

# Authentic Leadership; Origins and Foundations: A Review of Literature

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## Abstract

In an era of rapid social development brought about by technology, various industries are experiencing disruptive changes. Simultaneously, the traditional education system is also facing a variety of challenges and reforms due to the shifting wishes and needs of learners (Dewi et al., 2019). Therefore, new and more fruitful working relationships, including within school organisations, between schools and communities, are a key to the research inquiry. As many studies on leadership have shown, authentic leadership is considered to be the leadership style that can respond to the demands of educational reform and contribute to organisational effectiveness (Başaran & Kiral, 2020; Srivastava & Dhar, 2019; Bird et al., 2009). Authentic leaders are able to influence their followers directly or indirectly through their positive psychological capabilities to achieve the organization's development goals. (May et al., 2003; Luthans & Avolio, 2003). In this paper, a comprehensive literature review is provided. It contains a number of definitions related to authentic leadership, explanations of basic concepts, and summaries of theories related to this study.

**Keywords:** Authentic Leadership, Integrative Leadership Theories, Contingency Leadership, Leader Behavior

## Introduction

In an era of rapid social development brought about by technology, various industries are experiencing disruptive changes. Simultaneously, the traditional education system is also facing a variety of challenges and reforms due to the shifting wishes and needs of learners (Dewi et al., 2019). Chapman and Ainscow (2019) assert that the upgrading of the education system for itself requires new approaches to thinking, attitudes and relationships. Therefore, new and more fruitful working relationships, including within school organisations, between schools and communities, are a key to the research inquiry.

Authentic leadership is a constructive leadership strategy that embodies the management process of an organisation. Authentic leaders are able to influence their followers directly or indirectly through their positive psychological capabilities to achieve the organization's development goals. (May et al., 2003; Luthans & Avolio, 2003). According to Avolio and Gardner (2005), a multi-layered and multi-dimensional analysis of authentic leadership should be performed. A large number of academics are of the opinion that an

authentic leadership theory must include the following four core elements: self-awareness, relational transparency, internalised ethics, and balanced processing. (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Avolio & Mhatre, 2011; Gardner et al., 2011). In addition, authentic leadership provides the theoretical basis for other positive leadership approaches, including transformational leadership, charismatic leadership and servant leadership (Gardner et al., 2011). Factors like the principal's character traits, values and relationships with others, as well as teachers' trust in the principal and teachers' job satisfaction are all important in the study of principals' authentic leadership. Thus, as many studies on leadership have shown, authentic leadership is considered to be the leadership style that can respond to the demands of educational reform and contribute to organisational effectiveness (Başaran & Kiral, 2020; Srivastava & Dhar, 2019; Bird et al., 2009). In this paper, a comprehensive literature review is provided. It contains a number of definitions related to authentic leadership, explanations of basic concepts, and summaries of theories related to this study.

### **The Definition of Leadership**

Leadership has a profound impact on the future of society and its cultivation within organizations is an important objective to pursue and acknowledge (Day et al., 2021). The examination of leadership has gained significant attention from scholars in the field of organizational and management sciences as it is believed to have a crucial role in shaping social policy and contributing to the development of other theories (Elkhwesky et al., 2022).

Despite extensive research on the subject, there remains a lack of a standardized definition and multiple theories of leadership exist. Chen (2020) highlights that leadership encompasses the various methods in which leaders guide their followers and foster a positive image of themselves within their organizations, such as through the use of positive emotional stimuli and promoting innovation among members. Stoller (2021) adds that effective leaders often display different leadership styles, depending on the organizational context and their individual personality traits and ethics. According to Ahmed et al (2022), leadership refers to the guidance provided by an organization's leaders through a set of specific leadership strategies that directs collective actions towards the achievement of long-term organizational goals. The importance of leadership in an organization lies in its ability to foster positive relationships among team members and support the leader in leading the organization to complete tasks under various situations. Thus, having positive leadership is a significant factor in the success of an organization. However, in reality, the organizations with well-defined leadership strategies are still limited in number. Lorensius et al (2021) also provide supportive arguments, suggesting that leadership can play a supportive role in organizational change. In the current educational context, the core of leadership is learning and change, and leaders need to emphasize the importance of organizational members, focus on learning both within and outside the organization, and rely on the team's cooperation to drive change.

