

# Authentic Worship or Authentic Infection: A Dual-Route Model of Authentic Leadership

Chung-Jen Chien<sup>1</sup>, Bor-Shiuan Cheng<sup>2</sup>, Yu-Hui Lien<sup>3</sup>

College of Management, Yuan Ze University<sup>1</sup>

Department of Psychology, National Taiwan University<sup>2</sup>

Department of Athletic, National Taiwan University & Graduate Institute of  
Athletics and Coaching Science, National Taiwan Sport University<sup>2</sup>

Previous studies about authentic leadership focus their attention on the mechanism of leader identification which is the leader centric focus route. However, according the development approach of authentic leadership, there should have another influence route which is subordinate centric approach. This study collected 279 dyadic data and proposed the dual route of authentic leadership. First, we proposed the identification with leader is the mediator of leader centric route and identification with career is the mediator of subordinate centric route. Second, both of these two routes can enhance subordinate's in-role performance. The leader identification route enhanced leader directed OCB while the career identification route enhanced the proactive career behavior. Third, the time supervisor and subordinate work together moderate the career identification route. This route has positive influence effect when the time is longer, but no effect when the time is shorter. Finally, the theoretical and empirical implications and future direction will be discussed.

**Keywords:** *authentic leadership, career identification, leader identification, self-concept*

## SUMMARY

According to Walumbwa et al. (2008), authentic leadership is a type of leadership that draws on and promotes positive psychological capacities and a favorable ethical climate to foster greater self-awareness, internalized moral perspectives, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders. The result is positive self-development of subordinates. Previous studies suggest that authentic leadership has a critical role in subordinates' work performance and behavior (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008; Gardner, Cogliser, Davis, & Dickens, 2011). Due to its importance, more and more researchers are focusing on the mechanisms of authentic leadership.

Leader identification is one of the most critical mediators identified in previous studies. Leader identification, which is a leader-centric process, involves the identification of and positive attitude toward an

outside objective. However, the role of subordinate-centric processes in authentic leadership has been neglected. According to the developmental perspective of authentic leadership, an authentic leader provides a model that can guide subordinates to self-reflection and help them clarify their positions in a job (Gardner, Avolio, & Walumbwa, 2005). We propose that subordinate-centric mechanisms such as authentic infection are more important to successful authentic leadership than leader-centric mechanisms such as authentic worship. The original meaning of authentic leadership suggests a type of leadership that helps subordinates to develop self-concepts, job meaning, and positive psychological capital. Although some studies have empirically investigated the mechanisms of leader-centric processes (i.e., leader identification) (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004; Gardner et al., 2011), only one study has examined a subordinate-centric mechanism (i.e., basic need satisfaction) (Leroy, 2015). No studies have simultaneously investigated a dual

mediation mechanism, with a focus on the self-concept approach.

To fill in this theoretical gap, we propose a model that includes both leader- and subordinate-centric mechanisms. Such a model allows us to examine the strength of possible moderators on indirect paths. First, we propose that an authentic leader interacts with her subordinate in a highly authentic, optimistic, and moral way that can generate positive emotions and attitudes in the subordinates toward the leader. Therefore, authentic leadership has a positive relationship with a subordinate's leader identification. When a subordinate identifies with her leader, she follows the dyad norm of the leader and is more willing to follow the leader's instruction, which can enhance work performance. In addition, leader identification can transfer the leader-subordinate dyadic relationship between two individuals to the organization by increasing organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs). Thus, authentic leadership can enhance a subordinate's leader identification and improve the subordinate's performance and the OCBs directed toward supervisors. Second, a leader's authentic and self-reflective behavior models these processes and lead subordinates to explore their true selves at work. When people begin to reflect on the meaning of their work and to connect the job with their self-image, career identification occurs (Millward & Haslam, 2013). When people have high levels of career identification, they cite success at work as a personal credit and are more strongly motivated to work and to engage in career-helping behavior. Therefore, career identification enhances work performance and proactive career behavior. Thus, authentic leadership can enhance a subordinate's career identification, which in turn leads to improved performance and proactive career behavior.

