

ANALYZING THE MEDIATING ROLE OF PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT BETWEEN AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY

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Abstract

Leadership is an essential part of organizational success. Without leadership support survival of organizations are hard to sustain. The employees' perception regarding organization is developed through leaders' behavior and support. Such perception and support lead to novel ideas and products. The focus of this study was on the relationship between authentic leadership and employees' creativity. It is believed that POS represents an individual's perception of his/her organization. Consequently, individuals with higher POS enhance the importance of authentic leadership and improve their creativity. So, this study explored the mediating role of POS between leadership style and creativity. To test the study hypotheses, primary data (N=310) employees working in construction sector located in Islamabad region were gathered. The results confirmed the direct relationship between authentic leadership and creativity. Further, the indirect effect through perceived organizational support was also confirmed. Theoretical and practical contributions have been discussed and recommendations have been suggested.

INTRODUCTION

Creativity is the result of individuals' positive behavior and is a collective effort of organizational support and employees (Yoon et al., 2020). Collaboration among organizational members is a key to developing creativity (Hargadon and Bechky, 2006). Collaborative creativity focuses on combining personal and contextual aspects to identify creativity (Amabile and Pillemer, 2012; Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). For example, sharing knowledge or discussing fresh ideas leads to learning and creativity (Islam et al., 2022). Studies have underlined the significance of leadership in such behavior sharing (Chaudhary et al., 2023; Islam et al., 2021). Authentic leadership is related to self-awareness and considers the employees'

development and sense of ownership (Cerne et al., 2013) such ownership motivates employees to discuss novel ideas and sharing of knowledge (Fontana and Musa, 2017). The subordinates may feel empowered and accomplished due to their leader's professional contributions, motivating them to engage in positive social behavior (Wang et al., 2019). Such behavior is based on organizational or social perceived support (Cook et al., 2013) and enhances employees' creativity (Alshwayat et al. 2021). Consequently, research should find an approach to enhance creativity in organizations, taking into account both employees and environmental aspects to achieve creative outcomes.

Authentic leadership is characterized by positive self-awareness and self-regulation (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Authentic leaders demonstrate accountability, and a moral viewpoint, and align their actions with social norms (Ribeiro et al., 2020). Self-reflection is a dynamic process and an individual's reaction to environmental stimuli (Bandura, 1986). It is unclear how authentic leaders emerge daily and how their activities impact employee creativity at the individual level (Fladerer and Braun, 2020). Leaders' relationships may be similar to the natural process (McCormick et al., 2020) and may vary. Consequently, it is vital to identify the antecedents of employees' creativity (Iqbal et al., 2022). Leadership is a key factor in workers' creativity, yet it has received little attention (Nguyen et al., 2023). Authentic leadership enhances employee engagement by providing necessary information, job tasks, and required resources. Augmented work and information make work more interesting, favorably impacting cognitive processes and creative behavior (Kafeel et al., 2024). Authentic leaders nurture a healthy organizational culture that encourages creativity among followers. Authentic leaders develop self-determination, drive, self-esteem, and creativity in their followers (Ilies et al., (2005). Furthermore, based on the future directions of Kafeel et al., (2024), this study investigates the relationship between authentic leadership and employees' creativity.

There is a need to study the mechanism through which leaders influence employees' behavior i.e. creativity (Haque et al. 2021). Research should find an approach to spreading creativity in organizations, considering both employees' and organizational/environmental (POS) aspects to achieve creative outcomes (Yoon et al., 2020). Higher POS employees were shown to be more trustworthy than lower POS employees, and this trust was linked to greater harmful behavior (Neves & Eisenberger 2014). Also, previous studies called for testing the mediating role of POS (Wang et al., 2024; Islam and Asad, 2024). Thus, it is anticipated that authentic leadership influences POS which further enhances employees' creativity.

The construction industry, despite of the advanced technology has been lost productivity and has been reported that construction managers/supervisors are the prime contributor to the required performance,

for example, the supervisor's poor planning and meager ability to schedule (Broughton et al., 2016). Thus, the construction industry has been suffered from leadership crisis. (Yousif et al., 2015). Because the leaders' lacked the necessary leadership style to guide and achieve the desired outcomes, this leadership crisis hindered the industry's growth (Ismail, and Fathi, 2018). In the same vein, it has been suggested that a specific leadership style is not the best (Giritli and Oraz, 2004), yet, is about the authenticity (Toor and Ofori, 2008).

