

Authentic Leadership: A Review of Theoretical Foundations, Core Models, and Empirical Research

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Abstract

As a significant paradigm in leadership studies, authentic leadership integrates core concepts from ethics, positive psychology, and organizational behavior. It emphasizes leaders' alignment with their intrinsic values through dimensions such as self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective, thereby fostering trust, enhancing commitment, and improving organizational effectiveness. This paper presents a systematic review of the theoretical foundations, core models, and empirical research on authentic leadership. It begins by tracing the theoretical origins and conceptual definitions of authentic leadership, then critically examines representative theoretical models proposed by Terry (1993), Ilies et al. (2005), Gardner et al. (2005), George et al. (2007), Avolio et al. (2004), and Walumbwa et al. (2008). The paper systematically synthesizes existing empirical studies on authentic leadership practices, challenges, strategies, and frameworks, with particular attention to research conducted in the Chinese context. By identifying the major contributions and limitations of existing studies, this review reveals a critical gap in the literature: the systematic investigation of authentic leadership practices among deans in Chinese public universities remains notably underexplored. This paper provides a solid theoretical foundation and literature support for future empirical research on authentic leadership in the Chinese context.

Keywords: Authentic Leadership, Literature Review, Leadership Models, Higher Education, Chinese Context

Introduction

This chapter aims to systematically review the major concepts, theoretical models, and empirical findings in authentic leadership research, thereby establishing a theoretical foundation for subsequent studies. First, it explores the foundational concepts of leadership and their evolution, providing context for situating authentic leadership within the broader landscape of leadership theory. Subsequently, it analyzes the philosophical and psychological roots of authenticity, elucidates the core characteristics of authentic leaders, and defines the theoretical meaning of authentic leadership. Building on this foundation, the chapter critically examines six representative theoretical models of authentic leadership, comparing their

similarities, differences, and contributions. It then systematically reviews empirical research on authentic leadership across four dimensions—practices, challenges, strategies, and frameworks—with particular emphasis on studies conducted in the Chinese context. Finally, the chapter summarizes the major findings and limitations of existing research, identifying directions for future inquiry, particularly the research gap concerning authentic leadership practices among deans in Chinese public universities.

Authentic Leadership: Theoretical Foundations and Conceptual Definitions

Historical Evolution of Leadership Theory and the Emergence of Authentic Leadership

The development of leadership research reflects a deepening understanding of leadership phenomena. Trait theories in the early twentieth century attempted to define leadership by identifying differences between leaders and followers, positing that leaders possess certain inherent qualities. Behavioral theories shifted focus to leaders' behavioral patterns, seeking to guide leadership practice by identifying effective leadership behaviors. Subsequent contingency theories emphasized that leadership effectiveness depends on the match between leader style and contextual factors. In the late twentieth century, the emergence of transformational leadership theory marked a shift from transactional relationships to visionary inspiration and moral appeal (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

However, traditional leadership theories have limitations in explaining how leaders navigate complex ethical dilemmas and maintain consistency in changing environments. Entering the twenty-first century, with frequent corporate scandals globally and rising societal expectations for leaders' moral integrity, value-based leadership paradigms emphasizing leaders' inner authenticity have gradually become research hotspots. Authentic leadership emerged precisely in this context.

The conceptualization of authentic leadership represents both a reflection on traditional leadership theories and a response to developments in positive organizational behavior. Luthans and Avolio (2003) defined authentic leadership as “a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context,” emphasizing that leaders achieve positive influence on followers by cultivating self-awareness, self-regulation, and positive psychological capital. This definition established the theoretical foundation for authentic leadership research.

Philosophical and Psychological Foundations of Authenticity

The concept of authenticity has deep historical roots, traceable to the ancient Greek philosophical emphasis on “know thyself.” Socrates' aphorism that “the unexamined life is not worth living” reveals the centrality of self-awareness in individual life. Aristotle linked authenticity to virtue, suggesting that individuals should pursue lifestyles consistent with their nature.

In modern philosophy, Heidegger regarded authenticity as a fundamental mode of being, emphasizing that individuals should make authentic choices in the face of finitude. Sartre, from an existentialist perspective, argued that authenticity means individuals acknowledge their subjectivity and are not constrained by external expectations. These philosophical reflections provide rich intellectual resources for understanding authenticity in leadership.

