

## Exploring Authentic Leadership in Relation to Work Engagement in Public and Private Sector Universities

Said Saeed<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Dr. Riasat Ali<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>PhD Research Scholar, Department of Education, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan

<sup>2</sup>Department of Education, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan

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### ABSTRACT

The study aims at to explore the authentic leadership attributes (ALA) and its impact on work engagement. The objectives of the study were to investigate ALA of leaders and measure relationship between ALA and work engagement at university level. The population of the study was 6975. The sample of the study was 967. The mixed method approach was used to collect information from sample through modified form of ALQ developed by Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson (2008) and interviews. Analysis was done with percentage, Mean, STD, independent sample t-test, Pearson's rank correlation and thematic analysis. It was found that r value (.426) which was significant at .000 showed significant positive and average level correlations between ALA and work engagement at university level. It is suggested that followers may be involved in positive activities and be provided more leadership opportunities for the achievement of organizational goal and personal development.

**KEYWORDS:** leadership; authentic leadership attributes; work engagement

### INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The world is rapidly changing and transforming. Quickly changing educational contexts demand adroit leadership retorts. Everything needs refinement and takes a new shape. Similarly, leadership requires fine-tuning and is taking the form of authentic leadership. Authentic leadership is self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing and ethical perspective [29], knowledge capital, two way learning and integrity [7], true self [26] and idealized influence [28] is more follower-centered in comparison to most of the recognized leadership models that come into view more leader- centered [21]. The organizations of present time require Authentic leaders to build up authentic leadership (ALs) in their followers for constructive and optimistic decision-making behaviors which comes to an end in encouraging administrative outcomes such as follower leader interactions, follower authentic leadership development, and work engagement. Authentic leader is always cognizant of his natural abilities, recognizes his/her shortcomings and works hard to overcome loopholes [15]. He /she establishes direct relationship with followers for bringing improvement in organizational structure and its values.

### Research problem

The new millennium in Pakistan, is shocking and dismal for many people due to the unethical practices in all walks of life. The society is feeling thirst for a new brand of leaders who epitomize an understanding and cognizance of aim and show loyalty to beliefs and ethics. [12] suggested that people require leaders who are the symbols of principles and straightforwardness; and who are the nice agents of the heritage left by their forerunners. The main purpose of this article is to investigate the attributes of authentic leadership and its relationship with work engagement at university level. The previous research works have shown that authenticity and authentic leadership have positive influences on the performance of the human resources.

### Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were;

- 1) To investigate authentic leadership attributes of educational leaders at university level
- 2) To investigate work engagement at university level

<sup>1</sup> Note: This paper is based on the PhD dissertation of the scholar.

- 3) To measure relationship between authentic leadership attributes and work engagement in public and private sector universities

### Research questions

1. What are authentic leadership attributes of educational leaders at university level?
2. What is the existing status of work engagement as organizational development at university level?
3. Is there a relationship between authentic leadership attributes and work engagement in public and private sector universities?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Authentic Leadership (AL) appeared as a fruit of the previous leadership notions. It has universality. As organizations develop, so problems created. The best weapon to handle such type of situation in academic institutions is AL [11]. Leaders in academic circles are forefront workforce [27], properly grooming the next generation to face lurking challenges and intricacies of the time.

The present circumstances are more intricate. Therefore, AL is very necessary in academic organizations to handle such type of complicated problems [6]. The different empirical studies showed the variables of AL i.e. self-awareness (SA), relational transparency (RT), ethical perspective (EP), balance processing information- BPI [29], positive psychological capital, self-truth and authenticity [23]); as well as diverse components of organizational development, org. effectiveness, communication, behavior, psychological capital, pedagogical development, job satisfaction, classroom management, professional development trainings, follower leader interaction, follower AL development and work engagement.

