & work engagement in a new context i.e. marketing firms in Oman. The findings will add to the existing authentic leadership literature as well as

work engagement literature. Another significance of the study is that it relates the process approach by using work engagement as a mediator to better understand how authentic leadership effects staff performance. Therefore, these findings can be used by the management especially in the marketing firms to devise suitable policies for fostering optimum performance from staff. The findings of the study can also be used by future researchers, academicians, and management consultants.

Literature Review

Authentic Leadership and Employee Work Performance

Studies suggest that authentic leadership positively influences staff including work performance (Nasab & Afshari, 2019); employee attitude (Goestjahjanti, Novitasari, Hutagalung, Asbari, & Supono, 2020); and employee behavior (Xu, Zhao, Li, & Lin, 2017). More specifically, studies show that the job performance of individuals is influenced by authentic leadership. For example, a study by Yasmin, Santoso, and Setiawan (2021) shows that authentic leadership influences staff job performance. Other studies also reported similar results including Daraba, Wirawan, Salam, and Faisal (2021); Nasab & Afshari (2019); Ribeiro, Gomes, and Kurian (2018); and Ribeiro, Duarte, and Filipe (2018). Based on previous studies and authentic leadership theory (Avolio, Wernsing, & Gardner, 2018; Gardner, et al., 2021), we put forward the following hypotheses.

H1: Self-awareness applies a positive & significant effect on the staff job performance

H2: Relational transparency applies a positive & significant impact on the staff job performance

H3: Balanced processing applies a positive & significant effect on staff job performance

H4: Internalized moral perspective applies a positive and significant effect on staff job performance

Authentic Leadership and Employee Work Engagement

Work engagement raises to a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is categorized by vigor, absorption, & dedication (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002). Work engagement is a type of workplace behavior consisting of vigor, dedication, and absorption (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Vigor is characterized by higher mental resilience, work-energy, and investing

higher efforts in work (Schaufeli, 2018). Dedication is about accepting a challenge, inspiration, significance, pride, and a sense of enthusiasm. Finally, absorption is about showing higher concentration and being engrossed in work.

Previous studies indicate that work engagement is also influenced by authentic leadership. For example, a study by Oh, Cho, and Lim (2018) reported that staff work engagement is predicted by authentic leadership. Another study by Kim (2014) reported that authentic leadership and its dimensions positively influence employee work engagement. Other studies also reported similar results (e.g. Koon & Ho, 2021; Khan, Muhammad, Afridi, & Sarwar, 2017; Khan & Ghayas, 2022; Maximo, Stander, & Coxen, 2019). Thus, based on previous studies and work engagement theory (Bakker, Demerouti, & Brummelhuis, 2012), the following hypotheses are proposed.

H5: Self-awareness exerts a significant positive influence on staff work engagement

H6: Relational transparency exerts a significant positive influence on staff work engagement

H7: Balanced processing exerts a significant positive influence on staff work engagement

H8: Internalized moral perspective applies a significant positive effect on staff work engagement

The Effects of Work Engagement on Employee Job Performance

Previous studies indicate that work engagement influences staff job performance (e.g. Bakker et al., 2012; Lisbona, Palaci, Salanova, & Frese, 2018). More specifically, a study Yongxing, Hongfei, Baoguo, & Lei (2017), reported employee job performance is predicted by work engagement while moderated by observed organizational support. Other studies also reported similar results such as Ribeiro, Duarte, and Filipe (2018). Thus, based on the previous studies and engagement theory (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Schaufeli, et al., 2002), our specific hypothesis is as follows;

H9: Work Engagement significantly influences staff job performance.