From a psychological perspective, authenticity means aligning individual actions with core values (Harter, 2002). This alignment is not merely surface-level behavioral consistency but embodies a profound commitment to self-awareness and integrity (Erickson, 1995). Humanistic psychologist Rogers emphasized that the key to individual self-actualization lies in maintaining consistency between experience and self-concept. Maslow viewed self-actualization as the highest level of human needs, with authenticity being an important condition for self-actualization.

Starratt (1993) was among the early scholars to introduce authenticity into leadership research, calling for a paradigm shift toward authentic leadership and advocating for leaders to deeply understand the complexities of human experience, critique established norms, and pursue meaningful change. This perspective transcends traditional leadership theories' focus on efficiency and control, viewing leadership as a profound ethical practice.

Painter-Morland (2008) further conceptualized authenticity as a dynamic construct, suggesting that leaders should adapt their roles according to organizational contexts while maintaining core value consistency, flexibly responding to diverse stakeholder expectations. This perspective acknowledges the fluidity of organizational roles, providing theoretical space for applying authentic leadership across different cultural contexts.

Core Characteristics of Authentic Leaders

The literature exhibits substantial consistency in describing the characteristics of authentic leaders. Synthesizing research from multiple scholars, authentic leaders possess the following core characteristics:

First, profound self-awareness. Authentic leaders clearly recognize their strengths, weaknesses, emotions, and values (Kleynhans et al., 2022). This self-awareness involves not only awareness of internal states but also understanding how their behavior affects others. Self-awareness enables leaders to present themselves genuinely, avoiding pretense and affectation.

Second, firm moral convictions. Authentic leaders adhere to moral principles, demonstrating steadfast integrity in their actions (Avolio, 2010; Başaran & Kiral, 2020). They do not compromise due to external pressure but consistently guide their behavior by internal moral standards. This moral steadfastness provides reliable reference for followers and forms the cornerstone of organizational ethical culture.

Third, transparent communication. Authentic leaders build trust-based relationships with followers by openly sharing information and candidly expressing thoughts and feelings (Shirey et al., 2019). They do not conceal true intentions or manipulate information, approaching others with sincerity. This transparent communication helps eliminate misunderstandings and promotes mutual understanding.

Fourth, high resilience and humility. Authentic leaders remain composed in adversity and humble in success (Wilson, 2014; Watts, 2015). They acknowledge their limitations, are willing to learn from others, and maintain rational judgment under pressure. This

combination of resilience and humility enables authentic leaders to function effectively in complex environments.

Fifth, empathetic concern. Authentic leaders attend to followers' needs and feelings, treating others with empathy (Shapira-Lishchinsky & Rosenblatt, 2010). They focus not only on task completion but also on team members' growth and well-being, fostering a supportive organizational climate.

Conceptual Definition of Authentic Leadership

Synthesizing the theoretical origins and characteristic descriptions above, authentic leadership can be defined as: a leadership paradigm in which leaders achieve alignment between their actions and intrinsic values by demonstrating self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective, thereby cultivating follower trust, enhancing organizational commitment, and improving organizational effectiveness (Walumbwa et al., 2008).

This definition contains several key elements: First, authentic leadership emphasizes consistency between leaders' internal states and external behaviors, requiring leaders to match words with actions and maintain consistency between inner and outer selves. Second, authentic leadership focuses on interactive relationships between leaders and followers, emphasizing the central role of trust in the leadership process. Third, authentic leadership places moral dimensions in an important position, requiring leaders to embody ethical considerations in decision-making and action. Fourth, authentic leadership concerns not only the impact of leadership behaviors on organizational goals but also leaders' self-actualization and moral growth in the leadership process, reflecting positive psychology's emphasis on individual potential development.

Major Theoretical Models of Authentic Leadership

Terry's Authentic Action Wheel Model

Terry's (1993) "Authentic Action Wheel" represents an early seminal contribution to authentic leadership theory. The model comprises six fundamental elements: Mission, Power, Structure, Resources, Existence, and Meaning, with "Fulfillment" at the core.

The Mission dimension emphasizes leaders' possession of clear purpose and vision as guides for action. Authentic leaders' actions are not random but unfold around clear missions. The Power dimension focuses on leaders' ethical responsibilities in exercising influence, requiring leaders to use authority prudently for the benefit of others and the organization. The Structure dimension attends to the organizational framework's impact on action, requiring leaders to understand organizational hierarchy, communication channels, and processes, creating environments conducive to authentic action. The Resources dimension emphasizes providing individuals with necessary tools, support, and capabilities to translate intentions into action. The Existence dimension addresses external contextual factors constraining action, requiring leaders to maintain authenticity even when facing external pressure. The Meaning dimension points to the deeper value of action, enabling action to transcend instrumental purposes and acquire profound significance.