AL is a gathering of self-information, understanding and thoughtfulness to the positioning of other people and a methodological cleverness that proceeds to the interaction of leadership actions [5]. AL produces significant transformation in the life of individuals [19]

AL! Thy name is self-identity, self-knowing, followers-knowing, world-knowing and God-knowing. AL is showing truth and feeling fair in his/her dealing with others [12]. AL is all-encompassing and inclusive of both transformational and transactional leadership styles [2].

The authentic leaders have distinguishing qualities of influencing the followers in a way as to enhance the feeling of assurance, devotion, enthusiasm, keenness, perseverance, allegiance, staunchness and inspiring to progress the responsibilities accomplished in the organization perpetually [1]. Ethics and morality of the leader is the crucial component of AL theory [16].

[18] posit that ALs is the product of the aftermath of industrialized management theory, signifying, it is cooperative, interpersonal, and not concentrated on specific spearhead. Answers to organizational challenges and opportunities have been provided by authentic practices and AL theory, for institutional transformation, by admitting how their different and crisscrossing social individualities influence them. Narrative, reflection and other modes focus leaders to examine the roots of their morals, and activities; and to encourage followers [8].

Since the inception of sophisticated technology, fiscal pressures, transnational competition, organizational initiatives, and an ever-growing financial and ethical climate; leaders in both private and public sector universities are meeting a high degree of difficulty in the environment [15]. There is struggle for skills across organizations; upholding worker engagement is challenging; leaders can no longer dependent on their authority to attain their targets [10]. Their workforce also expect to be esteemed, appreciated and supported and to see their leaders as models of truth. At the same time, leaders have to make hard decisions which sometimes go against the outlooks and principles of their followers [25]. The atmosphere in organizations is progressively multifaceted and challenging, and some leaders are not succeeding to cope within it, as apparent by the number of organizations that continue to experience failings. Many leaders are struggling to develop organizations that can operate successfully within multifarious settings; while ensuring that their followers behave ethically [23]. Leaders are as being 'climate engineers'; what they convey through their character, principles, philosophies, fondness, and manners, leaves an influence on those they lead [18].

Authentic Leaders upkeep the welfare of their followers, making availability of advising, shelter, positive response and information that they would otherwise have deficiency [17].

## METHODOLOGY

The study was mixed method research in nature. It is the blend of numerical and non-numerical methodologies in one study [9]. Concurrent triangulation design (Convergent Parallel design) was used.

The population was all VCs/ Deans, HEC approved supervisors, heads of departments (HODs), and teaching faculty of public and private sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa leading and teaching at different levels. HEC website was visited for the identification of the available population in twenty nine (29) public and private sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Twenty nine (29) vice chancellors / (58) Deans, four hundred and thirty two (432) HODs, seven hundred and seventy two (772) HEC approved supervisors; and five thousand, seven hundred and forty two (5742) assistant professors and lecturers comprised the population of the study.

Simple random and purposive sampling techniques were adopted for selection of leaders and teachers from 13 universities. The human resources sample comprised twelve (12 with 40%) vice chancellors/ Deans, one hundred and ninety five (195 with 45%) HODs, three hundred and fifty (350 with 45%) HEC supervisors and four hundred and ten (410 with 8%) assistant professors and lecturers; total sample of the study was nine hundred and fifty seven (967) from nine (9) public and four (04) private sector universities (45%) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Questionnaires and in-depth interview were used as research instruments to collect data from the concerned participants and informants.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Mean was applied to analyse the collected data.

