

# Unveiling Authentic Leadership: A Comprehensive Literature Review

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## Abstract

*Leadership theory has always been a hot topic in global leadership research. In today's situation where moral crises, malfeasance, and slack management behaviors occur frequently, authentic leadership, as an emerging leadership style, combines the positive factors of various leadership styles and is considered to be a reflection of the regression of properties and process for eternal, true, and basic leadership. This study conducted a relatively systematic review and review of relevant domestic and foreign literature from the aspects of the concept, measurement, and mechanism of authentic leadership, in order to grasp the latest trends and lay the foundation for future related research.*

**Keywords:** *Authentic leadership, Concept, Measurement, Mechanism.*

## Introduction

People's confidence in leaders has been challenged in recent years by the regularity of management blasphemy and organizational ethics scandals. These events have also made people reevaluate managers' moral obligations and their commitment to honesty and integrity (Gardner et al., 2011). In fact, specialists in personnel psychology, organizational behavior, and human resource management have long studied leadership styles. Managers in general and corporate human resources managers are also frequently concerned about it. In an effort to investigate the exceptional style, charisma, or personality attributes of great leaders, leadership academics have published over 1,000 study articles over the past 50 years, however, none of the studies have yielded a definitive picture (George et al., 2007). From early transaction leadership to later transformation leadership, to later charismatic leadership, servant leadership, and spiritual leadership.

In order to alleviate the current crisis of trust and rebuild subordinates' fundamental confidence, hope, and optimism, they must firmly believe that leaders can bring meaning to their professions and lives (Avolio et al., 2004), which is of great significance. Therefore, in the face of the fierce and complex international development environment, exploring effective leadership styles to improve management levels has increasingly become a focus of academic and practical circles. Researchers conducted in-depth discussions on organizational leadership theory and moral foundation theory, extracted the positive factors of various leadership styles, and proposed authentic leadership. Research shows that authentic leaders can operate effectively in increasingly complex environments (Roncesvalles & Gaerlan, 2020), and authentic leadership is believed to be essential for keeping skilled employees (Jun Kiho, Hu Zhehua & Sun Yi, 2023). Different from other leadership types, this new leadership style pays more attention to the moral character of the leader and is well in line with traditional Chinese culture. At present, many foreign scholars have proposed a series of authentic leadership theories, and these theories have certain guiding significance for the practice of human resource management in domestic and foreign enterprises. However, the existing research on authentic leadership is mainly based on the Western background and has not been verified on a large scale in the Eastern context.

In view of this, on the basis of domestic and foreign research, this article focuses on combing and analyzing the core issues of authentic leadership research in terms of concepts, structures, measurements, and mechanisms of action, to comprehensively present the research progress of authentic leadership, in order

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to provide a useful reference for relevant research and practice.

### *The Concept of Authentic Leadership*

Authentic leadership was first proposed by Western scholars and was later considered by many scholars to be the "root construct" of effective leadership (Avolio, B. J., & Gardner, 2005). However, the concept of authentic leadership, like many other definitions in the field of management, has not yet been developed by scholars. At present, there are many definitions of authentic leadership, and academics have presented many viewpoints from various angles. Based on extant literature, the notion of authentic leadership is characterized by the distinction between the trait/behavior view and the process view. Of these, the former is frequently used to characterize an "authentic leader," whereas the latter refers to "authentic leadership."

#### *Trait/behavior View*

A theory of research known as the "trait/behavior view" describes authentic leadership in terms of "the traits and behaviors possessed by leaders." Based on optimal self-esteem theory, Kernis (2003) proposed that behavioral authenticity includes awareness of oneself, unbiased information processing, relationship authenticity, and authentic behavior. The definitions and dimensions of authentic leadership proposed by both local and international academics are based on the behavioral authenticity structure proposed by Kernis. According to Avolio and Luthans et al. (2004), authentic leaders are people who possess a thorough awareness of their own attitudes and actions and who give the impression to others that they comprehend others' and their own beliefs, ethics, knowledge, strengths, and work environments. These people also have strong moral character and are resilient, hopeful, upbeat, and self-assured (Avolio, Luthans & Walumbwa, 2004). In the opinion of Ilies (2005) and others, leaders who practice authentic leadership blend highly developed organizational settings with good psychological traits and make them work. They propose a four-component model of the concept of authentic leadership, including self-awareness, lack of biased analysis of data, authentic behavior, and authentic relationship orientation (Ilies, Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2005).

As research and discussions in the field of authentic leadership continue to heat up, Shamir and Eilam (2005) distinguished authentic and inauthentic leadership from four aspects depending on how the leader views themselves and how their action relates to them. These are the significance of the leader's function in the system of self-concept, the self-concept's clarity, the coherence of goals with one's values and beliefs, and the coherence of one's outward conduct with one's inner self (Shamir & Eilam, 2005). George and Sims (2007) believe that authentic leaders are "authentic people who are true to themselves and the beliefs they adhere to, and strive to establish authentic trusting relationships with others, thereby motivating subordinates to perform high-performance work. They are able to abide by their true selves. Think about serving and developing others rather than satisfying others or getting success and recognition for yourself" (George, Sims & Gergen, 2007). George, Walumbwa, Avolio, and Gardner (2008) believe that authentic leadership can promote the leader's internalized morality, self-awareness, balanced information processing, and relationship transparency based on his or her own positive moral principles and positive psychological cognition so that it can enable both oneself and subordinates to develop (Li Rui, Ling Wenyan & Fang Liluo, 2010).

Walumbwa (2008) and others defined authentic leadership based on the behavioral perspective as "leaders who demonstrate a series of abilities to create and utilize their own positive psychological abilities and positive moral atmosphere, promoting the leader's self-awareness, moral internalization, information balanced processing and relational transparency result in behaviors that enhance self-development and that of subordinates" (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Whitehead (2009) proposed that authentic leaders should have the following characteristics: clear self-awareness, modest and persistent pursuit of progress; the ability to create a moral atmosphere to cultivate high-trust relationships; and a high commitment to organizational success based on social values (Whitehead, 2009). Liu et al. (2015) believe that positive psychological capital, such as optimism, confidence, and hope, are personal traits of authentic leaders (Liu, Liao, & Wei, 2015). Shang Xudong (2016) believes that authentic leadership is a new type of positive leadership style that is consistent with the requirements for leaders in traditional Chinese culture to "have both ability and political

integrity, first moral character and then measure talent." Authentic leaders have positive traits such as high moral cultivation, positive, fairness, confidence, and optimism, abundant knowledge reserves, and a clear understanding of their own and their subordinates' working environment, values, beliefs, etc., through internalizing moral ideals and having positive personal traits; building open, equitable, and beneficial connections with subordinates; taking into account the growth of subordinates; concentrating on their training; and encouraging them to improve themselves (Shang Xudong, 2016). It is easy to see that the essential elements of genuine leadership center around self-awareness, values, authentic behavior, positive psychology, and ethics when examining the definition of authentic leadership from the trait/behavior perspective.

