

A Comprehensive Review of Authentic Leadership Models

Xie Jiewen, Jamilah Binti Ahmad, Lu Xiaoyang

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

Email: xiejiewen@graduate.utm.my, Jamilah_ahmad@utm.my,

luxiaoyang@graduate.utm.my

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been a renewed and growing interest among researchers in exploring the essence of authentic leadership. Among the vast body of leadership literature, three pioneering models that are frequently discussed are the model by Kernis (2003), the model by George (2004), the model by Ilies et al. (2005) and the model by Walumbwa et al. (2008). In order to gain a deeper and more detailed understanding of the developmental process and cultivation of authentic leadership, this article will proceed to analyse and compare these models in greater depth, identify the strengths and weaknesses of each of them, and analyse the specific elements that authentic leadership encompasses. In conclusion, the article posits that the connotations and elements inherent to the models of authentic leadership have been subjected to continuous correction, expansion, and refinement in accordance with the characteristics exhibited by leaders across different historical periods. Furthermore, it asserts that there is no definitive definition of the theory of authentic leadership, which will continue to undergo further research in the future.

Keywords: Authentic Leadership, Leadership Models, Leadership Theory, Self-awareness, Relational Transparency, Balanced Processing, Internalized Moral Perspective

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a renewed and growing interest among researchers in exploring the essence of authentic leadership. This has given rise to the emergence of multiple models that delve into the intricacies of authentic leadership within the field of leadership studies. Among the vast body of leadership literature, three pioneering models that are frequently discussed are the model by Kernis (2003), the model by George (2004), the model by Ilies et al (2005) and the model by (Walumbwa et al., 2008). These models provide invaluable insights into the conceptual framework essential for comprehending authentic leadership, allowing for a more comprehensive examination and explanation of how leaders embody and manifest authenticity. Furthermore, they facilitate a systematic evaluation of the profound influence leaders exert on organizations and teams. By engaging in a thorough study and practical application of these models, a profound and nuanced understanding of the developmental processes and cultivation of authentic leadership can be attained.

Authentic Leadership Model By Kernis (2003)

In Kernis' (2003) theory of optimal self-esteem, authenticity assumes a prominent role as a crucial factor. It facilitates individuals' comprehension of themselves and others, enabling them to effectively navigate the complexities and adversities of life. Building upon this foundation, Kernis has formulated the Authentic Leadership Model, comprising four essential components: awareness, unbiased processing, behaviour, and relationship orientation. These components, although existing as distinct entities, maintain interrelatedness and interdependence, collectively contributing to the model's overall effectiveness. Figure 1 shows the authentic leadership model developed by (Kernis, 2003).

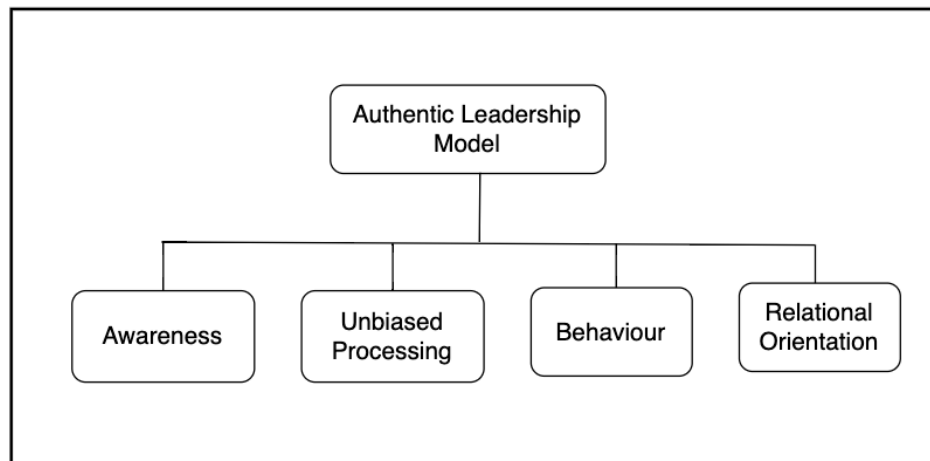


Figure 1 Authentic Leadership Model by Kernis (2003)

The Authentic Leadership Model proposed by Kernis (2003) encompasses four distinct components, each contributing to the overall understanding and practice of authentic leadership. The first component is awareness, which entails the profound ability to be self-aware and cognizant of one's own personality traits, emotions, motivations, strengths, weaknesses, and other intrinsic qualities that underpin personal values. This multifaceted awareness forms the bedrock upon which individuals base their communication behavior with others, allowing for a deeper understanding of their own perspectives and behaviors within interpersonal interactions.