By integrating these six dimensions, authentic leaders can diagnose challenges and formulate solutions holistically, achieving harmonious alignment between mission and action. This model's significant contribution lies in revealing the systemic nature of authentic leadership, emphasizing interconnections and synergies among dimensions.

Ilies et al.'s Four-Dimensional Psychological Model

Ilies et al. (2005) constructed an authentic leadership model from a psychological construct perspective, comprising four dimensions: self-awareness, unbiased processing, relational authenticity, and authentic behavior (Figure 1).



Figure 1 Authentic leadership influences on leaders' and followers' well-being proposed by Ilies et al. (2005)

Self-awareness involves deep understanding of one's strengths, weaknesses, and emotional states, forming the foundation of authentic leadership. Only through deep self-awareness can leaders present themselves genuinely and avoid self-deception. Unbiased processing emphasizes the ability to discern relevant information from various situations, avoiding amplification of trivial issues or obstruction of information absorption. This dimension requires leaders to approach different perspectives with openness, avoiding cognitive biases in judgment. Relational authenticity refers to establishing open, trustworthy interactions with followers, requiring leaders to present genuine selves without pretense or affectation. Authentic behavior requires leaders' actions to align with personal values, ensuring consistency between words and actions.

This model's significant contribution lies in revealing the dual impact of authentic leadership dimensions on both leader and follower well-being. Research indicates that authentic leadership benefits not only organizational performance but also enhances leaders' sense of self-actualization and followers' job satisfaction.

Gardner et al.'s Self-Based Model

Gardner et al.'s (2005) model, grounded in Kernis's (2003) conception of authenticity, positions self-awareness and self-regulation as core elements, emphasizing the bidirectional development process of leaders and followers (Figure 2).

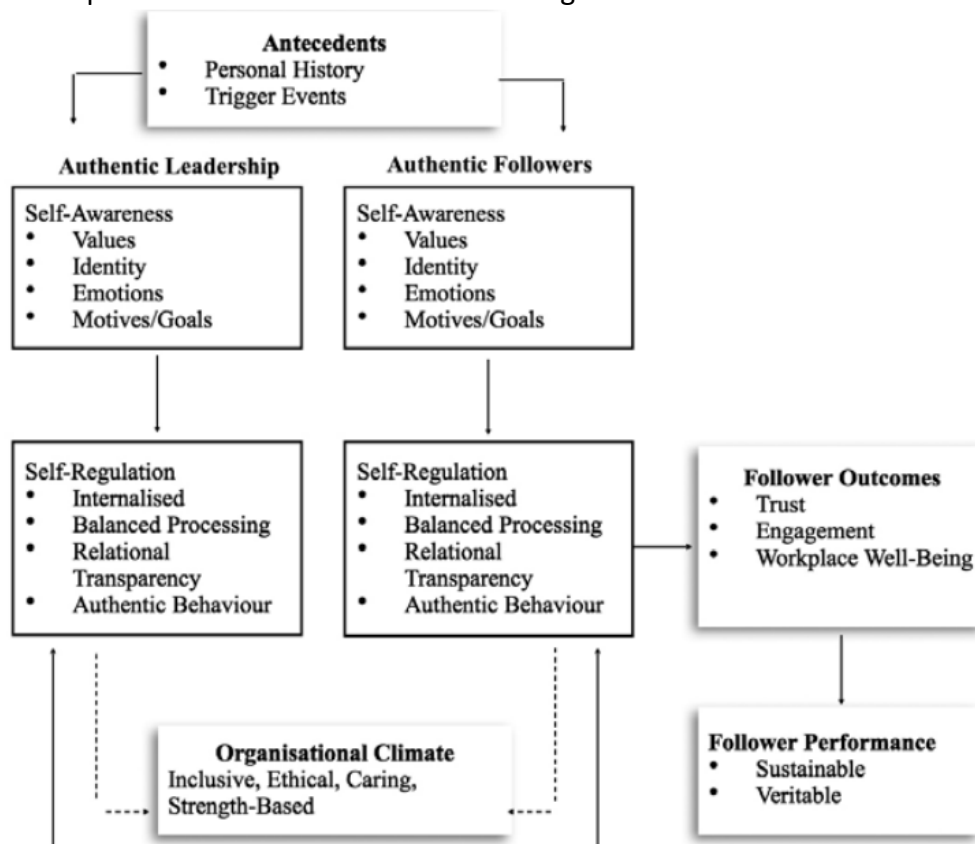


Figure 2 Model proposed by Gardner et al. (2005).