The Mean Score= 1.00 --- 1.50 = Strongly Disagree

The Mean Score=1.51---2.50 = Disagree

The Mean Score= 2.51--- 3.50= Undecided

The Mean Score= 3.51--- 4.50= Agree

The Mean Score= 4.51--- 5.00= Strongly Agree

### R.Q.1:- What are authentic leadership attributes of educational leaders at university level?

**Table 4.1 Self-Awareness among university leaders**

S. No	Statements	M	Std
1	I can list my three greatest weak points.	4.54	.669
2	I can list my three greatest strong points.	4.67	.649
3	I seek feedback as a way of understanding who I really am as a person.	4.43	.666
4	I accept the feelings I have about myself.	4.69	.465
5	I consider myself answerable to all.	4.54	.810
6	I remain I am aware of my own loopholes and openly discuss with followers.	4.53	.667
	Overall	4.57	0.65

Table 4.1 shows that respondents are “strongly agreed” with the five statements of self-awareness construct having mean scores 4.54, 4.67, 4.69, 4.54 and 4.53 which come in the (Range from 4.51 to 5.00) among leaders. Statements “*I seek feedback as a way of understanding who I really am as a person*” has the mean scores “4.43” which comes in the range (3.51 – 4.50) indicates that respondents are agreed. The overall mean score 4.57 comes in the range (4.51 - 5.00) shows that all the respondents are strongly agreed with the construct of self-awareness of authentic leadership. The mean scores further show that the most of the leaders at university level are self-aware and have the attribute of self-awareness, which is the prime component of authentic leadership.

However, all the STD scores reflect that all the respondents have convergence in their opinions about the statements of self-awareness construct.

**Table 4.2 Relational Transparency among university leaders**

S. No	Statements	M	Std
1	I openly share my feelings with others.	4.81	.419
2	I let others know who I truly am as a person.	4.73	.440
3	I rarely present a "false" front to others.	3.54	.720
4	I confess to others for my mistakes.	4.53	.681
5	I almost always consult with my team before decision-making.	4.83	.388
6	I keep positive relations with followers.	4.26	.440
	Overall	4.45	.514

Table 4.2 indicates that respondents are “strongly agreed” (Range from 4.53 to 4.83) with the four statements. Statements “*I rarely present a "false" front to others.*” and “*I keep positive relations with followers.*” have the mean scores “3.54” and “4.26” which demonstrate that the respondents are agreed with two statements. The overall mean score 4.45 follows the range (3.51 - 4.50) shows that all the respondents are agreed with all the statements. The mean scores further show that the leaders at

university level have transparency in their relationship with followers and have the attribute of relational transparency, which is the key component of authentic leadership. However, most of the STD scores reflect that all the respondents are unanimous on their opinions about the statements.

**Table 4.3 Balance Processing of Information among university leaders and followers**

S. No	Statements	M	Std
1	I seek others' opinions before making up my own mind.	4.56	.685
2	I listen closely to the ideas of those who disagree with me.	4.74	.539
3	I do not emphasize my own point of view at the expense of others.	4.55	.677
4	I listen carefully to the ideas of others before making decisions.	3.51	.751
5	My followers feel I am genuinely interested in serving them.	3.71	.847
6	I share my information with followers.	4.15	.575
	Overall	4.20	.679

Table 4.3 point to that respondents are “strongly agreed” (Range from 4.55 to 4.74) as come in range of strongly agreed (4.51 to 5.00) with the three statements and “agreed” (Ranged from 3.51 to 4.15) as come in the range (3.50 to 4.50). The overall mean score 4.20 move toward the range (3.51 - 4.50) shows that all the respondents were agreed with all the statements. The mean scores further show that the leaders at university level have the balance processing of information within the outskirts of the university and have the quality of balance processing of information, which is an important component of authentic leadership.

However, the standard deviation scores reflect that all the respondents are undivided in their opinions about the statements of balance processing.

**Table 4.4 Ethical perspective among university leaders**

S. No	Statements	M	Std
1	My actions reflect my core values.	4.66	.668
2	I do not allow group pressure to control me.	4.67	.660
3	Other people know where I stand on controversial issues.	4.70	.638
4	My moral standards guide me what I see to do as a leader.	4.70	.638
5	I deal ethically with my followers.	4.59	.662
6	I look forward to creating genuine relationship through my association at work.	4.59	.662
	Overall	4.65	0.65

Table 4.4 describes that respondents are “strongly agreed” (Range from 4.59 to 4.70) with the all six statements. The overall mean score 4.65 follows the range (4.51 - 5.00) displays that all the respondents are strongly agreed with all the statements. The mean scores further show that the leaders at university level are ethically strong and have the attribute of ethical perspective, which is a major component of authentic leadership.