### *Process Perspective*

In contrast to the trait/behavior approach, the process view uses the phrase "process and situation" to characterize authentic leadership. Burns (1978) is considered by some scholars to be the first person to propose the concept of authentic leadership. Burns mentioned that authentic leadership is an integrated process, not an individual trait of the leader. It brings together the conflicts and congruence of motivations and goals between leaders and followers (Pittinsky & Tyson, 2004). Luthans and Avolio (2003) integrated relevant leadership theories, positive organizational behavior, and ethics research to define authentic leadership as "arising from positive psychological abilities and an extremely developed organizational environment which allows leaders and followers to produce better results." The method of developing better self-awareness and self-control behavior in order to support constructive self-development (Luthans et al., 2003). It is precisely because of their definition of authentic leadership that they have stimulated academic interest in authentic leadership.

Shamir and Eilam (2005) noted that the term "authentic leader" does not adequately capture the meaning of "authentic leadership" because it only considers the personal characteristics and behaviors of the leader, excluding the description of subordinates and interactions between them. It can be seen that Shamir and Eilam define genuine leadership as a process that involves followers that copy and follow the leader out of authenticity, as well as authentic leaders, creating an authentic relationship process (Shamir & Eilam, 2005).

Domestic scholars have also actively discussed this issue. Wang Yong and Deng Zijuan (2012) mentioned that an adequately developed organizational environment is combined with the positive psychological traits of the leader to create authentic leadership. Authentic leadership is also an affirmation of self-state, which contains profound foundations in ethics, economics, law, psychology, and sociology. It emphasizes self-development, values self-confidence, positive emotions, trust, and other non-cognitive variables (Wang Yong & Deng Zijuan, 2012). They also mentioned that the concept and composition of authentic leadership will be affected by different national cultures, and the differences between different cultures require further research.

While definitions of authentic leadership vary across academics, it is easy to determine that leadership is fundamentally a process in which leaders influence teams and subordinates through their own traits and behaviors. Wang Zhen, Song Meng & Sun Jianmin (2014) mentioned that this phenomenon of inconsistent definition of connotation is caused by different research perspectives. Since the process of leadership is abstract, specialized research frequently concentrates on the traits and actions of leaders. Stated differently, scholars who adopt a process perspective to define authentic leadership tend to adopt a holistic perspective to analyze its functioning process, while scholars who hold a trait or behavioral perspective tend to use a partial perspective to focus on how leadership exerts positive effects. There is no substance between the two. Sexual conflict has not been strictly distinguished in the academic community (Wang Zhen, Song Meng & Sun Jianmin, 2014). Therefore, we can combine the two in subsequent research to define and study authentic leadership more systematically and comprehensively.

### *Measurement of Authentic Leadership*

Judging from the existing literature, there are currently many types of true scales. Henderson and Hoy (1983) first created a 32-item Leader Authenticity Scale (LAS) using primary school teachers and principals

as samples to measure the three components of leader authenticity they predicted: self-over-role, manipulation, and conscientiousness (Henderson & Hoy, 1983). However, this scale's content validity and generalizability are severely constrained, and it is heavily context-dependent. Following Henderson and Hoy (1983), some researchers began to use measurement tools of related constructs to measure authentic leadership. Kernis (2003) proposed that authentic leadership includes four basic elements: self-esteem, balance in information processing, open and authentic relationships with subordinates, and authentic actions (Kernis, 2003). Ilies (2005) integrated the four elements of Kernis' authentic leadership and proposed dimensions such as conscious thinking, fair information processing, and actions that combine knowledge and action (Ilies, Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2005). What Ilies proposed was only a theoretical construct and lacked the support of empirical research.

As the discussion continued to deepen, researchers tried to develop some targeted measurement tools. Gerber (2006) was the first to make an attempt. Based on the authentic leadership theory, he compiled a scale with 5 dimensions: self-understanding, candid communication, honest leadership, altruistic orientation, and achievement of others, with a total of 18 items (Gerber, 2006). Jensen and Luthans (2006) followed Avolio et al.'s theoretical structure of authentic leadership and referred to other leadership types. The table and some items of the organizational ethics scale were compiled to form a scale including three dimensions: superior actions, organizational ethics, and future direction (Jensen & Luthans, 2006). There may be some issues with the scientific validity of these scales, though, since true leadership will become indistinguishable from other structures if scale tools from other constructs are used to measure new constructs. Lagan (2007) based on Ilies, integrated and compiled a set of measurement scales with 19 items in 4 dimensions including self-awareness, unbiased cognition, relational transparency, and authentic behavior (Lagan, 2007). Tate (2008) compiled a 17-item scale based on Gerber's authentic leadership theory with three dimensions: self-discipline and moral standards, fostering meaningful relationships, and enthusiasm for goals (Tate, 2008). Drawing from the authentic leadership theory and framework developed by Kernis et al., Walumbwa and others (2008) integrated the views of Gardner, Luthans, and Ilies on the authentic leadership structure and compiled four dimensions: self-awareness, relationship transparency, moral internalization, and information balance processing, for a total of 16-item scales (Walumbwa et al., 2008). The conceptual validity and predictive validity of the scale have been confirmed using sample data from China, Kenya, and the United States. In recent years, most measurements of authentic leadership have adopted its scale or modified it.

Wong and Cummings (2009) selected 7 items in the leadership practice questionnaire to represent the 7 characteristics of authentic leadership to measure authentic leadership, including self-awareness, relationship transparency, balanced processing, ethical behavior, trustworthiness, supportive, and empowering. Obviously, the scale compiled in this way has not gone through strict compilation procedures, and the measurement content is difficult to accurately and comprehensively reflect authentic leadership (Wong & Cummings, 2009). Based on the research of Walumbwa et al., Neider and Schriesheim (2011) developed a new authentic leadership measurement scale: the Authentic Leadership Inventory (ALI), which compiled self-awareness, relational transparency, and moral internalization. There are 14 items in total in 4 dimensions including perspective and information balance processing. However, it is currently found that this scale is rarely used in research (Neider & Schriesheim, 2011). Černe and Škerlavaj (2013) also based on the research of Walumbwa et al., regarded positive demonstration as a dimension of authentic leadership, and compiled a scale with three dimensions of self-awareness, self-regulation, and positive imitation, with a total of 13 items (Černe, Jaklič & Škerlavaj, 2013).

Judging from the existing literature, foreign research on the measurement of authentic leadership is relatively mature. With the deepening of research, measurement tools have been continuously improved. Domestic researchers have also compiled authentic leadership measurement scales, but they have not yet formed a mainstream research system. Most of them draw on classic foreign structural analysis and measurement scales. One of the more representative ones is Xie Hengxiao (2007) combined the Chinese cultural background, using interviews and literature research methods, based on the CPM theory, compiled an authentic leadership questionnaire that is more in line with Chinese culture, and opened a total of 5 dimensions: subordinate orientation, compliance with rules, leadership traits, honesty, and non-deception, integrity and selflessness, a 23-item scale. In the CPM theory, a leader can have both direct and indirect

influence over their subordinates. Indirect influence is mostly attained through the C (personal character) element, whereas direct influence is mostly attained through the P (job performance) and M (group maintenance) factors (Xie Hengxiao, 2007). Based on the scale developed by Xie Hengxiao, Walumbwa, and others, Zhou Leilei (2010) integrated the questionnaire and compiled 4 dimensions: subordinate orientation, moral internalization, leadership traits, and honesty, with a total of 17 items scale (Zhou Leilei, 2010). Wang Yong and Chen Wanming (2012) used literature research, in-depth interviews, and questionnaire research methods, Four dimensions were opened: employee-oriented sincerity, relationship-oriented sincerity, value-oriented sincerity, and work-oriented sincerity, with a total of 9 items in the scale (Wang Yong, Chen Wanming & Li Jiansheng, 2012).