The model suggests that personal history and life-trigger events play important roles in shaping authentic leadership. Critical life experiences, such as career transitions, major challenges, or ethical dilemmas, often become important opportunities for leaders' self-reflection and growth. Organizational climate provides a supportive environment for cultivating authenticity. When organizational culture encourages open communication and respects individual differences, leaders' authenticity is more readily expressed.

Notably, the model proposes a "positive modeling" mechanism: authentic leaders demonstrate authenticity principles through their own behavior, inspiring followers to engage in self-discovery and self-regulation processes, creating cascading effects throughout the organization. This mechanism reveals the diffusion effect of authentic leadership, explaining how authenticity transmits from leaders to followers and subsequently influences the entire organization.

George et al.'s Practical Attributes Model

George et al.'s (2007) model transcends theoretical construction, focusing on the practical attributes of authentic leaders. The model identifies key characteristics of authentic leaders: unwavering passion for performance, clear sense of purpose, tenacity, robust ethics, harmonious relationships, composure, empathy, and steadfast commitment to followers and the organization (Figure 3).



Figure 3 The Dimensions of an Authentic Leader from George et al. (2007)

These characteristics collectively constitute the behavioral profile of authentic leaders, providing practical guidance for leadership development. Unlike theoretical models, this model focuses more on “what” leaders do rather than “what” leaders are, emphasizing that authentic leadership is embodied in concrete actions rather than abstract traits. For example, passion for performance is reflected in leaders’ dedication and focus on work; clear sense of purpose is reflected in leaders’ ability to articulate vision and guide teams forward; tenacity is reflected in perseverance when facing setbacks.

Avolio et al.’s Trust-Centered Model

Avolio et al.’s (2004) model places trust at the core of authentic leadership. The model posits that authentic leadership lays the foundation for trust through transparency, self-awareness, and moral integrity, and trust subsequently catalyzes follower commitment, loyalty, and engagement (Figure 4).

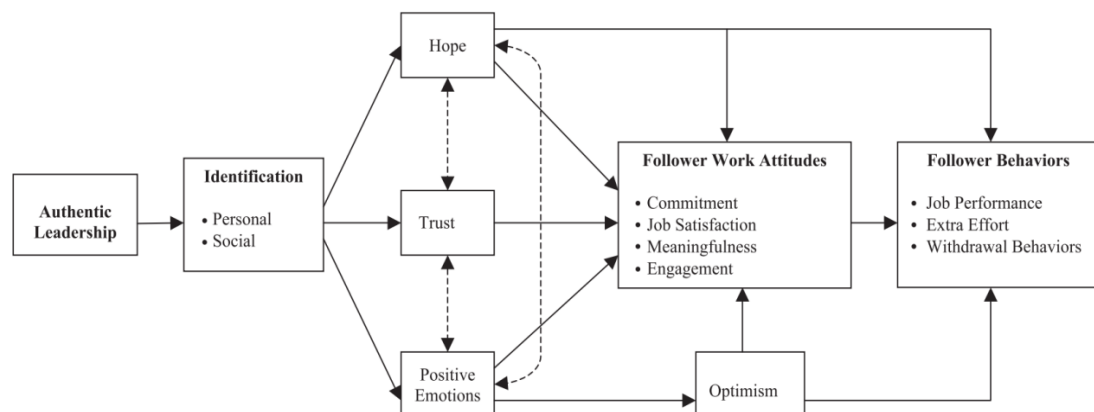


Figure 4 Avolio et al. (2004) framework of authentic leadership

The model distinguishes between cognitive and affective dimensions of trust: cognitive trust concerns judgments of leader competence, reliability, and consistency, resulting from rational evaluation; affective trust stems from emotional connections forged through sincerity, empathy, and genuine care, resulting from experiential feelings. These two forms of trust mutually reinforce each other, jointly constituting strong bonds between leaders and followers.