Leadership theory is widely used to test the effectiveness of leadership in various organizations (Huang, 2019). Over time, researchers have had varying perspectives on leadership theories. In the 19th century, the great man theory emerged as one of the first leadership theories. According to research articles, this theory posited that good leaders were innate, heroic individuals with traits such as charisma, intelligence, and political acumen that could not be acquired (Early, 2017; Rüzgar, 2019; Razali et al., 2022). However, scholars have since criticized the great man theory for its flaws. First, it solely focuses on the leadership ability of men and disregards the potential of women in leadership positions (Harrison, 2017).

Second, latter research suggests that leadership is a competency that can be developed and acquired through socialization rather than being an innate quality (Organ, 1996).

Through further research into leadership theory, scholars have developed the trait theory. Initially, some researchers believed that leadership traits were inherent and unique to certain individuals, explaining why some people were better leaders than others (Kibbe & Chen, 2015; Huang, 2019). However, trait theory has since evolved as researchers delved deeper into the characteristics of effective leaders. In 1948, leadership theory researcher Stogdill found that specific traits could differentiate leaders from non-leaders, but emphasized that these traits were not the sole determining factors of leadership success (Early, 2017; Harrison, 2017). Other factors that influence leadership effectiveness include the followers' identity background, organizational environment, and more (Verawati & Hartono, 2020).

During the early 20th century, there was a notable shift in leadership research towards studying leader behavior. Researchers recognized that a leader's behavior played a crucial role in determining their effectiveness, leading to the development of behavioral leadership theory (Derue et al., 2011). Early research on this theory attempted to categorize leader behavior, with Kurt Lewin proposing three main styles: authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire. Since then, many scholars have suggested additional leadership styles, leading to an enriched understanding of behavioral leadership (Kibbe & Chen, 2015). However, subsequent research has shown that leader behavior is also heavily influenced by the leadership situation and that analyzing successful leadership behavior cannot be divorced from environmental factors. In other words, studies at the time were unable to demonstrate a direct relationship between leadership style and performance (Early, 2017; Harrison, 2017).

During the 1960s and 1970s, leadership research expanded its scope to include the theory of contingency leadership. This theory posits that no single leadership style can be applied to all organizations, and leaders need to adapt their behaviors to different organizational situations to be effective (Kibbe & Chen, 2015; Harrison, 2017). Fiedler, a key proponent of the theory, argues that effective leadership takes into account three main factors: the leader's relationship with other members of the organization, the form of task structure within the organization, and the leader's positional power (Early, 2017). Based on these factors, Fiedler's theory identifies eight specific leadership scenarios and suggests that task-oriented and people-oriented leadership styles are each applicable to specific leadership situations (Peters et al., 1985; Suharyanto & Lestari, 2020). However, critics of the theory argue that it is inadequate and only addresses a part of the hypothetical situations it presents. They suggest that leadership styles may not work when the reality is inconsistent with the hypothetical situations mentioned in the theory (Schoonhoven, 1981).

Recent research has shown that one-dimensional theories of leadership may not be effective in practice. Focusing solely on the leader's behavior can overlook other important factors that contribute to effective leadership (Hede, 2001). In light of this, a new approach to leadership called integrative leadership theory has emerged as a more effective framework. This theory takes into account three main factors: the leader, the followers, and the leadership environment (Silva, 2015). Integrative leadership theory emphasizes the need for a combination of leadership and management mechanisms, with the leader taking on tasks such as managing, directing, and engaging team members. The followers are given a clear understanding of their specific roles and the importance of their work, while everyone in the organization is motivated and united in pursuit of a common organizational vision (Fisher, 2016).

As integrative leadership theories gain more influence, several new leadership theories have emerged, such as transactional leadership theory, transformational leadership theory, and servant leadership theory. Among these, transactional leadership theory emphasizes leadership through incentives and disincentives (White, 2011). In this approach, the leader and subordinates have a value exchange relationship, where the organization benefits from the employees' labor and loyalty, and employees are compensated for their work and provided with developmental resources (Reid & Dold, 2018). While transactional leadership has some effectiveness and fairness, it does not fully align leaders and followers with the same goals, nor does it foster sustainable development.