The second component of the model is unbiased processing. According to Kernis, unbiased processing significantly influences an individual's behavioral choices when faced with situations that involve conflicting values. It entails the capacity to approach such dilemmas in a fair and objective manner, free from personal biases or favoritism. Leaders who possess the ability to engage in unbiased processing are better equipped to make informed decisions that align with their authentic selves while taking into account the perspectives and needs of others.

The third component of the model centers on behavior. Authentic behavior stems from a conscious alignment with one's own values, needs, and preferences rather than being driven by extrinsic motives such as gaining advantages or avoiding disadvantages by pleasing others or pretending to be someone other than oneself. Authentic leaders make deliberate choices that are consistent with their core beliefs, displaying sincerity and genuineness in their actions. By remaining true to themselves and their principles, authentic leaders inspire trust and foster an environment that encourages others to embrace their own authenticity.

The fourth and final component of Kernis' model is relational orientation, which pertains to the management of interpersonal relationships within a leadership context. Relational authenticity involves cultivating an atmosphere of genuine, trusting, and unapologetic interactions with peers and followers. Authentic leaders recognize the importance of open communication, empathy, and mutual respect, creating an environment where individuals feel valued and empowered. By fostering authentic relationships, leaders establish a foundation for collaboration and collective growth.

However, this authentic leadership model has faced critique and calls for further development from subsequent scholars. Viewed through the lens of cognitive psychology, the model's assertion of "unbiased processing" has been met with controversy due to the inherent flaws and biases ingrained in human cognition. Humans are naturally predisposed to subjectivity and cognitive biases, impacting the way they perceive, interpret, and process information. Furthermore, the term "relational authenticity" in the model has been subjected to scrutiny for its lack of intuitive clarity and its failure to adequately capture the intricate relationship dynamics between leaders and followers. While emphasizing the significance of fostering genuine and unapologetic relationships, researchers argued that the term fails to fully encapsulate the complexity and nuances that characterize the interactions between leaders and their followers. They propose the exploration of alternative concepts or the adoption of more context-specific language to more accurately depict the multifaceted nature of the leader-follower relationship (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

Authentic Leadership Model By George (2004)

In George's seminal study (2004), the significance of authenticity in effective leadership is underscored. The research highlights that authenticity serves as a key determinant, whereby a proficient leader embodies qualities such as authenticity, independence, and autonomy, aligning their leadership style harmoniously with their unique personality and character. An authentic leader demonstrates self-awareness by accepting their limitations and strategically leveraging their strengths, while steadfastly maintaining their authenticity without compromising it to gain the respect of their subordinates. Drawing upon this fundamental concept, George propounds a comprehensive model of authentic leadership, delineating five essential qualities. These qualities encompass understanding own purpose, practicing solid values, leading with heart, establishing connected relationships, demonstrating self-discipline. Importantly, George emphasizes that the acquisition of these five qualities is an ongoing and nonlinear process, requiring leaders to engage in consistent development, self-reflection, and continuous learning over time. Figure 2 shows the authentic leadership model developed by George (2004)

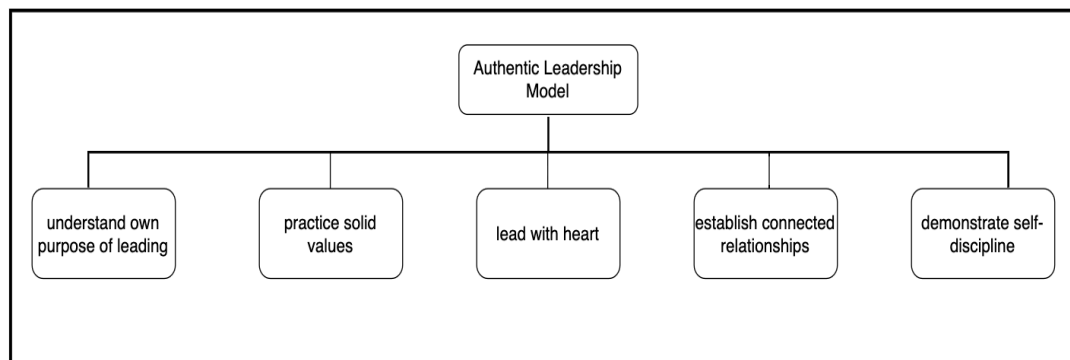


Figure 2 George's Authentic Leadership Model (2004)