Specifically in the construction industry, the leaders normally focus on the routine tasks and sometimes ignore the long term objectives and are inclined toward ends than means (Toor and Ofori, 2008). The new challenges for example, complexity, environmental issues and regulations, safety measures and other legal issues initiates the demand for authentic leadership. In order to tackle the typical construction supervisors, who functions on the basis of power, authority, and task orientation, authentic leaders will bring the requisite talents to the industry. (Broughton et al., 2016). The expected benefits of the authentic leadership style in construction industry are vary, but the sharing and retaining of knowledge, ethical behavior and overall organizational sustainability are the crucial for the industry (Lloyd-Walker and Walker, 2011). It is important for followers to imitate the traits of authentic leaders as they help create positive organizational cultures.

Underpinning Theory

Social cognitive theory (SCT) focuses on how human objectives, cognitions, and environmental variables interact to influence motivated behavior (Bandura, 1991). According to SCT, cognitive processing helps humans cope with external inputs and explain their behavior. It emphasizes the role of individuals in self-regulatory processes e.g. Individuals' initiatives (Bandura, 1986), this involves intentionality, foresight, self-reactivity, and self-reflectivity. Furthermore, SCT emphasizes the significance of self-reflection (Damen and Van Dam, 2016). Self-reflection, as a within-person activity, is an essential component of self-regulation (Bandura and Wessels, 1997), and leads individuals to repeated thinking (Lord et al., 2010). According to SCT, employees can

impact their behavior by paying attention to their daily tasks and positive behavior. Such workers acknowledge and participate in their tasks, which they choose to undertake autonomously because they experience a sense of validation and enjoyment (Bayraktar & Jiménez, 2022). In a nutshell, this study suggests that authentic leadership influences employee cognitions, and their perception towards organizational support including contemplation and rumination, influencing performance outcomes like employees' creativity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relationship between Authentic Leadership and Employees' Creativity

The leadership and employees' creativity has gained the attention of the Western world and the emerging stages in Eastern countries (Alzghoul et al., 2018). Authentic leadership emphasizes on positive outcomes (Jensen and Luthans, 2006). Authentic leadership balances transparency, promotes trust, and provides emotional safety (Avolio et al., 2004). Subordinates' perceptions of the leader's autonomy and self-assurance may result in more innovative activities (Walumbwa et al., 2011). Adopting self-awareness mechanisms, leaders identify and analyze their mental state through contemplation, which enhances self-confidence. It is subsequently transferred into the employees' thoughts (Cerne et al., 2013). Authentic Leadership fosters an optimistic, supportive, fair, and transparent environment, leading to improved performance and innovation (Rego et al., 2014) and positive emotions support creative thinking (Avolio et al., 2004) which is dependent on trial and error technique. Through such techniques, employees try novel ideas even when the possibility of failure exists.

Authentic leadership is beneficial to accomplish desired and long-term consequences related to novel ideas and creative performance (George and Zhou, 2007). Studies have found that authentic leadership encourages creativity. This leads to more creative attitudes and behaviors, leading to improved performance (Alshammari et al., 2015). Leadership has a vital impact on creative behavior (Tierney, 2008). Specifically, authentic leadership has a direct relationship with employees' creativity and further the relationship between employees and supervisors

must be balanced and transparent (Semedo et al., 2016). Authentic leadership enhances creativity and helps employees adapt to new obstacles in the workplace (Semedo et al. 2017). Authentic leadership assures a positive relationship between supervisor and workers, which results in desired behavior and response the employees' creativity increases (Rego et al., 2012; Walumbwa et al., 2011). H1: Authentic leadership has a significant relationship with employees' creativity.