However, most of the standard deviation scores reflect that all the respondents are exclusive in their opinions about the statements ethical perspective.

**Table 4.5 Positive psychological capital among university leaders**

S. No	Statements	M	Std
1	I am optimistic in my performance as role model for my followers.	4.59	.662
2	I share common vision with my associates.	4.49	.809
3	I encourage my co-workers when facing difficulties.	4.49	.809
4	I try to become a model of authentic leadership attributes.	4.48	.809
5	The actions I take are always linked with my values.	4.49	.809
6	I am resilient and won't be unhappy for long.	4.68	.646
	Overall	4.53	0.75

Table 4.5 refers to that respondents are “agreed” (Range from 4.48 to 4.49) with the four statements. Statements “I am optimistic in my performance as role model for my followers.” and “I am resilient and won't be unhappy for long” having the mean scores “4.59” and “4.68” which express that the respondents are strongly agreed with these two statements. The overall mean score 4.53 emanates in the range (4.51 - 5.00) shows that all the respondents are strongly agreed with all the statements. The mean scores further show that the leaders at university level are hopeful, self-efficacious, resilient and optimistic; and have the attribute of positive psychological capital, which is a most important component of authentic leadership.

However, the standard deviation scores reflect that all the respondents have the similar opinions about the statements of positive psychological capital.

**Table 4.6:- Work engagement among university teachers**

S. No	Statements	M	Std
1	I get motivation from my AL to accomplish my set goals	4.13	0.72
	AL enhances my job performance	4.16	0.73
3	At work, I keep it up, even when things do not go well	4.37	0.66
4	My job inspires me	4.55	0.67
5	I am immersed (get involved deeply) in my work	3.94	0.87
6	AL encourages my persistence even in face of obstacles	4.24	0.62
	Overall	4.23	0.71

Table 4.6 mentions that respondents are “agreed” (Range from 3.94 to 4.37) with five the statements as come in the range (3.51 to 4.50). Statements “My job inspires me” having the mean scores “4.55” which takes place in the range (4.50- 5.00) expresses that the respondents were strongly agreed. The overall mean score 4.23 emanates in the range (3.51 - 4.50) illustrates that all the respondents were agreed with all the statements of work engagement. The mean scores further show that the leaders at university level have the abilities to engage followers in the best of their activities for the development of the organization and well-being of the human resources and believe that work engagement is the best construct for the organizational development and a necessary element for the professional development of the teachers and other followers.

However, the standard deviation scores reflect that all the respondents have the alike opinions about the statements of work engagement.

**Table 4.7 Pearson Product Moment Correlations between self-awareness and work engagement**

Correlations			
		SA	WE
Self-awareness	Pearson Correlation	-	.388**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N		967
Work engagement	Pearson Correlation		-.912**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N		967

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The above table illustrates that the self-awareness which is the first construct of authentic leadership has the average correlation for work engagement (r value .388) which is significant at .000

**Table 4.8 Pearson Product Moment Correlations between relational transparency and the components of organizational development**

Correlations			
		RT	WE
Relational Transparency	Pearson Correlation	-	.115**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N		967
Work Engagement	Pearson Correlation		-.912**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N		967

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The above table illustrates that the relational transparency which is the most important construct of authentic leadership has the highest correlation for work engagement (r value .115) which is significant at .000.