First and foremost, the concept of "understanding own purpose" emphasizes the imperative for authentic leaders to possess a profound understanding of their own identity, motivations, passions, and desired accomplishments. Furthermore, they must actively seek an environment that aligns their purpose with the overarching goals of the organization. The second pivotal attribute is "practicing solid values," with George emphasizing integrity as a fundamental cornerstone of authentic leadership. Integrity entails the unwavering commitment to truthfulness and honesty. An authentic leader's integrity becomes evident in their interactions with others, as they cultivate trust and followership through consistently upholding ethical principles. In reality, a leader's values may face challenges, necessitating continual learning, introspection, and negotiation. The third hallmark quality is "leading with heart," signifying leaders' openness to share their ideas, experiences, and values with their followers while equally embracing the importance of listening and understanding their perspectives. The fourth element encompasses the critical aspect of "establishing connected relationships," which not only distinguishes effective leadership but also fulfills employees' expectations within an organization. According to George, such relationships should be founded upon shared goals between leaders and their followers. Lastly, authentic leadership entails "demonstrating self-discipline." Leaders who possess this quality possess the ability to translate their values into tangible actions. Consistent self-discipline amplifies a leader's competitiveness, thereby reinforcing their commitment to their principles. Figure 2.2 shows the authentic leadership model developed by (George, 2004).

However, George's (2004) model also has some weaknesses, as pointed out by (Gardner et al., 2011). They argue that the model is largely descriptive oriented, with a focus on the practitioner, but lacks sufficient validation evidence 2011. In other words, the model is more descriptive of practitioners' behaviours and observations, without adequately validating these descriptions. This observation implies that more research and empirical data are needed to support and validate the validity and applicability of the theoretical model.

Authentic Leadership Model By Ilies et al (2005)

Based on social psychology and authenticity research, Ilies et al (2005) proposed a model of authentic leadership comprising four elements. According to their findings, authentic leadership fosters positive communication, emotional engagement, organizational identity, and personal development between leaders and followers (Nikolic et al., 2022). Moreover, authentic leadership enhances the well-being of both leaders and followers in organizations by promoting their personal fulfillment and self-efficacy. In the model developed by Ilies et al (2005), the key components include self-awareness, unbiased processing, authentic behavior/actions, and relational authenticity. Furthermore, the model delineates how authentic leadership influences leaders' and followers' eudaemonic well-being. When leaders demonstrate authenticity, their positive conduct and integrity inspire followers to exhibit higher levels of motivation and creativity in the workplace. Additionally, the leader's authenticity serves as an exemplar, motivating followers to pursue self-fulfillment and personal growth. Figure 2.3 shows the authentic leadership model developed by (Ilies et al., 2005).

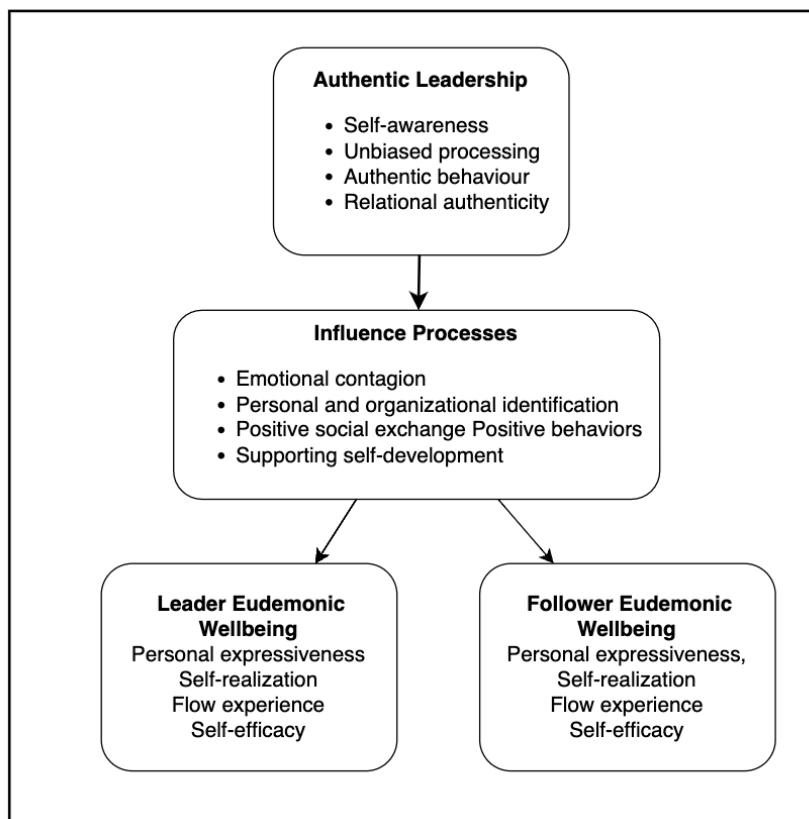


Figure 3 Authentic Leadership Model by Ilies et al. (2005)