Overall, the majority of scales are similar in terms of structure, content, and measurement indicators. The most popular measuring instrument now in use is the ALQ (Authentic Leadership Questionnaire) scale, which was created by Walumbwa et al. in 2008. This scale has high cross-cultural applicability, a solid theoretical foundation, and strict reliability and validity verification. Therefore, this scale has been widely used in empirical research. Many domestic researchers have mostly used this scale and reported good measurement indicators.

In the pilot study by Abdul Aziz et al. (2022) being carried out in the Malaysian context, EFA revealed that the measured components of the concept of authentic leadership were separated into four factors: self-awareness, relational/transparency, internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing. The principal axis factor analysis (PAFA) was used to maintain all of the instrument's elements. Besides that, the reliability of the instrument exceeded the minimum limit value of 0.6, which indicated it was valid for use in the actual study.

In addition, research on the measurement of authentic leadership is not limited to the study of measurement tools. There are also a small number of studies involving measurement methods and measurement subjects. Looking at the previous research literature, it is found that most researchers use direct measurement or indirect measurement. Hannah et al. (2011) pointed out that direct measurement is a way to directly measure employees' perceptions of authentic leadership at the individual level to examine the impact on workers of their perception of authentic leadership (Hannah, Walumbwa & Fry, 2011). Rego, Vitória, Magalhães, Ribeiro, & e Cunha (2013) mentioned that indirect measurement refers to measuring employees' perceptions of authentic leadership at the individual level, thereby integrating the same team and group or the perceived outcomes of different members of a department. Judging from existing research, the proportions of these two categories are similar. In addition, there are relatively few studies on the measurement subject alone. The measuring subject pertains to whether authentic leadership is reported by subordinates or observers or whether it is self-reported by the leader. Judging from the existing literature, researchers in the past mostly used other-evaluation reporting methods, that is, selecting subordinates or observers as subjects to conduct questionnaire surveys or experimental research. A few researchers have used leadership self-report methods to conduct research. In recent years, some researchers have adopted both reporting methods simultaneously (Černe, Jaklič & Škerlavaj, 2013).

### *The Mechanism of Authentic Leadership*

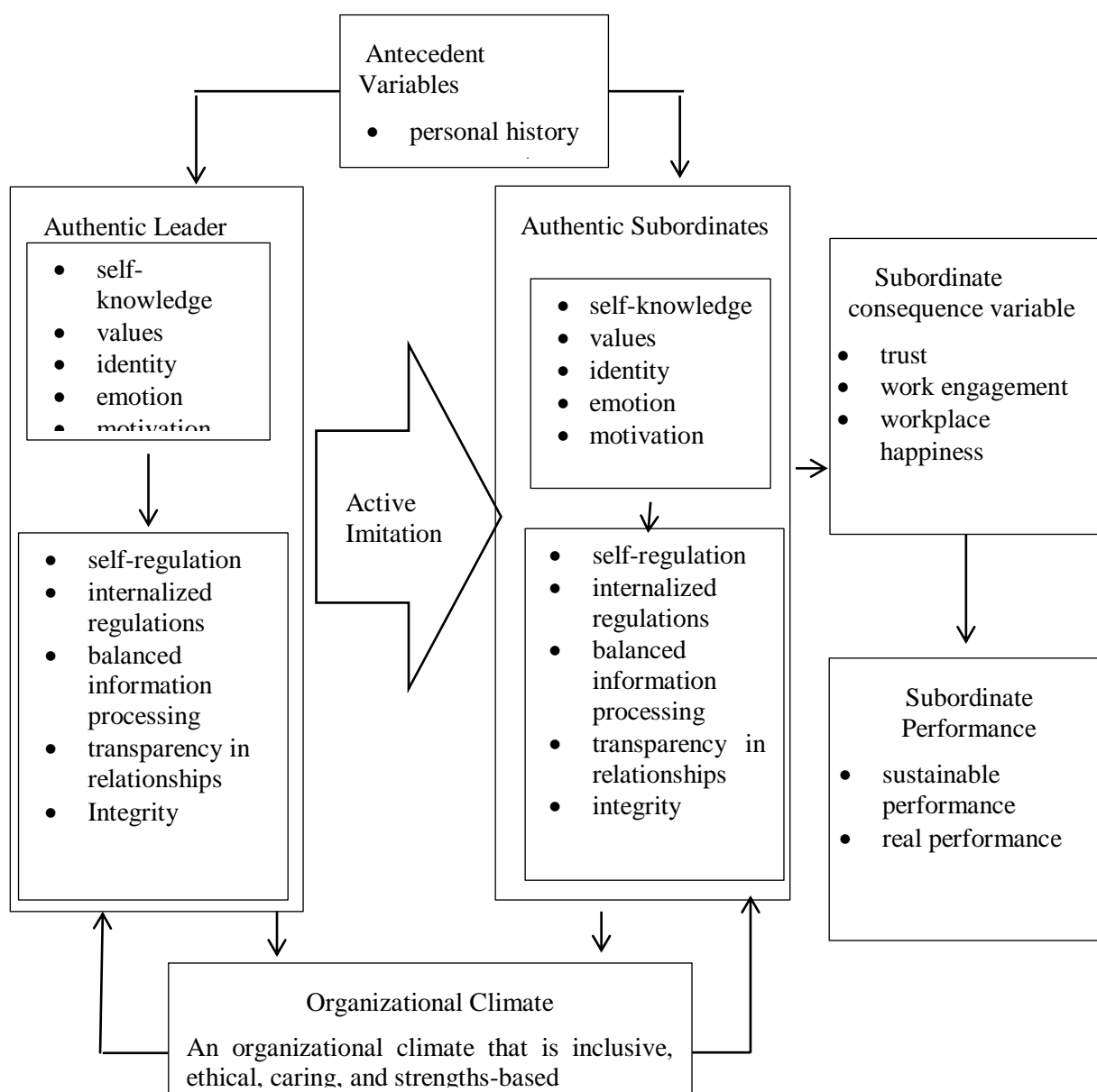
With the continuous deepening of theoretical research, the focus of research on authentic leadership by domestic and foreign scholars has slowly begun to change. In particular, research on the mechanism of authentic leadership continues to become more popular. Through searches of previous literature and statistical findings, at present, research on the action mechanism of authentic leadership mainly focuses on two aspects. On the one hand, it is the antecedent variables and action mechanism. On the other hand, there are the outcome variables and their impact.