**Table 4.9 Pearson Product Moment Correlations between balance processing and the components of organizational development**

Correlations			
		BP	WE
Balance processing	Pearson Correlation	-	.129**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N		967
Work engagement	Pearson Correlation		-.912**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N		967

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The above table illustrates that the balance processing which is the third construct of authentic leadership has the highest correlation for work engagement (r value .129) which is significant at .000

**Table 4.10 Pearson Product Moment Correlations between ethical perspective and the components of organizational development**

		Correlations	
		EP	WE
Ethical Perspective	Pearson Correlation	-	.177**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N		967
Work engagement	Pearson Correlation		-.912**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N		967

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The above table illustrates that the ethical perspective which is the fourth construct of authentic leadership has the highest correlation for work engagement (r value .177) which is significant at .000

**Table 4.11 Pearson Product Moment Correlations between positive psychological capital and work engagement**

		Correlations	
		PPC	WE
Positive Psychological Capital	Pearson Correlation	-	.255**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N		967
Work Engagement	Pearson Correlation		-.912**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N		967

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The above table illustrates that the ethical perspective which is the construct of authentic leadership has the highest correlation for work engagement (r value .255) which is significant at .000

**Table 4.12 Pearson Product Moment Correlations between authentic leadership attributes and work engagement**

		Correlations	
		Authentic leadership attributes	Work engagement
Authentic leadership Attributes	Pearson Correlation	-	.426**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N		967
Work engagement	Pearson Correlation		-
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	967	967

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Medium positive correlation between the two variables,  $r = .426$ ,  $n = 967$ ,  $P < .000$ , not as much of .05 indicating the statistical significance of the results. Cohen (1988) suggests the following guidelines: small correlation ( $r=.10$  to  $.29$ ) medium correlation ( $r=.30$  to  $.49$ ) large correlation ( $r=.50$  to  $1.0$ ) (pp.79-81). In the light of this suggestion, there is medium correlation ( $r=.426$ ) between authentic leadership attributes and work engagement.

**Table 4.13 Sector-wise correlation between authentic leadership attributes and work engagement in public and private sectors**

		Correlations				
	Type of organization (binned)	N	Mean	Std deviation	r value	Sig. level
Authentic leadership attributes	Public	483	140.8170	7.52612	.355	.000
Work engagement						
Authentic leadership attributes	Private	484	134.0424	14.96052	.519	.000
Work engagement						

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The above table illustrates the mean, STD deviation, Pearson correlations and significance of the authentic leadership attributes and organizational development (teacher professional development) from sector-wise perspective. The mean score of the authentic leadership attributes and teacher professional development in public and private sector universities was 140.8170 and 134.0424 with standard deviation 7.52612 and 14.96052. The  $r$  value between authentic leadership attributes and teacher professional development in public sector universities is ( $r = .355$ ) which shows medium relationship which is highly significant as shown by the significant level (.000). The  $r$  value between authentic leadership attributes and teacher professional development in private sector universities is ( $r = .519$ ) which is indicative of large correlations as suggested by Cohen (1988) that small correlation ranges from (.10 to .29) medium correlation (.30 to .49) and large correlation (.50 to 1.0) which is highly significant as shown by the significant level (.000). These values show that relationship between authentic leadership attributes and teacher professional development in private sector universities is higher than public sector universities.

Major findings of the study were;