In Ilies et al.'s (2005) model of authentic leadership, the four core elements exhibit positive interrelationships and mutually reinforce each other. Firstly, self-awareness and an unbiased approach enable individuals to enhance self-acceptance and gain a better understanding of their environment, thereby facilitating personal growth, purpose identification, and self-improvement. Leaders, through self-awareness, can recognize their strengths and weaknesses and approach challenges with impartiality, thus bolstering their problem-solving skills and self-awareness. These attributes aid leaders in unleashing their potential, defining their objectives, and achieving superior performance in their roles. Secondly, relational authenticity fosters positive connections between individuals. Authentic leaders cultivate genuine and trustworthy relationships, willingly sharing their thoughts, emotions, and experiences with followers instead of concealing their true selves. Such relational authenticity nurtures a positive environment of interaction and collaboration, fostering trust and cooperation among team members and ultimately enhancing team performance. Thirdly, authentic behavior and actions stem from self-awareness. Authentic leaders not only prioritize personal development and relationship building, but also exemplify authentic values and leadership styles through their own conduct. By exhibiting authentic behavior, leaders demonstrate care and respect for their team members, setting a positive and worthy example to follow. Furthermore, the model highlights the correlation between authentic leadership and the well-being of both leaders and followers. Authentic leadership positively impacts the well-being of leaders, as evidenced by their improved personal performance, self-fulfillment, flow experiences, and self-efficacy. Through authentic leadership behaviors, leaders can effectively pursue personal goals, achieve self-fulfillment, and enhance their self-efficacy. Additionally, authentic leadership positively influences followers' personal performance, self-fulfillment/development, flow experiences, and self-

efficacy through mechanisms such as personal and institutional identification, positive emotional contagion, positive behavioral modeling, support for self-determination, and positive social communication.

According to Ilies et al (2005), authentic leaders' influence on their followers is rooted in the positive psychological capital dimension. This suggests that authentic leaders inspire followers' intrinsic motivation by transmitting positive mindsets, beliefs, and values. Overall, the interconnections and facilitative relationships among the four core elements of the Authentic Leadership Model offer crucial theoretical and practical guidance for leaders' and teams' development and well-being.

Authentic Leadership Model By Walumbwa et al (2008)

Based on the research on authentic leadership models conducted by scholars such as Kernis (2003); Ilies et al (2005); Walumbwa et al (2008) proposed an authentic leadership model that focuses on self-development for both leaders and followers. This model comprises four fundamental elements: (a) self-awareness, (b) relational transparency, (c) balanced processing, and (d) internalised moral perspective.

Walumbwa et al (2008) argue that authentic leadership is characterized by leaders demonstrating positive psychological competencies and fostering an ethical climate, guiding their leadership decisions and behaviors based on high ethical standards within the organization. Additionally, the leadership model underscores the impact of authenticity on both leaders and followers. When leaders possess a clear awareness of their own internal values and effectively integrate them into their management practices, they exert a positive influence on their followers, resulting in personal development and a stronger sense of identification with the organization. Through the transmission of positive mindsets, beliefs, and values, authentic leaders inspire intrinsic motivation and moral values in their followers, thereby influencing their behavior and performance. This mechanism of influence, rooted in positive psychological competencies and internalized moral values, substantiates the authenticity and validity of the Authentic Leadership Model. Figure 4 shows the authentic leadership model developed by (Walumbwa et al., 2008).