Perceived Organizational Support and Employees' Creativity

According to social exchange theory, Employees who obtain socio-emotional advantages from their organization are more inclined to be motivated and compelled to repay the favor through good attitudes and behaviors (Maden, 2015). As a social and emotional support offered by the organization (Wong et al., 2012), perceived organizational support is linked with favorable attitudes and behaviors, including enhanced creativity. Studies have confirmed that when employees evaluate their organizations as supportive are more prone to be creative (Yu and Frenkel, 2013). Employees experience trust and are confident when perceive their organization as supportive (Rich et al., 2010), enhancing their skills and cognitive abilities to suggest novel ideas as organizations tolerate their failure and do not punish them for trial and error (Edmondson, 1999), employees feel more secure psychologically which endorses creativity (Kahn, 1990). Ehen employees receive organizational support, they exhibit positive behavior (Eisenberger et al., 2001), which, as a result, encourages creative behavior (Judge and Ilies, 2004). Such employees interact and discuss new ideas with colleagues and supervisor (Chiang et al., 2015). They feel more involved in their work (Rich et al., 2010), this motivates individuals to strongly promote creative ideas (Chang et al., 2013). Employees who observe their organizations as unsupportive are less likely to feel valued for their innovative contributions (Luksyte and Spitzmueller, 2016), and consequently put less effort into innovative behavior. Thus, H2: Perceived organizational support has a significant relationship with employees' creativity.

Mediating role of Perceived Organizational Support

According to the organizational support theory of Eisenberger et al., (1986), POS depends on members' inclination to identify with the organization's attributes. POS supports emotional well-being and reduces stress and exhaustion (Kurtessis et al., 2015). POS, a cultural system based on Csikszentmihalyi's (1988) systems, encourages members to participate to the organization's creative performance. POS supports innovation by integrating a cultural system and a socio-cultural environment. The cultural system facilitates social interaction and information sharing discussion and bringing new ideas (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Studies have found that socially supportive environments, including leadership and organizational resources, encourage individuals to acknowledge POS and prioritize creativity (Thao and Kang, 2018). POS is commonly used to assess a mediating role, high levels of perceived organizational support (POS) are associated with sentiments of trust, organizational affiliation, and long-term duties (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002), and low-level POS results in negative behavior (Kurtessis et al., 2015), for example, withdrawal behavior and strain (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002), ultimately influencing employees' creativity negatively. To originate and implementing creativity, social interactions, and supportive cultures facilitate the sharing of ideas and experiences, leading to the dissemination of useful knowledge (Li et al., 2009). Similarly, Individuals who feel supported by their organizations in their creativity are more likely to participate in creative practices, because POS encourages employees to cooperate in challenging working environments and supportive culture (Diliello et al., 2011). Employees evaluate organizational support for creativity based on their relationship with their supervisors at every level (Nantha, 2013) and such relationship enhances creativity (Asif, 2020; Han et al., 2017). Organizational support may enhance the relationship between authentic leadership and employees' creativity. The mediating role of management or organizational support has been established in different working settings and variables (Zhou and Hoever, 2014). In this regard, Chi (2019) urged that organizational support has substantial impact on

employees' behavior, whereby the low level support does not acknowledge employees' creativity.

It is believed that POS represents an individual's perception of his/her organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986) individuals with high POS enhance the importance of authentic leadership and improve their creativity. Similarly, when the perception of POS is higher among employees, they perceive additional rewards, praise, and recognition against their working behavior, leading to increased happiness (Eisenberger et al., 2020) this increases their motivation to engage in creative behavior. POS creates a sense of obligation and motivates employees to work hard to attain goals, leading to positive behavior e.g. creativity (Eisenberger et al., 2002). POS is a social resource, fosters creative activities and has a concern for employees' contribution (Yu, and Frenkel, 2013). By increasing employees' POS through resource provision and by the fact that workers who deploy resources to creative activities are certainly enhance their creative output (Zhang et al., 2016). Employees' self-perception of value may be impacted by the organization's assessment of their work performance, which is reflected in POS (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002), moreover, Employees are more likely to connect with the organization's goals and make an emotional commitment when they feel valued and have a significant role in it (Sluss et al., 2008).

POS encourages employees to learn and acquire skills to help the organization achieve its objectives. Such learning environment ultimately results in creativity and employees feel emotional stability and security. Similarly, authentic leadership also provides such psychological safety. Thus, individuals who possess POS perceive a lack of commitment from their organizations. Individuals with poor POS tend to accomplish tasks with low dynamism and learning. Additionally, it is assumed that to practice creativity authentic leadership and perceived organizational support is essential, for which a positive working environment and support is vital (Poku et al., 2022). Thus, POS will mediate the relationship between authentic leadership and creativity. Therefore, H3: Perceived organizational support mediates the relationship between authentic leadership and employees' creativity.