### *Antecedent Variables and Mechanism of Action*

Authentic leadership begins with one's own background or experience. and triggering events are the motivation or stimulus for authentic leadership's self-development. Since the concept of authentic leadership was proposed, scholars have discussed its role in organizations from different perspectives. Some



researchers have proposed related theoretical models, assuming environmental factors such as a positive organizational environment, personal history, and triggering events, as well as personal characteristics of leaders including integrity, a positive self-concept, positive psychological capital, emotional intelligence, self-monitoring, and self-transcendence ideals. The antecedents of the development of authentic leadership include positive feelings expressed toward others, psychological intimacy, attribution bias, and emotional expression. Among these hypothesized antecedents of authentic leadership development, psychological capital factors were empirically tested. In addition, attention to status, self-knowledge, and self-consistency are also recognized, and situational clues and moral reasoning emphasize internal focus and external focus (Xu Zhihua, 2016). Gardner (2005) believes that the leader's personal history and leading events are the inducements of honest leadership. The leader's self-understanding and self-regulation can promote the development of honest leadership, and the leader's continuous and positive honest behavior can inspire and develop honest subordinates, allowing subordinates to achieve happiness and sustainable, high-level performance while generating trust (Gardner et al., 2005). The details are shown in Figure 1.



**Fig.1** Self-Based Model of Authentic Leader and Follower Development

Weischer et al. (2013) mentioned that using the life story method can effectively develop authentic leadership and improve employees' perception of authentic leadership (Weischer, Weibler & Petersen, 2013). Hinojosa (2014) and others also believe that special triggering events and personal life experiences can enhance and accumulate a leader's psychological capital and are also antecedent variables of a leader's authentic leadership style. A leader's personality can also have an impact on authentic leadership. Individuals with attachment personalities are far more inclined to develop authentic leadership (Hinojosa et al., 2014). Furthermore, some scholars have examined the connection between psychological wealth and authentic leadership. The correlation model demonstrates how a leader's positive psychological capital and honest leadership, as proposed by Jensen et al. (2006), regard a leader's positive psychological capital as an important antecedent variable of honest leadership and believe that both organizational context and personal life experience will affect honest leadership (Jensen & Luthans, 2006). Figure 2 shows the psychological capital and authentic leadership relationship model based on the discussion above.

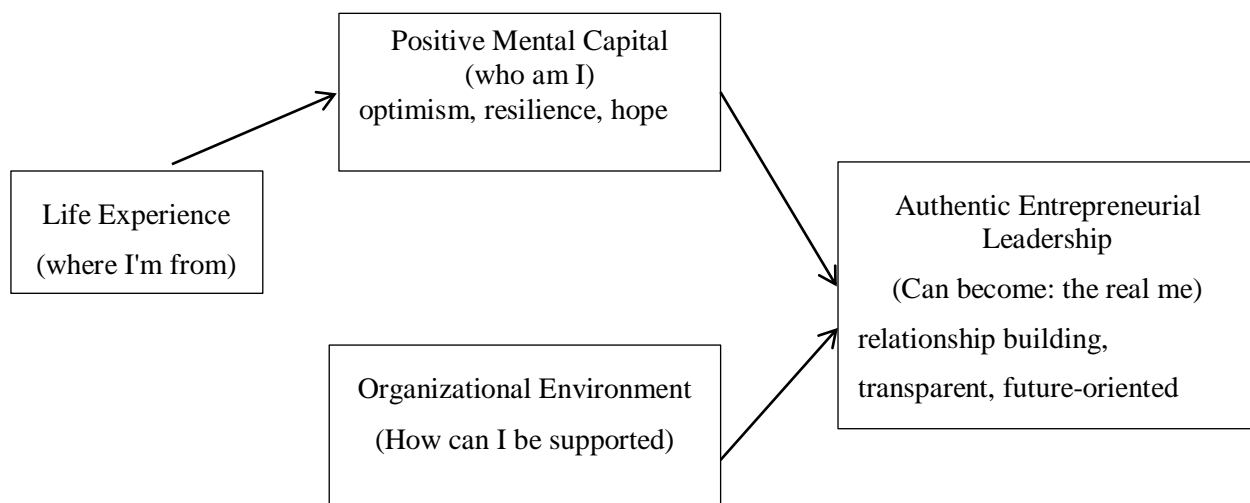


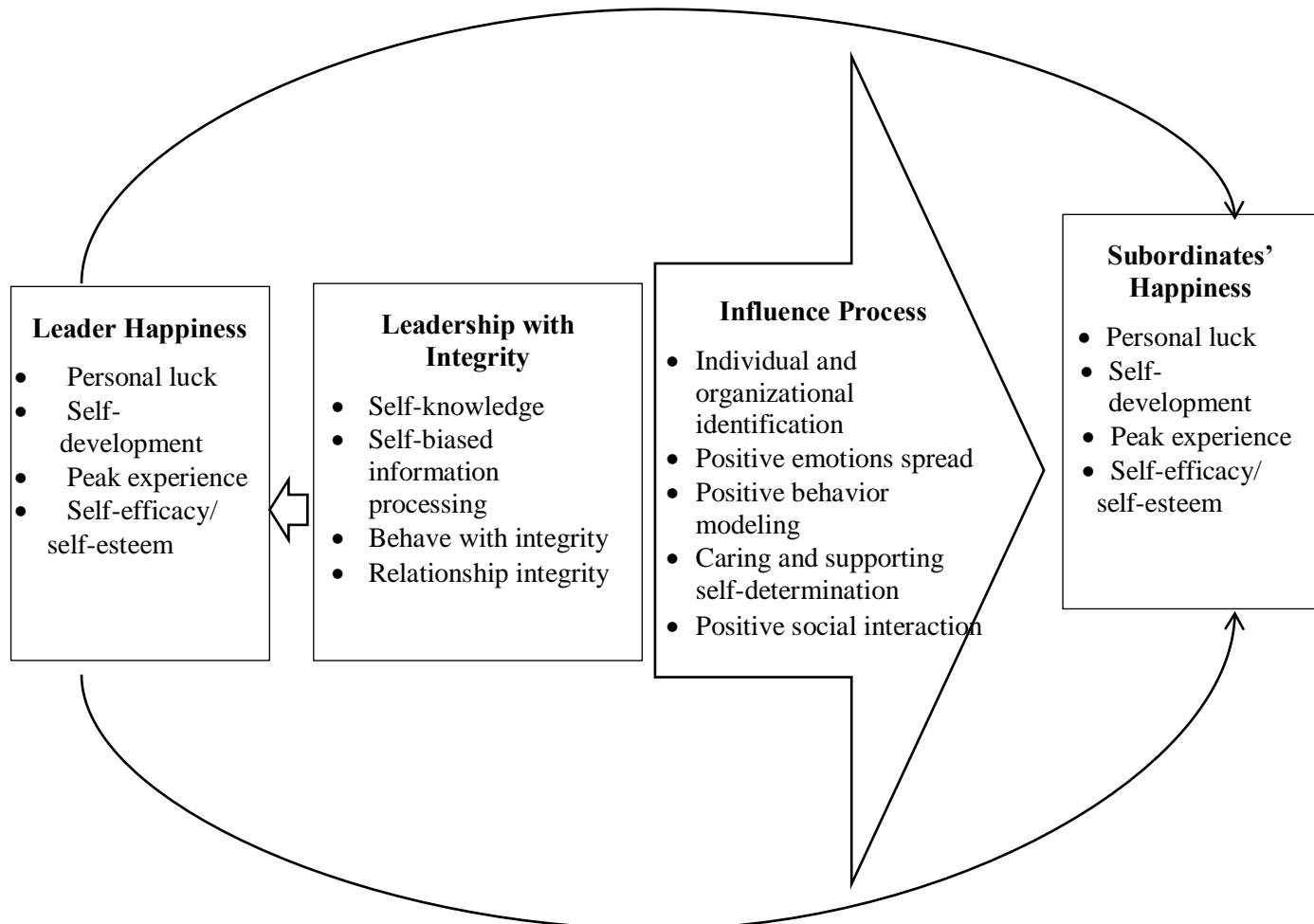
Fig. 2 Psychological Capital and Authentic Leadership Relationship Model