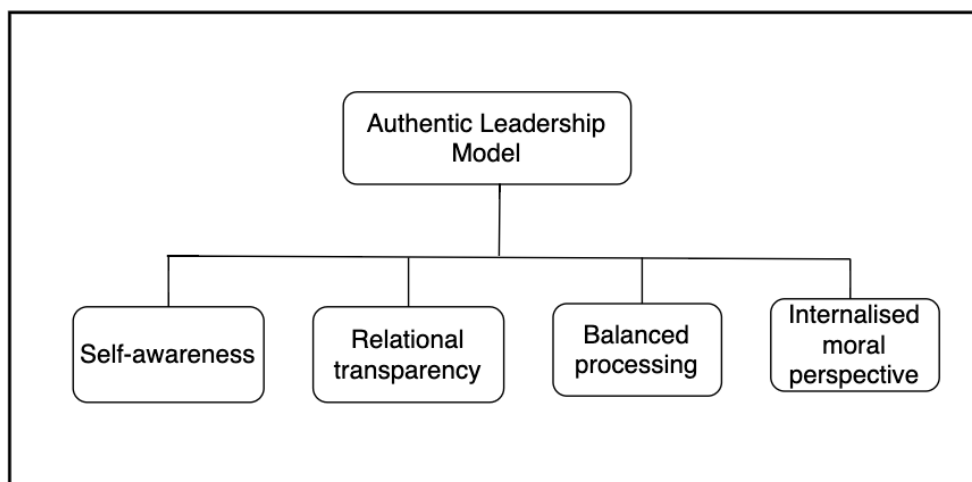


Figure 4 Authentic Leadership Model by Walumbwa et al (2008)

Although all of these models emphasise the role of leader authenticity, they each have their own focus and weaknesses. Kernis' model has been found to suffer from terminological deficiencies and an inability to accurately summarise the complexity of the leader-follower

relationship. George's model emphasises the observation of leader behaviours and summarises several components of authentic leadership. However, the validity and applicability of this model have been questioned. Additionally, Ilies et al.'s model emphasises the influence process between leaders and followers, highlighting the role of the leader's psychological capital, but does not mention moral values. In contrast, Walumbwa et al.'s model combines multiple approaches, considering both the leader's role and the relationship with followers. The model suggests that leadership behaviour should be based on moral values.

Dimensions of Authentic Leadership Model By Walumbwa et al. 2008

To explore the constructs and characteristics of authentic leadership, Walumbwa et al. (2008) proposed a model consisting of four dimensions. This model aims to uncover various essential aspects of authentic leadership, offering guidance and insight to the leaders and organizations. The four dimensions encompass: (a) self-awareness, (b) relational transparency, (c) balanced processing, and (d) internalized moral values.

Self-Awareness

In the framework of authentic leadership proposed by Walumbwa et al. (2008), self-awareness encompasses an individual's comprehensive understanding and perception of various dimensions of their own being, including strengths, weaknesses, internal values, identity, emotions, motivations, and goals. This heightened awareness is attained through interpersonal exchanges and introspective introspection. Self-awareness assumes a pivotal role in providing vital support to the decision-making process of authentic leaders. By cultivating self-awareness, these leaders gain profound insights into their own behavioral patterns and become cognizant of the impact their actions have on others (Gardner et al., 2005). Furthermore, self-awareness establishes a fundamental alignment between authentic leaders' actions and their intrinsic values, fostering authenticity and adaptability in their leadership approaches. This self-regulation enables leaders to delve deeply into their strengths and weaknesses, make principled decisions, and serve as moral exemplars for their followers. Additionally, scholars posit a close interconnection between self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and self-concept in leaders. Leaders with well-developed self-concept and emotional intelligence tend to exhibit heightened levels of self-awareness. This heightened self-awareness empowers leaders to embrace themselves more fully, cultivate positive relationships with their followers, and exert influence over their followers' self-perception patterns (Ilies et al., 2005; Hannah et al., 2005). Hence, the significance of self-awareness is eloquently exemplified within the authentic leadership framework. By attaining a profound understanding of their multifaceted nature, authentic leaders adeptly manage their own behaviors and establish positive interactions with their followers. This progressive cultivation of self-awareness contributes to the personal growth and development of leaders while serving as the cornerstone for fostering a positive and authentic leadership culture within organizations.

Relational Transparency

Relational transparency pertains to leaders effectively dismantling communication barriers and fostering an open and transparent organizational climate. By openly sharing information and authentically expressing their thoughts and emotions, leaders can cultivate trusting relationships with their followers (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Such relationships built

on mutual trust are indispensable within organizations, as they enable followers to witness the alignment between leaders' behavior and their expressed beliefs and ideas. Consequently, followers acknowledge and respect their leaders, thus increasing their inclination to embrace their guidance and decisions, thereby facilitating the accomplishment of the organization's leadership objectives. Moreover, Hannah et al (2005) argue that transparent and open relationships within an organization yield positive organizational behavior and foster the personal development of employees. Transparency in relationships cultivates a sense of fairness and ethical responsibility among employees by providing them with a clear understanding of the decision-making processes and principles upheld within the organization. This transparency fosters higher levels of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and increased engagement and involvement in the workplace. Simultaneously, followers feel motivated to enhance their competencies and skills, as they perceive their leaders' support and concern for their personal growth. Thus, relational transparency holds paramount significance as an essential facet of authentic leadership.