Role of Work Engagement as Mediator between Authentic Leadership and Job Performance

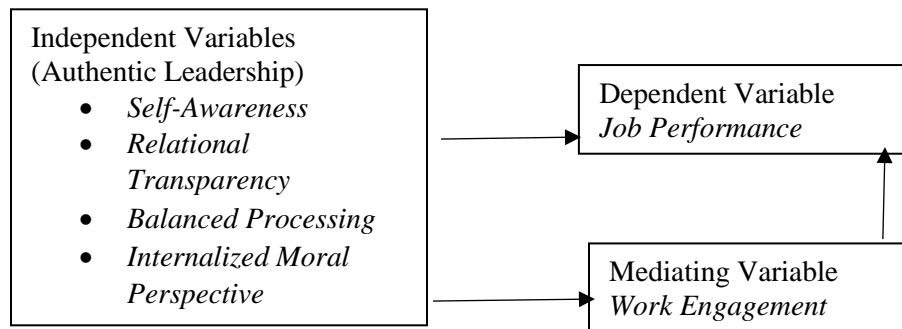
Work engagement is also proposed as a mediator amongst authentic leadership & work performance. The reason is that true leadership influences both work engagement (Kim, 2014); and job performance (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans., & May, 2004). Furthermore, work engagement is found to be influencing staff job performance (Bakker et al., 2012; Chung & Angeline, 2010). Therefore, we expect that work engagement is also a candidate for performing the mediating role in this relationship. Previous studies such as Ribeiro, et al., (2018); and Nasab & Afshari (2019), also used some mediating variables (organizational commitment) to understand the association amongst authentic leadership & work performance. Additionally, main reason for proposing this association is that a leadership which is ethical brings a sense of responsibility and dedication among staff which consequently leads to improved work performance. Therefore, we propose the mediating relationship of work engagement. Our specific hypotheses are as follows; H10: Work engagement significantly mediate the self-awareness & job performance relationship.

H11: Work engagement significantly mediate the relational transparency and job performance relationship.

H12: Work engagement significantly mediate the balanced processing & job performance relationship.

H13: Work engagement significantly mediate the internalized moral perspective & job performance association.

Based on the above objectives of the study and overall hypotheses, this study proposed the following theoretical model.



Research Methodology

Research Design

The current study utilizes the explanatory research design means the study attempts to explain the effects of one variable over another (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The study is cross-sectional and survey-based in nature means a single time data collection from participants.

Population and Sampling

The population of the study is the staff of marketing firms. Since the population is large and it is not practical to collect data from all of the population, so the sampling approach is used. Accordingly, the Sampling frame consist of 12 selected marketing firms is selected which together employs about 480 staff in total based on the data received by the respective HR departments. The sample size calculator table developed by Bartlett, Kotrlik, and Higgins (2001) is used for calculation. Accordingly, based on 95% confidence interval and .03 margin of error the required sample size is 96.

Data Collection Measure

The authentic leadership measure is adopted from Neider and Schriesheim (2011). In this measure, self-awareness is measured by 3 items; relational transparency is measured by 3 items; balanced processing is measured by 4 items; and internalized moral perspective is measured by 4 items. Work engagement is measured by 9 items and adapted from Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova (2006). For job performance, scale from Williams and Anderson (1991) is used consist of 7 items.

Data Collection Procedure

Google Form tool is used to collect data from survey participants. The survey was distributed with the consent of individuals who get a link for the online questionnaire. Once filled, the questionnaire data is downloaded for analysis.

Results

Demographic Information

Table 1

Demographic Information of the Survey Participants

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	90	85.70%
Female	15	14.30%
Age		
18 to 25	46	43.8%
25 to 40	44	41.9%
40 to 60	11	10.5%
Above 60	4	3.8%

As given in Table 1, demographic information indicates that there are 90 males (85.70%) and 15 females (14.30%) participated in our survey. For respondent's age, 46 participants belonged to the 18 to 25 years age category (43.8%); 44 participants in 25 to 40 years (41.90%); 11 participants in 40 to 60 years (10.50%); and 4 participants belonged to the above 60 years (3.8%) age category.