Due to their different core mechanisms, we propose that the length of the leader-subordinate relationship can moderate the effect of authentic leadership on leader and career identification. According to Vecchio and Bullis (2001), when the length of the relationship is short, surface interactions have a more critical effect on subordinates' attitudes and behavior. However, as the interaction time increases, people have more of a chance to observe and become familiar with each other. A deep

interaction experience becomes more and more critical. Therefore, we propose that when the relationship is short, a subordinate can perceive a leader's authentic and positive behavior, and this can increase her performance and the OCBs directed at her supervisor via leader identification. However, career identification, which is associated with inner dialogs and self-reflection, takes more time. Therefore, authentic leadership can only increase performance and proactive career behavior via career identification when the relationship is long.

Accordingly, this study examines a dual mediated model for authentic leadership and outcomes (performance, OCBs directed at supervisors, and proactive career behavior) and considers the moderating effect of the length of the relationship.

- H1a: Authentic leadership increases subordinate performance through leader identification.
- H1b: Authentic leadership increases OCBs directed at supervisors through leader identification.
- H2a: Authentic leadership increases subordinate performance through career identification.
- H2b: Authentic leadership increases subordinates' proactive career behavior through leader identification.
- H3a: The length of the relationship moderates the indirect effect of authentic leadership on performance through leader identification, such that this indirect effect will be stronger when the relationship is short.
- H3b: The length of the relationship moderates the indirect effect of authentic leadership on OCBs directed at supervisors through leader identification, such that this indirect effect will be stronger when the relationship is short.
- H3a: The length of the relationship moderates the indirect effect of authentic leadership on performance through career identification, such that this indirect effect will be stronger when the relationship is long.
- H3b: The length of the relationship moderates the indirect effect of authentic leadership on proactive career behavior through leader identification, such that this indirect effect will be stronger when the relationship is longer.

## METHODS

Data for this study were obtained from a database of matched pairs of supervisors and their subordinates. From the 313 pairs of questionnaire that were distributed, we received 279 completed and usable matching pairs. The average age of the responding subordinates was 32. The majority of the sample was female (62%) and well educated (72% held bachelor's or higher degrees). The gender of the supervisors was balanced (52% was female). Their mean age was 43.

### Measures

Subordinates reported their data twice. The time interval between these two measurements was six months. Supervisors were asked to complete the questionnaires at the same time as the subordinates completed their questionnaires. Chinese versions of the scales were created using the back-translation approach suggested by Brislin (1980). All of the scales were measured using a 7-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from 1="strongly disagree" to 7="strongly agree."

### Authentic leadership

Sixteen items in four sub-dimensions were taken from the authentic leadership scale developed by Walumbwa et al. (2008). The internal consistency reliability values of these four sub-dimensions were .80, .80, .86, and .90, respectively.

### Leader identification

The six-item scale developed Kark, Shamir, and Chen (2003) was used to measure leader identification. The internal consistency reliability was .87.

### Career identification

We used Strauss, Griffin, and Parker's (2012) four-item scale to measure career identification. The internal consistency reliability was .84.

### Length of relationship

We asked both supervisors and subordinates to report

the length of their relationship and then calculated an average score to represent the length. We deleted the data if the difference between their answers was more than three months.

### Performance

The five-item scale developed Podsakoff and MacKenzie (1989) was used to measure performance. The internal consistency reliability was .88.

### OCBs directed at supervisors

Eight items from the OCBs directed at supervisors scale developed by Lee and Allen (2002) were used. The internal consistency reliability was .91.

### Proactive career behavior scale

Eleven items taken from four sub-dimensions of the proactive career behavior scale developed by Claes and Ruiz-Quintanilla (1998) were used. The internal consistency reliability measures for these four sub-dimensions were .77, .84, .82, and .77, respectively.