Gardner (2011) and others also believe that the leader's psychological capital is the prerequisite for authentic leadership and can significantly affect the leader's authentic leadership style (Gardner et al., 2011). These studies show that factors such as personal history, triggering events, and psychological capital profoundly influence authentic leadership. As a matter of fact, the industry, corporate type, size, culture, history, team cohesiveness, conflict, level of prior leader intervention, and success or failure of the organization are all regarded as antecedent variables of authentic leadership. Unfortunately, so far, the effect of other antecedent variables on authentic leadership has not been thoroughly studied in many studies. Individual differences, such as whether personality and age have an impact on authentic leadership, whether individuals with different personalities and ages develop different models of authentic leadership capabilities, etc. (Han Yi & Yang Baiyin, 2009).

#### *Result Variables and Impact Effects*

Numerous studies have been conducted on the consequences of genuine leadership, particularly for the well-being of followers. Authentic leadership creates a positive atmosphere through positive emotions, establishes a trusting relationship with followers, prompts followers to form positive emotions, and enhances organizational identification. Through their words and acts, authentic leaders build their followers' trust and confidence and offer them moral, emotional, and cognitive support so they can adopt a developmental perspective of their own talents. Authentic leaders can not only increase followers' trust in the leader, but also help followers discover their talents, place them in appropriate positions, and provide opportunities for enriching work and developing relationships with colleagues. Follower engagement can effectively improve workplace happiness, and happiness and engagement both contribute to followers'

genuine and long-term performance (Gardner et al., 2005). Ilies (2005) and others believe that authentic leadership can enhance individual positive emotions and help individuals accumulate more resources needed to cope with negative situations and mentality, such as physical, quality, and psychological resources, thus enabling individuals to behave more effectively with positive attitudes and behaviors (Ilies, Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2005). In summary, authentic leadership affects outcome variables through the passing factor of individual identity. The details are shown in Figure 3.



**Fig. 3** Model of Authentic Leadership Influences on Leader and Follower's Eudaemonic

Yammarino (2008) and colleagues were the first to combine the positive behavioral theories of organizations and authentic leadership theoretical frameworks. They suggested that genuine leadership should influence positive organizational behavior's outcomes before it can influence the output of results. In other words, the related concepts of positive organizational behavior are the mechanism of action of the authentic collar and its outcome variables. Simultaneously, the results of this study also indicated that the outcome factors of authentic leadership and constructive organizational behavior influence individuals as well as teams or organizations. Individual self-efficacy, psychological capital, and happiness are included at the individual level; team efficacy, trust, performance, cohesiveness, and mood are included at the team level; and organizational commitment, work characteristics, organizational climate, and collective efficacy are included at the organizational level (Yammarino et al., 2008). Specifically this is shown in Figure 4.



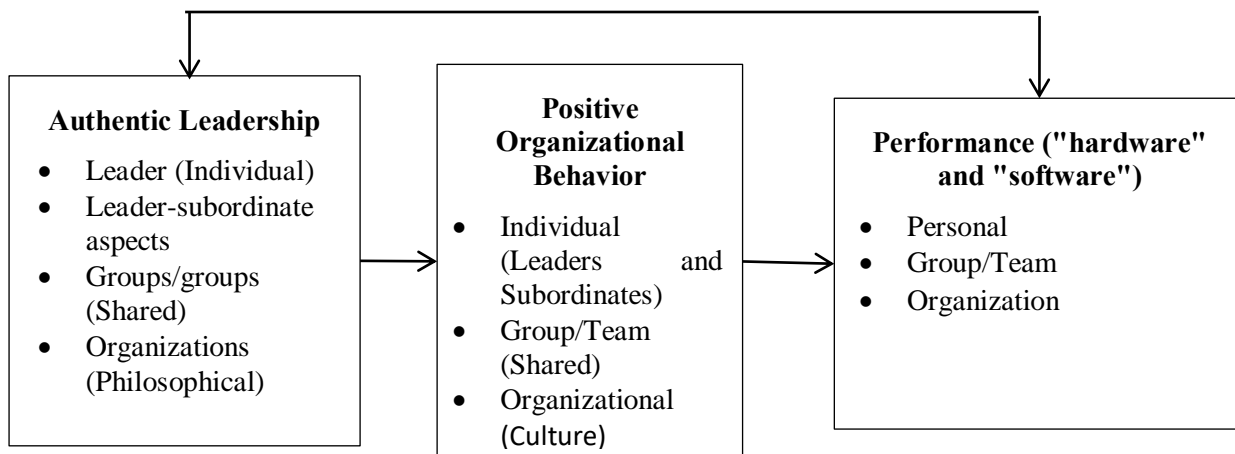


Fig. 4 Model of Multilevel Authentic Leadership.