METHODOLOGY

Population and Sampling

The target population of this study was the employees working in organizations related to construction sector in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Primary data was collected from the employees. Based on the objectives of the study, purposive sampling technique was followed. The employees were large in number and it was not reasonable to approach all the organizations in the selected sector. Office cadre employees were targeted and labor cadre was exempted.

Instrumentation

The primary data was collected through adopted questionnaires. All the adopted questionnaires were well established. To assess the authentic leadership a 16 items scale was used which was developed by Walumbwa et al., (2008). To record the responses for the POS, a 10 items scale of Eisenberger et al., (2020) was utilized. Lastly, the Employees' creativity was measured with a 5 items scale, developed by Ganesan and Weitz (1996).

Data Collection Procedures

The organizations in the construction sector were selected on the bases of the convenience. Prior to visit these organizations, the permission regarding the visit and collection of primary data from the employees was obtained from the responsible authorities. The permission was granted as the responsible authorities were made clear regarding the purpose of the study and surety for the sensitivity and confidentiality of the obtained information.

Following purposive sampling technique, it was easy to approach the prospect employees on the specific time and exact location. Approaching the selected organizations, the employees were asked to provide primary data on the prescribed format. Similar to prior permission from responsible authorities, the employees were also assured with confidentiality and sensitivity, and that the information collected is only for research and would be discarded after the completion of the study.

A total of 430 questionnaires were handed over to the employees and was collected after due time period. Upon scrutinizing the 254 questionnaires were complete and were fit for analysis. Among the participants of the study, 72% of the employees were male and the rest 28% were female. A handsome number i.e. 51% of the employees were in the age group between 30-40 years. Considering the qualification 69% of the employees had 16 years of formal education.

RESULTS

The calculated values of correlation, Mean, SD and reliability have been provided in table 1. The values in parenthesis demonstrate reliabilities. The reliability value of the authentic leadership was 0.86, for POS 0.90 and for employees creativity 0.92 and all are above the threshold value of 0.70, confirming that the instrument was reliable. The coefficient value of the relationship between authentic leadership and POS was 0.57, for authentic leadership and creativity was 0.51 and lastly for POS and creativity 0.56. All the values were significant at 0.01. These values show support for hypotheses.

Table 1. Correlations, Mean, SD and Reliabilities

	AL	POS	EC	Mean	SD
AL	(0.86)			4.121	0.402
POS	0.57**	(0.90)		4.124	0.411
EC	0.51**	0.56**	(0.92)	4.139	0.419

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

Regression analysis has been presented in table 2. The results show the R² value between authentic leadership and creativity was 0.352 and the beta value was 0.501. Further, the t value was 15.61 and

was significant at 0.001. Thus, the results supported the study hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 assumed the significant association between POS and creativity. The results show the R² value between POS and creativity was 0.437 and the beta value was 0.545. Moreover, the t value was 17.97 and was above the threshold value and was

significant at 0.001. Therefore, the hypothesis 2 was supported.

Table 2. Regression Analysis

	Employee creativity			
	R ²	β	t	Sig
Authentic leadership	0.352	0.501	15.61	0.00
POS	0.437	0.545	17.97	0.00

The mediation effect was tested through Preacher and Hayes (2004) method and table 3 shows the mediation results. The sum of the direct and indirect effect was 0.6187 in which the direct effect was 0.3015 and indirect effect through POS was 0.3172. Both were significant at 0.01. Further, the lower and

upper confidence interval was in same direction and did not pass through zero. Therefore, it was supported that the POS mediates the relationship between authentic leadership and employees' creativity.

Table 3. Mediation effect

Direct effect of X on Y						
Effect	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	
0.3015	.0561	6.329	.0000	.1831	.3653	
Indirect effect of X on Y						
Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI			
POS 0.3172	.1293	.0411	.3621			

DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis predicted the significant relationship between authentic leadership and employee creativity, and was supported in this study. This is consistent with previous results (Cerne et al., 2013; Yamak and Eyupoglu, 2021) which confirmed that leadership style affect employees' creativity in desired direction. Authentic leaders encourage their employees to be creative by being self-aware and honest in their relationships. Authentic leadership style plays a vital role in motivating employees to be creative. Further, it has been demonstrated that authentic leaders inspire their followers by fostering a good mental state, which in turn fosters and enhances self-determination, which is closely linked to creativity (Rego et al. 2012). Authentic leadership motivates employees to bring new ideas, enhance their abilities in problem solving skills and take advantage of any opportunity beneficial for organization (Avolio et al., 2004).