Trust forms a reciprocal cycle between leaders and followers: leaders’ authentic behavior enhances followers’ trust, trust in turn promotes followers’ positive behaviors, and

these positive behaviors subsequently reinforce leaders' authenticity. This cycle facilitates organizational goal achievement and change implementation.

Walumbwa et al.'s Four-Dimensional Integrative Model

Walumbwa et al. (2008), synthesizing the integrated model of Luthans and Avolio (2003) and the framework of Ilies et al. (2005), developed the most influential four-dimensional model of authentic leadership. The model comprises the following dimensions (Figure 5) :

Relational Transparency refers to leaders presenting their authentic selves in interpersonal interactions, openly sharing information, and candidly expressing thoughts and feelings. This dimension creates an environment where followers feel free to express themselves and be understood, establishing a foundation for trust. Leaders demonstrating relational transparency do not conceal true intentions or manipulate information, approaching others with sincerity.

Ethical Practice focuses on the ethical foundations of leader behavior, requiring leaders to consistently adhere to positive ethical standards, demonstrating moral consistency in both personal conduct and interpersonal relationships. Leaders practicing ethical conduct do not change principles with situational changes or sacrifice ethics for interests.

Balanced Processing emphasizes leaders' capacity for impartial decision-making, objectively evaluating information and perspectives from various sources, avoiding bias and arbitrariness. This capability contributes to fostering an inclusive and fair organizational climate. Leaders capable of balanced processing listen to different opinions, weigh alternatives, and make prudent judgments.

Self-Awareness constitutes the foundational dimension of authentic leadership, referring to leaders' deep understanding of their strengths, limitations, emotions, and values. Self-awareness is not merely an awareness of internal states but also a mechanism for regulating external interactions, guiding leaders' behavior toward alignment with core values.

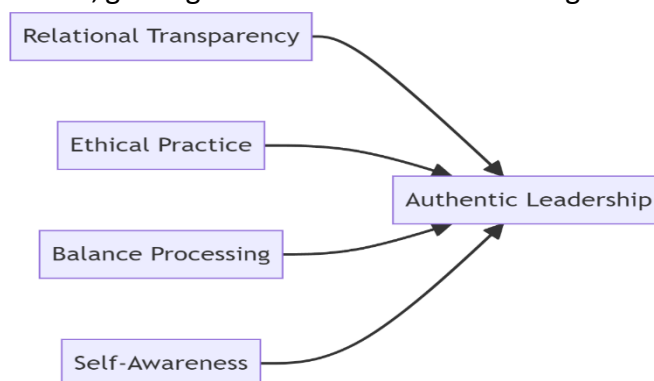


Figure 5 The model proposed by Walumbwa et al. (2008)

This model's significant contribution lies in operationalizing authentic leadership into a measurable four-dimensional structure, providing a reliable tool for empirical research. Through multiple rounds of validation, the model's reliability and validity have been widely

recognized, establishing it as the mainstream framework for current authentic leadership research.

Empirical Research on Authentic Leadership

Research on Authentic Leadership Practices

Shokooh et al. (2015), in a study conducted at an Iranian university, found that authentic leadership effectively counters unethical behavior and enhances organizational effectiveness. The research identified key attributes of authentic leaders, including transparency, self-regulation, balanced processing, integrity, self-awareness, and knowledge generation. These attributes collectively characterize the behavioral patterns of authentic leaders, enabling them to maintain moral steadfastness in complex organizational environments. The study employed a qualitative design with multi-source data collection, revealing the applicability of authentic leadership in non-Western contexts.

The study found that authentic leaders, by demonstrating transparency, enable followers to clearly understand decision-making bases and behavioral motivations; through self-regulation, maintain rational judgment under pressure; through balanced processing, avoid personal biases affecting decision-making fairness; and through integrity, earn followers' trust and respect. These findings provide rich material for understanding the practical mechanisms of authentic leadership.

Research on Authentic Leadership Challenges

Cooper et al. (2005) noted that authentic leadership development is constrained by various social and individual factors. Gender differences represent a significant factor influencing authentic leadership: women and minority groups face more obstacles to leadership positions due to social status inequalities (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). Additionally, factors such as individual competencies and technological proficiency may affect the manifestation of authentic leadership (Lloyd-Walker & Walker, 2011).