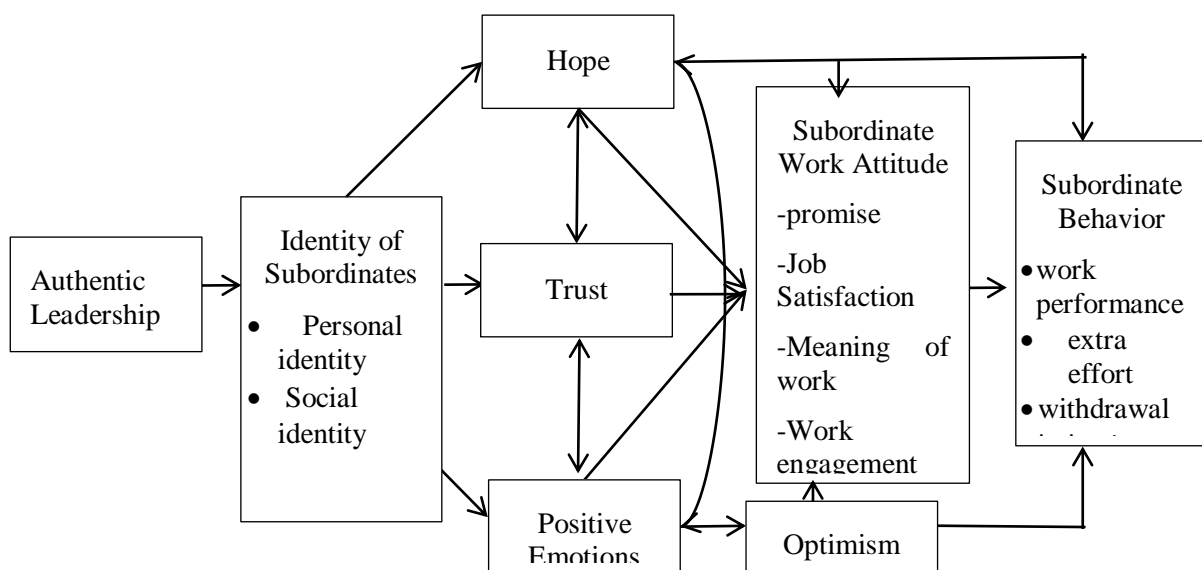
Walumbwa et al. (2011) pointed out that subordinates find authentic leaders to be very appealing because of their favorable traits. Their credibility, core values, and behaviors will cause positive imitation by subordinates, thereby fostering a more authentic team environment and relationship among members and ultimately affecting individual and team output. (Walumbwa et al., 2011). Leroy and Palanski et al. (2012) also found that the consistent behavior of authentic leaders increases the emotional commitment of followers, ultimately affecting their performance (Leroy, Palanski & Simons, 2012). Hsiung (2012) confirmed that authentic leadership stimulates subordinates' voice behavior by building a high-quality leader-subordinate exchange relationship (Hsiung, 2012). Ghufran et al. (2022) referred to the fact that the results of the present investigation support the strong and beneficial relationship between authentic leadership and personal achievement, which is mediated by LMX and trust. Additionally, it is shown that authentic leadership fosters trustworthiness among the followers, which raises employee LMX and, as a result, promotes worker efficiency. (Ghufran et al., 2022).

Hmieleski, Cole, and Baron (2012) focused on the positive emotions of the team and conducted related research. The research results found that authentic leadership in the top management team can improve organizational performance by promoting the positive emotions of the team (Hmieleski, et al., 2012). Regarding emotional commitment, Rego et al. (2014) and others proposed that the favorable traits and actions of real leaders might raise followers' moral dedication, which in turn improves teamwork.

Kulophas, Hallinger, Ruengtrakul, and Wongwanich (2018) pointed out that authentic leadership was considered a suitable model of school leadership where their findings confirmed that authentic leadership affects lecturers' academic optimism and work engagement. There was a moderate correlation found between the dependent variables of lecturer attitudes and authentic leadership (Kulophas et al., 2018). Andrea, Parivash, and Maryam (2019) pointed out that authentic leadership has a major impact on lecturers' perceptions of organizational assistance, psychological wealth, and desire to stay. It was discovered that instructors' psychological wealth and their perception of organizational support acted as moderators between the impact of authentic leadership and the intention to stay (Andrea et al., 2019). Wirawan, Muhammad Jufri, and Abdul Saman (2020) found that PsyCap and authentic leadership have an indirect impact on job satisfaction, which in turn affects work engagement. Job satisfaction acted as a complete mediating factor between the impact of genuine leadership and work engagement. By contrast, the association between PsyCap and work engagement was only slightly mediated by job satisfaction (Wirawan et al., 2020). Cortés, Octavio, Esther, and Manuel (2023) and others mentioned that leaders exhibiting substantial amounts of authentic leadership raise employees' total job satisfaction, which is made up of various elements with some differences between them (Cortés et al., 2023).

Kurian and Nafukho (2022) pointed out that the study's findings revealed that when workers believe their leaders adhere to the authentic leadership paradigm, they also perceive high levels of organizational justice. Authentic leadership is an emerging leadership approach based on positive psychology that emphasizes the moral and ethical aspects of leadership (Kurian & Nafukho, 2022). Kleynhans, Heyns, and Stander (2022) pointed out that the flourishing of employees through trust in the company and organizational support was highly anticipated by authentic leadership. This study sheds light on the possible benefits of an authentic leadership style in fostering a relationship of trust between team members and their employer, as well as the support they receive from them (Kleynhans, Heyns & Stander, 2022).

By instilling a stronger sense of moral value and exhibiting a high degree of transparency and trustworthiness in how they communicate with followers, authentic leaders can help followers feel more socially identified. Followers' personal and social identification has a mediating impact on the connection between authentic leadership behavior and hope, trust in the leader, and positive emotions. That is, authentic leaders indirectly influence hope and trust by improving followers' social and personal identification and positive emotions. Avolio et al. (2004) proposed a model of the relationship between authentic leadership and subordinate attitudes and behaviors, integrating previous research on the impact of leadership and satisfaction, and verifying the impact of authentic leadership on subordinate attitudes and behaviors. The positive impact of the two outcome variables of behavior pointed out that hope, trust, positive emotions, and optimism as mediating variables significantly affect this process (Avolio et al., 2004). Specifically shown in Figure 5.



**Fig. 5** Model of Framework Linking Authentic Leadership to Follower's Attitudes and Behaviors

Wong et al. (2010) found that authentic leadership influences employees' sense of trust and engagement at work by influencing their leadership identification; however, the process by which social identification is transmitted has not been established. The study also showed that followers who experience authentic leadership will identify more with the leader, strengthening their social identity. This will have an impact on followers' performance at work (Wong et al., 2010).

As the research on authentic leadership continues to heat up, domestic scholars have successively carried out some related research based on the research of foreign scholars and based on the Chinese region. Judging from existing research, most studies are conducted at the individual and team levels and focus on variables such as efficacy, psychological capital, positive emotions/emotions, employee innovation followers of subordinates, and so on.

Xie Hengxiao (2007) conducted an empirical study on the content structure of honest leadership based on the CPM theoretical research results of Professor Ling Wenshuan, constructed a five-factor structural model of honest leadership in the Chinese organizational context, and developed a corresponding honest leadership scale. An empirical study was conducted on the relationship between honest leadership and related variables (Xie Hengxiao, 2007). The details are shown in Figure 6.