Measurement Model: Reliability and Validity

Table 2
Reliability and Convergent Validity

Variables/ Construct	Item s	Standardiz ed Factor Loadings	Cronbac h Alpha	Composi te Reliabilit y	Averag e Varianc e Extracte d	Maximu m Shared Variance
Self-Awareness	SA1	.767	.886	.884	.719	.323
	SA2	.832				
	SA3	.937				
Relational Transparen cy	RT1	.678	.821	.820	.606	.214
	RT2	.873				
	RT3	.774				
Balanced Processing	BP1	.567	.822	.820	.540	.113
	BP2	.668				
	BP3	.783				
	BP4	.883				

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Internalized Moral Perspective	IM1	.775				
	IM2	.818				
	IM3	.846	.899	.898	.689	.173
	IM4	.880				
Work Engagement	WE1	.667				
	WE2	.690				
	WE3	.723				
	WE4	.745				
	WE5	.829				
	WE6	.867	.896	.894	.550	.342
	WE7	.645				
	WE8	Item Deleted				
	WE9	Item Deleted				
Job Performance	JP1	.760				
	JP2	.743				
	JP3	.582				
	JP4	.691	.884	.882	.512	.224
	JP5	.783				
	JP6	.678				
	JP7	.785				

Model Fitness: $\chi^2=970$, $df=324$, $\chi^2/df= 2.99$, $RMSEA=.064$, $RMR=.044$, $GFI=.919$, $CFI=.906$

The result of step 1 CFA performed using AMOS indicates that our model had a good statistical fit based on model fitness indicators ($\chi^2/df=2.99$, $RMSEA=.064$, $RMR=.044$, $GFI=.919$, $CFI=.906$). The recommended values are ($RMSEA<.08$, $RMR<.05$, $GFI>.90$, $CFI>.90$) as suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999) and Browne and Cudeck (1992). The standardized factor loading for each item is above 0.60 which shows good convergent validity except WE8, and WE9 were removed because of low factor loadings. The Cronbach alpha and Composite Reliability of greater than 0.70 indicate a satisfactory reliability for our measures.

Table 3
Discriminant Validity

	SA	RT	BP	IMP	WE	JP
Self-Awareness	.848	.746	.692	.548	.553	.476
Relational Transparency	.746	.779	.612	.543	.682	.364

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Balanced Processing		.692	.612	.734	.600	.422	.536
Internalized Moral Perspective	Moral	.548	.543	.600	.830	.627	.343
Work Engagement		.553	.682	.422	.627	.741	.678
Job Performance		.476	.364	.536	.343	.678	.720

The discriminant validity is tested based on Fornell and Larcker (1981) criteria as provided in the table above. According to the criteria, all diagonal bold values which are square root of AVE should be larger than other standards i.e (inter-variable correlation) in their respective column and rows which is lit in this case so it shows satisfactory discriminant validity for our measure.

Structural Model- Hypotheses Testing

Table 4
Regression Weights

H. No.	Paths	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
H1	Self-Awareness > Job Performance	.242	.121	2.000	.003
H2	Relational Transparency > Job Performance	.423	.212	1.995	.004
H3	Balanced Processing > Job Performance	.005	.189	0.026	.986
H4	Internalized Moral Perspective > Job Performance	.373	.151	2.470	.003
H5	Self-Awareness > Work Engagement	.286	.115	2.486	.003
H6	Relational Transparency > Work Engagement	.359	.106	3.386	.001
H7	Balanced Processing > Work Engagement	.445	.221	2.013	.004
H8	Internalized Moral Perspective > Work Engagement	.343	.098	3.500	.001
H9	Work Engagement > Job Performance	.489	.076	6.434	.000