Zhang et al. (2012), in a study of Chinese small and medium-sized enterprises, found that authentic leaders exhibited dual sensitivity to "self" and "context," reflecting the Chinese cultural emphasis on interconnectedness. This finding reveals the distinctive manifestation of authentic leadership in the Chinese context. The study noted that Chinese authentic leaders maintain stability of personal values while sensitively grasping contextual changes, seeking balance between self-assertion and contextual adaptation.

Research on Authentic Leadership Strategies

Shapira-Lishchinsky and Levy-Gazenfrantz (2015), in a study conducted in Israel, demonstrated that authentic leaders effectively facilitate the professional development of novice teachers through strategies such as visualization, charisma, appraisal, illumination, emulation, and intensive care. Visualization refers to leaders clearly depicting future scenarios, inspiring followers' sense of mission; charisma refers to leaders influencing others through personal character, winning followers' identification; appraisal refers to leaders providing timely, specific feedback to help followers improve; illumination refers to leaders stimulating followers' thinking, promoting self-discovery; emulation refers to leaders leading by example, providing behavioral models for followers; care refers to leaders attending to followers' needs and providing emotional support.

Nikpay et al. (2014), in a study at Iranian universities, found that authentic leadership has significant positive effects on both individually-oriented and organization-oriented organizational citizenship behaviors, indicating that authentic leadership concerns not only task completion but also followers' initiative and creativity.

Research on Authentic Leadership Frameworks

Abbas et al. (2022), in a study of Pakistani higher education institutions, found that authentic leadership significantly predicts employee commitment and performance, with religiosity moderating this relationship. The study noted that in environments with strong religious atmospheres, the influence of authentic leadership may be strengthened through the mediating role of religious values.

Opatokun et al. (2013), in a study at the International Islamic University Malaysia, confirmed that the four dimensions of self-awareness, balanced information processing, internalized moral perspective, and relational transparency significantly explain authentic leadership, providing empirical evidence for authentic leadership research in higher education contexts. The study employed a case study approach, deeply revealing the concrete manifestations of authentic leadership in academic organizations.

Research on Authentic Leadership in the Chinese Context

The Emergence of Research in the Chinese Context

Research on authentic leadership in the Chinese context has proliferated in recent years. These studies explore how authentic leadership principles developed in Western contexts apply to China's unique cultural, organizational, and interpersonal dynamics. Confucian values emphasizing harmony, respect for hierarchy, and collectivism pose distinctive challenges for leaders in balancing authenticity with culturally embedded leadership expectations (Zhu & Caliskan, 2021).

China's core cultural orientations, such as relational orientation, face consciousness, and collectivism, have complex relationships with the core dimensions of authentic leadership. On one hand, relational orientation emphasizes maintenance of interpersonal networks, which may prompt leaders to pay more attention to emotional connections with followers, benefiting the expression of relational transparency. On the other hand, face consciousness emphasizes maintenance of social image, which may inhibit leaders from showing vulnerability, challenging relational transparency. Collectivism emphasizes subordination of individual interests to collective interests, potentially creating tension with authentic leadership's emphasis on individual value.

Major Findings of Research in the Chinese Context

Long et al. (2024), in a study of public primary schools in Guiyang, China, found that all four dimensions of authentic leadership significantly predict teacher performance, validating the applicability of the theory in Chinese educational settings. The study employed structural equation modeling to verify theoretical hypotheses through questionnaire data. However, the study's focus on urban primary schools limits the generalizability of its findings to rural schools or higher education institutions.

Shang et al. (2019), in a survey conducted at a Chinese research university, found that authentic leadership influences student creativity through the mediating role of promotion-focused behavior, with relational power serving as a moderating variable reflecting Chinese cultural characteristics. This finding reveals the unique mechanisms through which authentic leadership operates in the Chinese context, highlighting the important role of interpersonal networks in leadership effectiveness. The study noted that under Chinese cultural background, personal relationships between leaders and followers may affect the effectiveness of authentic leadership.

Xiao and Huang (2023), in a study of college students in Hebei Province, found that authentic leadership significantly enhances innovation behavior through the mediating effects of trust climate and creative self-efficacy. The study employed a serial mediation model, revealing the psychological mechanisms through which authentic leadership influences innovation behavior. The study found that trust climate and creative self-efficacy play important roles in this process, providing new perspectives for understanding the relationship between authentic leadership and innovation behavior.