Another hypothesis assumed the significant relationship between POS and employee creativity which was confirmed in this study. The same is consistent with prior

studies (Duan et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2017). Nevertheless, this relationship is debatable (Zhang et al., 2016) as few studies did not confirm the positive relationship between POS and employee creativity (Zaitouni & Ouakouak, 2018; Suifan et al. 2018). Shalley and Gilson (2004) observed that depending on an individual's personality and cognitive characteristics, encouraging leadership can have varying effects. Explaining such conflicting results need more studies in this regard. Providing experiencing low autonomy and negating the favorable environment by the management will lead to low creativity by employees (Suifan et al., 2018) and focusing on the support the employees would be involved in creative behavior (Su et al., 2020).

The mediation results showed the positive relationship between authentic and creativity. This explains that how authentic leadership affects POS which further enhances employees' creativity. Employees' interaction with their direct supervisors might be utilized for evaluating how their organization is supportive for innovation (Swarna

Nantha, 2013). Similarly, supportive leadership enhances creativity (Asif, 2020; Delic et al., 2017). Prior studies have demonstrated the relationship between supervisor and organizational support and employee behavior. Chi (2019) investigated the possible replacement impact of POS, whereby managers' assistance in fostering creativity is important when workers lack favorable situational traits. Prior studies have confirmed the supervisor and management support for employees' behavioral outcomes (Chai, 2019). Further, the POS for employee creativity have been found to be dependent on contextual factors (Sarooghi et al., 2015).

Theoretical Contribution

This study responds to the recommendation of Kafeel et al (2024) who suggested adding empirical results regarding leadership styles and manager-employees dyad data collection technique. Further, authentic leadership-performance relation is well established (Ayça, 2023; Liu et al., 2023), however; its relation with creativity needs more empirical results.

Another contribution of the study will be the introduction POS as a mediating variable recommended by Wang et al., (2024) and Islam and Asad (2024). It is assumed that POS may mediate the relationship between authentic leadership and creativity. Organizational support in the presence of authentic leadership will enhance creativity. Employees will recognize management support and endeavor to offer new ideas, resulting in enhanced organizational performance.

This study add to the literature in a way that first, it investigated whether authentic leadership might be an important predictor of employees' creativity. Different leadership styles impact positive behavior. For example, employees' engagement is lower in Pakistan (Bilal et al., 2020) due to leadership style (Bhatti et al., 2018). This study was carried out South Asia region mainly in Pakistan which validated the cultural context and enriched the literature in South Asia region context.

Practical Contribution

The leaders' behavior is driven by the general perception of subordinates. The leaders' actions are influenced by their overall impression of subordinate

s. To address such impression variations, managers need to aggressively communicate their aims to their followers with accuracy. A leader's behavior helps in developing subordinates' positive behavior which results in improved outcomes. In this regard, regular meetings and feedback effectively engage employees in creating novel ideas (Hannah et al., 2011). Similarly, leaders play an important role in motivating people to contribute new ideas and actively participate in turning those ideas into useful products.

Managers may use an attractive and appealing vision to retain staff intact as a motivator to urge employees to perform better on the job. Such motivation can be observed through organizational support. Furthermore, managers may encourage employees to be productive at work by creating challenging goals for them. Similarly, managers may be empathetic toward employees, especially during times of failure of any new idea.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study faced few limitations. As usual the first limitation was the primary data collection which was solely based on the employees of construction sector and may not provide homogeneous results for other sector or organizations. Thus, results in generalizability. Another limitation of the study was instrument. The data for authentic leadership was obtained and tested as a uni-dimension. Therefore, it is suggested for further studies to consider the dimensions of authentic leadership as well, which may provide interesting and heterogeneous results. Similarly, further study may focus on the other leadership styles like paternalistic leadership (Hussain et al., 2025) and other work outcomes for example organizational citizenship behavior (Jun et al., 2025).

The context of this study was Pakistan and culture orientation may provide different results. Thus, cultural orientation may be considered for further studies. Recently, the same have been recommended by researcher (Wen et al., 2023)._Similarly, further studies may focus on experimental design to understand the underlying mechanism on the link between authentic leadership and employees' creativity. Furthermore, other underlying mechanism

may be considered for further studies focusing on negative outcomes as well (Tufail et al., 2024).

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