1. There were five statements in self-awareness construct of authentic leadership. The overall mean score (4.57) showed that majority of university leaders were aware and strongly agreed on this construct of authentic leadership. (table 4.1)
2. There were six statements on relational transparency where the overall mean score was (4.45) which reflected that majority of university leaders were aware and transparent in relations; and agreed that relational transparency was an important construct of authentic leadership. (table 4.2)
3. The overall mean score (4.20) of authentic leaders and followers interactions showed that majority of the respondents were aware and agreed that balance processing of information was an important construct of authentic leadership. (table 4.3)
4. Majority of the respondents were aware and strongly agreed that ethical perspective of authentic leadership was an important construct as shown by the cumulative mean score (4.65) of all six statements on the construct. (table 4.4)
5. The overall mean score (4.53) showed that majority of university leaders were strongly agreed that positive psychological capital was an important component of authentic leadership. (table 4.5)
6. The overall mean score (4.23) illustrates that all the respondents were agreed with all the statements of work engagement. The mean scores further show that the leaders at university level have the abilities to engage followers in the best of their activities for the development of the organization and well-being of the human resources and believe that work engagement is the best construct for the organizational development.
7. The  $r$  values (.388, .115, .129, .177 and .255) which were significant at .000 showed significant positive correlation with work engagement (table 4.7, 4.8, 4.9, 4.10 & 4.11)
8. The  $r$  value (.426) which was significant at .000 showed significant positive and average level correlations between authentic leadership and work engagement at university level. (table 4.12)
9. The  $r$  value (.355) which was significant at .000 showed a significant positive and average level correlation in public sector universities between authentic leadership and work engagement at university level. (table 4.13)
10. The  $r$  value (.519) which was significant at .000 showed a significant positive and average level correlation in private sector universities between authentic leadership and organizational development at university level. (table 4.13)
11. Most of the qualitative data support the quantitative data as all the major themes of the qualitative data such as self-awareness, relational transparency, ethical perspectives, positive psychological capital, and balance processing of information of authentic leadership supported the quantitative authentic leadership constructs taken from literature of empirical studies. Similarly, major themes emerged from qualitative data on work engagement supported the quantitative constructs taken from research studies.

The present study adds to the authentic leadership literature by documenting empirical support of relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement. All hypothesized relations were supported by the data, as expected authentic leadership attributes self-awareness, relational transparency, ethical perspective and balance processing information [29] were significantly positively related to work engagement [3]; [23]. This finding was consistent with [29], who found self-awareness, relational transparency, ethical perspective and balance processing of information as the constructs of authentic leadership.

It was found that positive psychological capital attribute of authentic leadership to be significantly positively related to work engagement. This finding is in line with previous research of [24].

Leaders who are professed to be more moral and make righteous decisions will be professed as caring more about their followers [7]. Furthermore, AL has got a strong relation to enhanced task performance [20] and performance at both the group and organizational levels [14], in part, because persons who are authentic are able to efficiently use balanced processing of information and establish consistency between their sayings and actions [29]. [11] present a “conceptual framework for authentic leader and follower development” in which the development of followership is the result of Authentic Leadership. *“a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development”* [24], p. 62).

### Recommendations

In the light of findings of the study following recommendations were made;

Authentic Leadership must be the theoretical lens through which all educational leadership development is perceived and developed. Since [6] defines that Authentic Leadership *“is a metaphor for professionally effective, ethically sound, and consciously reflective practices in educational administration”*, therefore, it is time for universities to encourage, motivate, progress and develop authentic leaders. Organizations in my country desires educational leaders who, while at the forward-facing line of defense is grooming and educating a new generation through authentic leadership as it is considered the architect of morality, are not guaranteed by position and prestige, but who lead by the attributes of Authentic Leadership. In reality, what this researcher actually learned from the study is that followers wish for authentic leadership in their universities.

Followers may be involved in positive activities for the achievement of organizational goal. It is suggested that more leadership opportunities be provided for workers, with the intention also to provide greater incentives to the professional.

It may be well to conduct research study on the authentic leadership at primary level, secondary level and college level both at private and public sectors as these areas are in great need of authentic leadership because these sectors suffered a lot due to unethical attitude of the leaders.

It is concluded from the interviews that theoretically leaders are very strong but in practice they are lagging behind. One interviewee remarked *“(HAM GUFTAAR K HERO HAN LAKEN KIRDAAR K ZERO). It means that speech-wise we are heroes but character-wise we are zeroes.”* Therefore it is recommended that all leaders and teachers must work in disciplined ranks to repel evil. They must choose between Good and evil, with their consequences in the coming life. If they did well, they did well for themselves; if they did evil, they did it against themselves.

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