### Controls

The subordinate's demographic variables, including gender, age, education, and position level, were used as control variables.

### Statistical analysis

Our analysis had two major parts. In the first part, we considered measurement quality. We used confirmatory factor analysis to examine the distinctiveness of all of the measures. In the second part, we used the PROCESS Macro Model 4 and Model 8 to test our hypotheses.

## RESULTS

We created four parcels of items for authentic leadership and proactive career behavior, based on the original theoretical model. We also created three parcels of items for OCBs directed at supervisors, using

the random assignment procedure to raise the sample size to the parameter ratio. The results showed that the hypothesized six-factor model was a good fit for the data ( $\chi^2(284, N = 279) = 830.38, p < .01$ ; CFI = .91, NNFI = .90, SRMR = .06, RMSEA = .07).

Using the PROCESS method (Model 4) developed by Hayes (2012) to generate 5000 bootstrap estimates, we found that authentic leadership had indirect effects on performance via leader identification (95% CI = [.08, .24]) and on OCBs directed at supervisors via leader identification (95% CI = [.25, .47]), supporting H1a and H1b. We also found that authentic leadership had indirect effects on performance via career identification (95% CI = [.01, .07]) and on proactive career behavior via career identification (95% CI = [.06, .16]), supporting H2a and H2b.

Next, we used the PROCESS method (Model 14) to test whether the length of the relationship moderated these indirect effects. In the path from authentic leadership to leader identification to performance, the mediation was not significant (95% CI = [-.001, .000]). In the path from authentic leadership to leader identification to OCBs directed at supervisors, the mediation was also not significant (95% CI = [-.002, .001]). Thus, H3a and H3b were not supported. In the path from authentic leadership to career identification to performance, the mediation was significant (95% CI = [.001, .002]). Specifically, when the relationship was short, authentic leadership did not have an indirect effect on performance via career identification ( $b = .01, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-.011, .035]$ ); when the relationship was long, authentic leadership had an indirect effect on performance via career identification ( $b = .06, 95\% \text{ CI} = [.015, .116]$ ). Accordingly, H4a was supported. In the path from authentic to career identification to proactive career behavior, the mediation was significant (95% CI = [.001, .003]). Specifically, when the relationship was short, authentic leadership did not have an indirect effect on proactive career behavior via career identification ( $b = .03, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-.031, .086]$ ); when the relationship was long, authentic leadership had an indirect effect on performance via career identification ( $b = .19, 95\% \text{ CI} = [.096, .262]$ ). Accordingly, H4b was also supported.

## CONCLUSIONS

Authentic leadership influences subordinate performance and OCBs directed at supervisors positively through leader identification and improves performance and proactive career behavior via career identification. Furthermore, the length of the relationship significantly moderates the indirect effect of authentic leadership on performance and proactive career behavior through career identification. When the relationship is short, the indirect effects do not exist; when the relationship is long, the indirect effects are positively significant.

This study makes three significant theoretical contributions. First, it is the first study to verify that authentic leadership increases subordinates' in- and out-role performance through both a leader- and subordinate-centric path. We also test the moderating role of the length of the relationship on these relationships in a first-stage moderation model. Second, we show that the consequences of authentic leadership have target sensitivity (Cummings & Parks, 1995). Only leader identification can increase OCBs directed at supervisors, and only career identification can enhance proactive career behavior. Third, we find that for both short and long relationships, the path from authentic leadership to leader identification to performance and OCBs directed at supervisors exists. However, the path from authentic leadership to career identification to performance and proactive career behavior only works when the subordinates and leader have a relationship that is at least 35 months long.

This study has several limitations. First, it is subject to common sources bias, as many variables in our model are based on subjective perceptions. To minimize this bias, we use both time lags, cognitive blocks, and leader ratings. Second, the cross-sectional nature of our study does not allow for the inference of causality. We recommend that future research use a longitudinal design or a field experiment. In addition, more empirical studies of this dual mediating model is needed to provide a more precise understanding of the mechanisms of authentic leadership.