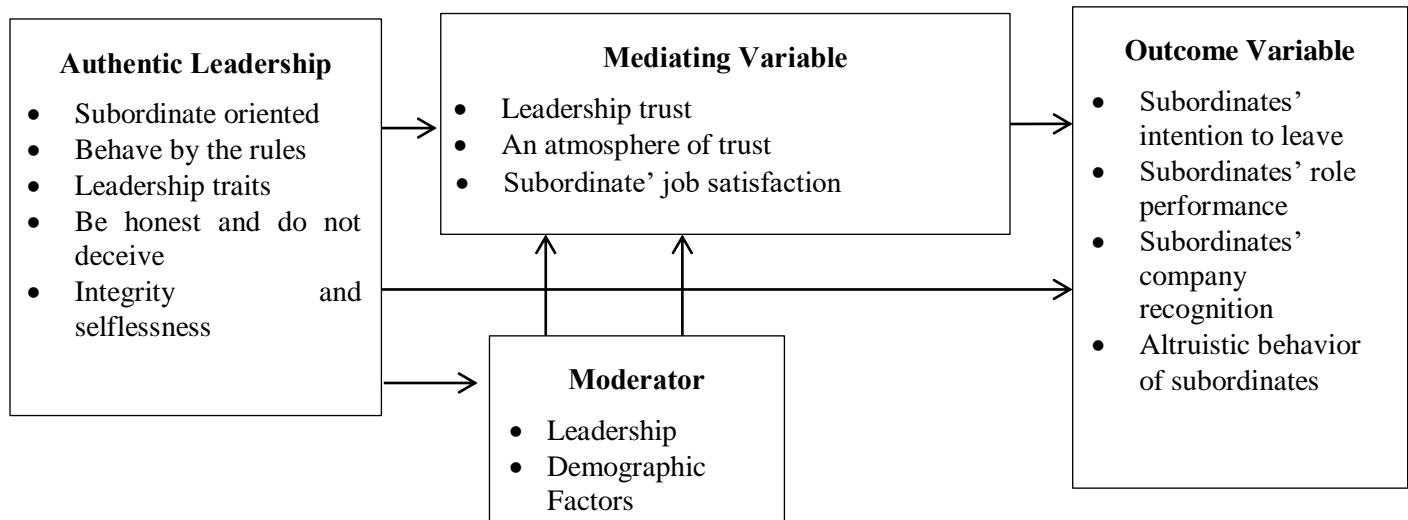
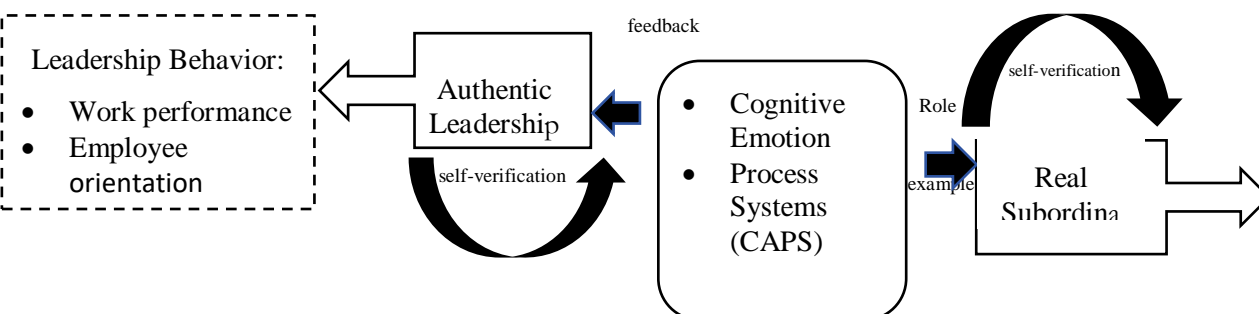
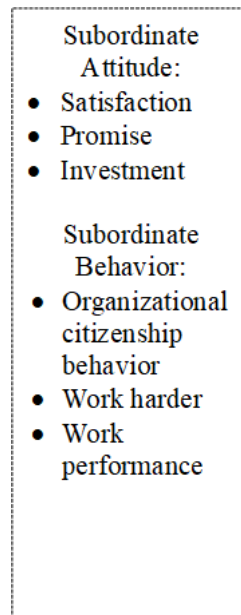


Fig. 6 Authentic Leadership and its Correlativity (In China)

Research by Deng Zijuan (2012) and others shows that authentic leadership has a positive impact on organizational citizenship behavior by acting on self-efficacy (Deng Zijuan, Wang Yong, & Jiang Duo, 2012). Qian Shiru and Zhao Binbin (2016) conducted a survey on 216 new-generation employees, and the findings demonstrated that psychological empowerment plays a key role in the relationship between authentic leadership and the job performance of new-generation workers. Authentic leadership has a strong positive impact on the work performance of new generations of employees. It acts as a mediator in the partnership (Qian Shiru & Zhao Binbin, 2016).

Kong Fang and Zhao Yaping (2010) used role model theory, social learning theory, CAPS theory, feedback theory, and self-validation theory to propose an expanded model of authentic leadership that includes cycle effects and interactive effects, pointing out that authentic leadership develops authentic leadership through positive role models. For subordinates, this process is realized through the learning process of subordinates, and then subordinates further enhance their self-authenticity through self-verification and thus generate positive attitudes and behaviors. Authentic leaders serve as positive role models to obtain positive feedback from subordinates and use this to carry out self-verification, thereby further enhancing self-authenticity and producing effective leadership behaviors (Kong Fang & Zhao Xiping, 2010). The specific model is shown in Figure 7.





**Fig. 7** The Five-Movement Cycle of Authentic Leadership and Subordinates

Research by Zou Zhufeng (2013) shows that authentic leadership can effectively stimulate the confidence of subordinates or team members in their own abilities and is conducive to promoting their positive attitudes and behavioral performance (Zou Zhufeng & Yang Zipeng, 2013). Li Yongxin (2014) and others conducted a survey of 308 Chinese enterprise employees. The empirical research results demonstrated that honest leadership has a significant positive predictive effect on employees' work engagement; professional identity, emotional commitment, and organizational support affect employee work engagement when honest leadership plays a complete mediating role in the process (Li Yongxin, Zhou Hailong & Tian Yanhui, 2014). Li Yanhong (2022), based on uncertainty management theory, explored the relationship between authentic leadership and employees' proactive behavior. The finding showed that authentic leadership can effectively promote employees' proactive behavior, and the impact of authentic leadership on employees' proactive behavior is by reducing employee anxiety; in addition, for individuals with higher (lower) uncertainty avoidance. Authentic leadership has a strong (weaker) direct impact on anxiety as well as an indirect effect via anxiety on proactive conduct. (Li Yanhong, 2022). The research findings of Yu Shujun and Ning Yingke (2022) demonstrate that emotional commitment is a mediator between employee knowledge-sharing behavior and authentic leadership, with authentic leadership having a significant impact on 424 valid sample data, while psychological safety as a moderator can strengthen the promotion effect of emotional commitment on employees' knowledge-sharing (Yu Shujun & Ning Yingke, 2022).