At the same time, transformational leadership theory suggests that leaders can empower individuals within the organization to discover their true needs and self-worth through moral influence, giving them a sense of responsibility and motivating them to take action to drive change and development (Reid & Dold, 2018). This approach advocates for leaders to pursue change and transform the thoughts and behaviors of their followers through motivation and persuasion, ultimately transforming followers into leaders themselves (Reza, 2019). In essence, transformational leadership theory promotes a leadership style that fosters personal growth and development, encouraging individuals to reach their full potential.

Additionally, servant leadership theory has also emerged as a significant topic of research in the 21st century. According to Greenleaf, the defining characteristic of a servant leader is the ability to act and think beyond self-interest, which ultimately earns the support of others (Dierendonck, 2011). In a study conducted by Russell and Stone, they identified several core qualities and characteristics of servant leaders, including vision, honesty, integrity, trust, service, demonstration, pioneering, appreciation of others, and empowerment (Parris & Peachey, 2013). Both transformational and servant leadership theories emphasize the ethical nature of leaders and the positive relationships between leaders and their subordinates. These theories advocate for leaders to prioritize the well-being of their followers and the organization as a whole, rather than solely focusing on their own self-interest.

On the other hand, through the comparative analysis of different leadership competencies, a new perspective has emerged which suggests that authentic leadership is a fundamental aspect of positive leadership, including transformational and servant leadership. Authentic leadership emphasizes the importance of a leader's ethical behavior and authenticity (Roncesvalles & Gaerlan, 2021). A number of researchers have pointed to the benefits of authentic leadership in the realities of management. In terms of decision making, authentic leaders are able to make their own objective judgements after evaluating multiple opinions (Crawford et al.). Regarding organisational relationship building, leaders aim to establish trusting and supportive relationships with their followers. They endeavour to create a supportive work environment, listen to their subordinates, and pay attention to each individual's developmental needs and work well-being (Chen & Sriphon, 2020). In developing the organisational culture, leaders promote the values of sincerity, transparency and ethics, leading by example, motivating their team members and creating a dynamic and belonging work environment (Iszatt-White & Kempster, 2019). Due to its strengths, authentic leadership has proven to be more responsive to the leadership needs of contemporary organizations, allowing for effective management of internal issues and addressing social challenges outside the organization.

### **Authentic Leadership; Origins and Foundations**

This section critically examines the conceptual foundations and precise definition of authentic leadership as posited by Walumbwa et al (2008) in their influential work. The four key dimensions of authentic leadership theory are introduced and explored in detail. Additionally, the theoretical origins and foundations of authentic leadership are investigated, while the concepts of authenticity, authentic leaders, and authentic leadership theory are defined and explicated. By providing a concise yet comprehensive overview, this section aims to enhance the understanding of the intricate relationships between authenticity and leadership, contributing to the existing scholarly discourse on authentic leadership and its practical implications in organizational contexts.

Authenticity, as a construct of profound interest in organizational research, revolves around the congruence between an entity's internal values and its external expressions. It serves as a beacon of genuine behavior and meaningful social relationships, qualities that are highly coveted and often elusive in the complexity of the real world (Lehmana et al., 2019). At an individual level, authenticity becomes a self-referential standard that necessitates a deep and insightful understanding of oneself. This entails gaining clarity regarding personal values, acknowledging one's current stage of personal development, and embracing authentic thoughts and beliefs, all of which guide individuals to act in alignment with their core identity (Iszatt-White & Kempster, 2019).

Some scholars of authentic leadership theory argue that placing emphasis on authenticity within organizational management yields significant benefits for both leaders and followers, paving the way for personal and professional growth (Gardner et al., 2021). By embracing authenticity, leaders foster a genuine connection with their subordinates, establishing an environment characterized by trust, transparency, and mutual respect. Authentic leaders are perceived as credible and reliable due to their consistent alignment between values, beliefs, and actions.