*<.05, **<.01, ***<.001

The result of step 2 Path analysis performed using AMOS shows that the dimensions of authentic leadership including self-awareness ($\beta=.242$, $P<.05$); relational transparency ($\beta=.423$, $P<.05$); and internalized moral perspective ($\beta=.373$, $P<.05$) exert positive and significant effects on job performance. The outcomes for the balanced processing turned out to be insignificant ($\beta=.005$, $P>.05$). The results also show that authentic leadership dimensions including self-awareness ($\beta=.286$, $P<.05$); relational transparency ($\beta=.359$, $P<.05$); balanced processing ($\beta=.445$, $P<.05$); and internalized moral perspective ($\beta=.343$, $P<.05$) exert positive and significant effects on work engagement. Finally, work engagement exerts a positive and significant effect on employee job performance ($\beta=.489$, $P<.05$). Based on these results, H1, H2, H4, H5, H6, H7, H8, and H9 are accepted while no support was found for H3.

Mediation Analysis

Mediation is checked by analyzing the indirect effects. The mediation analysis is based on analysis of indirect effect performed by the bootstrap procedure (5000 samples) and bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval (90%).

Table 5
Mediation Analysis

S.No.	Path	Total Effects	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects
H10	Self-Awareness>Work Engagement>Job Performance	.355	.242**	.113*
H11	Relational Transparency>Work Engagement > Job Performance	.590	.423**	.167*
H12	Balanced Processing>Work Engagement>Job Performance	-.040	.005	-.045
H13	Internalized Moral Perspective>Work Engagement>Job Performance	.479	.373**	.106*

* $<.05$, ** $<.01$, *** $<.001$

The indirect effects confirm the interceding role of work engagement amongst authentic leadership dimensions and work performance including self-awareness ($\beta=.113$, $P<.05$); relational transparency ($\beta=.167$, $P<.05$); and internalized moral perspective ($\beta=.106$, $P<.05$). The results for balanced processing are negative and insignificant

($\beta = -.045$, $P > .05$). Based on these results, H10, H11, and H13 are accepted while no support was found for H12.

Discussion

In this study, staff work engagement and job performance are predicted by authentic leadership. The outcomes of this study confirmed that authentic leadership dimensions predict staff job satisfaction. These findings are consistent with the findings of earlier studies which showed that authentic leadership influences the job performance of staff (e.g. Avolio, et al., 2004; Daraba, et al., 2021; Nasab & Afshari, 2019; Ribeiro, et al., 2018; Yasmin, et al., 2021). The other finding is that authentic leadership also influences employee work engagement which is also consistent with the findings of previous studies (e.g. Khan, et al., 2017; Koon & Ho, 2021; Kim, 2014; Maximo, et al., 2019; Oh et al., 2018). In general, it means that if a manager or supervisor adopts the authentic leadership style, it can lead to favorable employee and productivity outcomes. The relationship is logical since authentic leadership develops a sense of respect and responsibility among workers and fosters a positive and healthy work environment leading to higher productivity and engagement among the staff. Additionally, work engagement is found to be influencing staff job performance which is also consistent with the findings of earlier studies (Lisbona et al., 2018; Ribeiro et al., 2018) and work engagement theory (Bakker et al., 2012). The mediation analysis indicates that work engagement significantly mediates between authentic leadership and employee job performance relationship. These outcomes are likewise consistent with the authentic leadership and engagement theory and support the notion that employee behavior and productivity are influenced by work environmental factors.

Conclusion

Our result highlight that authentic leadership influences staff job performance as well as work engagement. The results lead to the conclusion that authentic leadership is highly important & contributes positively in terms of leading to employee behavioral and productivity outcomes. It can also be determined that authentic leadership enables the development of a positive and healthy work environment in the organization. The contribution of the findings to the literature is that it further strengthens the authentic leadership and employee outcomes literature by testing it in a new context and adding a new perspective by

using the mediation approach. The implication of the finding for the marketing firm is related to the incorporation of authentic leadership style in organizational routine. It means that authentic leadership style should be used as a criterion for hiring staff at managerial positions. Furthermore, training related to authentic leadership style should be provided. Major contribution of this study to the literature is testing authentic leadership and employee outcome in a new context. A small sample size, perceptual-based measure & single method of data collection are limitations of this study.

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