Han Yi and Yang Baiyin (2011) conducted a paired questionnaire survey of 297 power company leaders and employees and found that innovative activity on the part of employees is substantially positively correlated with honest leadership. While leader-member exchange is important in the relationship between the two, psychological capital performs a comprehensive mediating role between the two (Han Yi & Yang Baiyin, 2011). According to Zhang Xiuling (2016), authentic leadership is characterized by high moral quality and strong psychological capital and can set a moral example for subordinates, which is consistent with Chinese culture that emphasizes authenticity, integrity, and role models. Authentic leadership guides and supports subordinates' work through authentic behaviors, can establish a trusting relationship with subordinates, and can effectively promote subordinates' willingness to stay in the organization for a long time (Zhang Xiuling, 2016). Based on resource conservation theory and psychological ownership theory, Mao Rui and Zhou Lilei (2020) explored the mediating mechanism of promotive psychological ownership and defensive psychological ownership in the effect of authentic leadership on employee career burnout. The research results show that authentic leadership can significantly inhibit employee burnout, and

promotional psychological ownership and defensive psychological ownership play a partial mediating role. Promotional psychological ownership mediates the impact of authentic leadership on employee burnout. The effect is more obvious than the mediating effect of defensive psychological ownership (Mao Rui & Zhou Leilei, 2020). Song Meng and Dong Yujie (2021) conducted a study, and authentic leadership substantially positively predicts employees' subjective happiness, according to study results based on data from 309 workers. Psychological capital and leadership identification are mediators between authentic leadership and employee happiness, respectively. Multiple mediation effect study results indicate that psychological capital's indirect impact accounts for 60.7% of the total effect, a percentage that is much greater than that of leadership trust and identification (Song Meng & Dong Yujie, 2021).

Scholars such as Guo Wei (2012) conducted an empirical study using 113 R&D team leaders and their 574 employees as samples, proving that individual-oriented honest leadership affects employee innovation results through superior support; team-oriented honest leadership affects employee innovation results through team collaboration. It plays a significant role in promoting the individual innovative behavior of employees and the innovation of the team as a whole (Guo Wei et al., 2012). Xu Shuang et al. (2022) mentioned that as the "post-90s" generation becomes the main body of new employees, the motivating effect of different leadership styles on their innovative behavior has attracted more and more attention. Based on the cognitive-emotional perspective, this paper explores the impact mechanism of authentic leadership style on the innovative behavior of new employees and identifies the moderating effect of the mentor-apprentice relationship. The findings indicate that authentic leadership style has a significant positive impact on new employees' innovative behavior; organizational justice sense and work engagement have a mediating effect, and the mediating effect of organizational justice sense is stronger; a good mentor-apprentice relationship positively regulates authentic leadership style and the impact of organizational justice and work engagement on new employees' innovative behavior, and the stronger the relationship, the more significant the mediating effect (Xu Shuang et al., 2022). Wang Zhining, Guan Chunjie, and Ye Xinfeng (2023) conducted an empirical study based on nested data from 477 employees in 98 teams. The results showed that authentic leadership has a significant positive impact on subordinates' creativity; authentic leadership positively affects subordinates and the positive self-reflection of subordinates negatively affects the negative self-reflection of subordinates (Wang Zhining, Guan Chunjie, & Ye Xinfeng, 2023).

Zhang Lei and others (2012) conducted an empirical study on 136 samples from Yantai, Shandong, China, and found that the leadership style of honest leadership is easy to accept, follow, and imitate by subordinates. Subordinates' subjective identification with the leader plays an important role in the influence of honest leadership on subordinates' honest following. It plays a partial mediating role, and organizational political perception plays a moderating role (Zhang Lei, Yu Guangtao, & Zhou Wenbin, 2012). Drawing on the theory of social exchange, Wen Qiuxiang and Long Jing (2020) conducted a study involving 233 corporate employees as research subjects, and the internal mechanism between authentic leadership and subordinates' following motivation was studied from the perspective of trust, and on this basis, the regulation of organizational political perception was tested. Research results show that authentic leadership, as a new leadership style, plays an important role in stimulating or enhancing subordinates' following motivation. In this process, subordinates' trust in leaders plays a partial transmission role (Wen Qiuxiang & Long Jing, 2020).

Liang Fu, Niu Chenchen, and Meng Xiangxiang (2020) conducted a questionnaire survey on 215 employees and used confirmatory factor analysis and hierarchical regression analysis techniques to investigate, in an empirical manner, how authentic leadership affects workers' pro-organizational unethical actions in a Chinese setting. The research demonstrates that there is an inverse U-shaped association between pro-organizational immoral behaviors of employees and authentic leadership, with organizational identity acting as a mediating factor in this relationship. The exchange of leaders and members acts as a moderator between employees' pro-organizational immoral activities and authentic leadership (Liang Fu, Niu Chenchen, & Meng Xiangxiang, 2020). Yu Chuanpeng, Li Zhanfeng, and Ye Baosheng (2023) analyzed questionnaires from 522 on-the-job employees and found that authentic leadership is significantly negatively correlated with employees' avoidance, hiding, and reasonable hiding behaviors. Organizations can improve leadership's



authenticity level by inhibiting employee knowledge hiding. For example, leaders are encouraged to show quality of being sincere to others in their daily work, respect employees' personal opinions, encourage employees' self-expression, and be consistent in their interactions with subordinates (Yu Chuanpeng et al., 2023). Based on social information processing theory, Zhang Lifeng (2023) and others explored the impact of authentic leadership on employee job satisfaction. Through empirical analysis of 262 employee data, they concluded that authentic leadership has a positive effect on employee job satisfaction (Zhang Lifeng, Xia Zhengru & Lu Yongping, 2023).

## Conclusion

As a new type of leadership style, authentic leadership has begun to bear fruit in both theoretical construction and empirical verification, which has greatly enriched the theoretical system of leadership research. However, looking at the existing research, it is not difficult for us to determine that it is found that there are still some shortcomings in the research on authentic leadership, and its concepts, measurements, and variables need to be further studied and improved in the future.

First of all, conceptually, the current definition of authentic leadership has two perspectives: trait/behavioral perspective and process perspective. There are currently different opinions, and any definition from either perspective may not be comprehensive. We need to further clarify it in the future. This question is whether it is possible to integrate the two perspectives and put forward the concept of authentic leadership more comprehensively.

Secondly, in terms of measurement, the validity of the tool and its cross-cultural applicability is not limited to employee evaluation of leadership coats. Various methods such as leader self-evaluation, peer or superior evaluation of subordinates, etc. can be used as a reference. In addition, corresponding scales are developed based on sample designs in different environments and repeatedly verified. In addition, judging from the existing literature, although researchers have conducted investigations in a variety of cultural situations, most of them are based on Western backgrounds. Due to cultural differences, the research conclusions on authentic leadership derived from the West are not consistent. It must be suitable for Eastern culture, and Chinese culture has its own uniqueness. Therefore, it is particularly important to strengthen cross-cultural localization research on authentic leadership in the Chinese context.

Finally, in terms of variables, first of all, regarding the antecedent variables and mechanism of authentic leadership, although a large number of studies have analyzed its root causes, currently only the hypothesis that positive psychological capital is an antecedent variable of authentic leadership has been verified. Related theories and empirical studies are still less researched. Secondly, regarding the outcome variables and impact of authentic leadership, it can be seen from the existing literature that there are more studies that verify the impact of authentic leadership at the individual level of analysis, fewer studies on groups and organizations, and the sampling is mostly concentrated in enterprises, while ignoring such organizational levels as universities. In addition, due to the influence of positive organizational behavior, the current research on authentic leadership generally focuses on positive effects. In the future, we must not only strengthen the research and summary of authentic leadership at different levels but also focus more on the mechanism and impact of authentic leadership, so as to better lay the foundation for further research on authentic leadership.

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