Numerous academic studies have examined the traits of authentic leaders and have found that these leaders possess a wide range of characteristics. Among them, authenticity stands out as one of the most essential traits, with authentic leaders being both willing and able to stay true to their personal values and beliefs (Domínguez-Escrig et al., 2022). When it comes to managing an organization, authentic leaders rely on their own judgment and make decisions based on their own beliefs, rather than merely following the opinions of others (Crawford et al., 2020). Furthermore, authentic leaders use their own positive moral values to inspire and influence their followers. By fostering a culture of ethical behavior, authentic leaders motivate their followers to not only follow but also to develop themselves, ultimately contributing to the overall success of the organization (Zhang et al., 2021). Over time, this type of leadership approach proves to be effective in addressing ethical concerns within the organization and promoting the long-term well-being of employees (Lyu et al., 2019). Therefore, the cultivation of authentic leadership traits holds significant potential for fostering positive work environments, driving employee satisfaction, and contributing to the overall success of organizations in a rapidly evolving business landscape.

According to Walumbwa et al (2008), authentic leadership is considered to be a positive leadership that involves building the psychological capacity and ethical climate of managers and followers. The theoretical framework of authentic leadership contains four core elements, which are *self-awareness*, *internalised ethics*, *balanced information processing* and *relational transparency*. Together these elements shape the traits and behaviours of authentic leaders. Authentic leadership has many advantages and benefits.

Firstly, leaders who practice authentic leadership are honest, transparent, accountable and ethical and therefore gain the recognition and trust of their followers. They are honest about who they really are and build strong relationships of mutual trust with their followers, which improves interpersonal relationships within the organisation and promotes collaboration and team cohesion (Iszatt-White & Kempster, 2019).

Secondly, authentic leadership can be effective in creating a positive work climate. The authentic leaders have consistent values and behaviours, and they lead by example, setting an example that inspires employees to actively participate in their work. They listen to their employees, focus on their needs and development, and create a supportive work environment that inspires employees to work and perform (Chen & Sriphon, 2020). This positive work climate not only increases employee engagement, but also helps to improve organisational performance and innovation.

In addition, authentic leadership has been found to have a positive impact on creating and maintaining a sustainable team culture. Authentic leaders focus on the transmission and practice of values and guide team members to develop the right ethical values and codes of conduct. They inspire team members to pursue personal growth and overall team development by building trusting and supportive relationships, thus creating a dynamic and belonging work environment, and as a result, authentic leadership is seen as one of the key solutions to various leadership unethical issues in society (Corriveau, 2020).

## **Conclusion**

Leadership related issues are prevalent in different cultures and in different education systems. There are many different strategies that leaders can adopt to achieve effective organisational outcomes and to solve existing management problems. However, due to a variety of subjective and objective differences, including those arising from sociocultural differences, educational requirements and the perceptions of leaders, there is no single leadership strategy that can be applied to any educational organisation. In other words, to achieve effective leadership, leaders need to be supported by a sound leadership theory, but at the same time they also need to consider a combination of practical factors, including their own competencies, the relationships between members of the organisation, and external pressures on the organisation. Hence, conducting an in-depth exploration of the pivotal role played by the four elements—self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized ethics—in Authentic leadership holds profound significance.

This study offers an analysis of the evolution of leadership. It can be concluded that leadership is not a personality trait unique to an individual, acting singularly on the leader. Instead, leadership should be viewed as a dynamic process acting on multiple individuals within a particular organisational scenario. Its effectiveness is realised through the construction and development of relationships between leaders and followers. Different leadership styles emerge from different leader-subordinate relationships. Furthermore, in contrast to transactional leadership, transformational leadership and servant leadership, which are prevalent across different organisations, authentic leadership is more responsive to unethical issues such as opaque relationships, lack of trust, and unfair treatment in organisations. By emphasising the importance of fairness, honesty and personal ethical perspectives of leaders, it is possible to promote a positive organisational culture in different organisational scenarios. Consequently, the findings of this study will serve as a reference for further research on organisational relationships and leader characteristics.

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