Balanced Processing

Balanced processing refers to the skillful navigation of leaders in selecting and interpreting information while considering trade-offs (Gardner et al., 2005). It entails leaders seeking diverse perspectives and conducting objective analysis and comparisons before making decisions (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Implementing balanced processing within organizations fosters an environment of inclusive and transparent decision-making. By actively soliciting input, attentively listening, and respecting diverse viewpoints, leaders can enhance the quality of decision-making and foster employee engagement. At the core of balanced processing lies a leader's ability to objectively acknowledge their own strengths and weaknesses and exhibit respect for others' opinions (Karadag & Oztekin-Bayir, 2018). This fosters trust and builds robust interpersonal networks, bolstering the leader's reputation. The advantages of balanced processing are manifold. For organizational leaders, it enables them to effectively interpret task feedback and tackle complex organizational challenges. Additionally, it facilitates leaders' self-assessment of their skills and promotes the development of self-awareness. Furthermore, by influencing organizational decision outcomes, balanced processing has implications for the well-being of followers (Ilies et al., 2005). Notably, leaders who demonstrate fairness and equity in conflict resolution and problem-solving enhance followers' identification with and satisfaction within the organization. Hence, leaders should proactively cultivate the ability to engage in balanced processing, facilitating the integration of diverse perspectives and promoting organizational development. This approach fosters an inclusive and collaborative culture, where decisions are made with careful consideration, resulting in organizational growth and success.

Internalised Moral Perspective

Internalised moral perspective refers to the process through which leaders internally regulate themselves, aligning their decisions and behaviors with their personal moral standards and values (Walumbwa et al., 2008). In essence, internalised moral perspective serves as a driving force for the leaders to make conscious choices by weighing interests against ethical considerations, ensuring that their actions remain consistent with ethical norms. By adhering to such principles, authentic leaders become exemplary figures in guiding their teams and organisations. Some scholars in the field of leadership argued that leaders with internalised moral perspective exhibit higher levels of moral character and altruism

compared to other types of leaders (Hannah et al., 2005). These leaders possess the ability to anticipate potential ethical dilemmas and proactively develop effective coping strategies. They are not solely focused on immediate gains but also consider the long-term sustainability of their decisions, using this as a guiding principle. Consequently, internalised moral perspective fosters qualities such as foresight, intentionality, self-reflection, and self-responsiveness among leaders. Furthermore, it plays a vital role in the development of an organisation's ethical culture (Gardner et al., 2005). Authentic leaders shape a positive ethical environment by instilling ethical awareness and behavior within their employees. This, in turn, cultivates ethical norms and shared values throughout the organisation. The establishment of an ethical culture enhances trust, cooperation, and encourages ethical and organisational citizenship behavior among employees. By actively nurturing internalised ethics, leaders demonstrate higher moral character and altruism, effectively promoting the development of an ethical culture within the organisation. Through their decisions and actions, these leaders exemplify foresight, intentionality, self-reflection, and responsiveness to ethical challenges.

Conclusion

A review of the literature on authentic leadership reveals that all models focus on the personal awareness and values of the leader. All four models emphasise that authentic leaders demonstrate positive leadership behaviours such as ethics, fairness, self-discipline, and sincerity. At the same time, the effectiveness of this leadership implementation is dependent on the leader's psychological capital, rather than emphasising materialistic incentives. It is of particular importance to note that the implementation of authentic leadership has a positive impact on both the leader and the followers, facilitating both simultaneously. Furthermore, the four models of authentic leadership contain elements that vary, indicating that the attributes of authentic leaders evolve over time. Consequently, in order to continue to promote further research on the theory of authentic leadership, researchers and practitioners in this field must continue to observe, analyse and summarise the behavioural characteristics of contemporary authentic leaders, their ideology and the performance of their followers in their work organisations. This will enable them to expand the connotation and elements of authentic leadership in response to the current situation of contemporary enterprises and organisations.

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