Zhang et al. (2021), in a study of Chinese art enterprises, confirmed that authentic leadership positively influences positive psychological capital and psychological safety. The study noted that authentic leaders enhance employees' psychological safety by creating an open and inclusive atmosphere, thereby increasing their positive psychological capital. This finding provides empirical support for understanding the relationship between authentic leadership and employee mental health.

Limitations of Research in the Chinese Context

Although the studies above provide valuable evidence for understanding authentic leadership in the Chinese context, several limitations are commonly observed:

First, research samples are concentrated in specific areas. Most studies focus on urban primary schools, art enterprises, or student populations, with insufficient attention to higher education institutions, particularly deans in public universities. As mid-level leaders, deans' leadership practices directly impact faculty development, warranting in-depth investigation.

Second, research methods are predominantly cross-sectional designs. Most studies employ questionnaires collecting data at single time points, limiting causal inference. The direction of influence between authentic leadership and organizational performance requires longitudinal studies for verification.

Third, data sources are relatively singular. Most studies rely on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Leaders tend to report idealized leadership behaviors, while followers may embellish leadership evaluations due to relational considerations. Multi-source data collection would help reduce this bias.

Fourth, examination of Chinese cultural factors remains insufficient. Although existing studies note cultural differences, they lack systematic analysis of how indigenous concepts such as guanxi, face, and harmony shape authentic leadership practices. Cultural factors are often mentioned as background rather than examined as core variables.

Research Gaps and Future Directions

Major Gaps in Existing Research

Synthesizing the literature analysis above, the following major gaps exist in current authentic leadership research:

First, research contexts are predominantly Western organizations, with relatively weak representation of non-Western contexts. Although research in the Chinese context has grown in recent years, most studies focus on basic education or business organizations, with a notable deficiency in research on higher education, particularly deans in public universities.

Second, research methods are predominantly quantitative cross-sectional designs, which inadequately capture the dynamic processes and contextual factors of authentic leadership. Although qualitative research has been employed, its systematic and in-depth nature requires strengthening. The practical processes of authentic leadership, leaders' inner experiences, and followers' genuine feelings need qualitative research for revelation.

Third, examination of Chinese cultural factors in authentic leadership practices remains insufficiently deep. How Confucian values, guanxi networks, face culture, and other indigenous concepts shape the manifestation of authentic leadership has not been adequately explored. Cultural factors often serve as background variables rather than core explanatory variables.

Fourth, there is a lack of authentic leadership theoretical frameworks applicable to the Chinese higher education context. Existing research predominantly applies Western models directly, without adequate testing and adaptation for local contexts. Chinese higher education faces unique institutional environments, cultural traditions, and development challenges, requiring targeted theoretical frameworks.

Future Research Directions

Based on the gaps identified above, future research may advance in the following directions:

First, expand research contexts to focus on authentic leadership practices among deans in Chinese public universities. As mid-level leaders, deans bear dual responsibilities of strategy execution and grassroots management, and their leadership practices directly impact faculty development. Investigating deans' authentic leadership would help understand the behavioral characteristics and influence mechanisms of mid-level leaders in Chinese universities.

Second, adopt qualitative research designs using methods such as in-depth interviews and participant observation to reveal the processes and contextual factors of authentic leadership practices. Qualitative research helps capture the richness and complexity of leadership practices, understanding how leaders enact authenticity in daily interactions, respond to various challenges, and adjust leadership strategies.

Third, incorporate indigenous cultural concepts to explore how Confucian values, guanxi networks, face culture, and other factors shape the distinctive manifestation of authentic leadership in the Chinese context. Culture is not an external variable but permeates

all aspects of leadership practice. Deep analysis of cultural factors' influence would help construct more explanatory theoretical frameworks.

Fourth, develop authentic leadership theoretical frameworks applicable to the Chinese higher education context. By integrating Western theories with Chinese culture, drawing on existing research findings, and combining empirical data, develop framework models with both theoretical depth and practical significance. Such frameworks should reflect the institutional characteristics, cultural traditions, and development needs of Chinese higher education.

Summary

This study has systematically reviewed the theoretical foundations, core models, and empirical research on authentic leadership. As a leadership paradigm integrating ethics, positive psychology, and organizational behavior, authentic leadership emphasizes leaders' alignment with intrinsic values through dimensions such as self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective.

Theoretical models proposed by Terry, Ilies, Gardner, George, Avolio, and Walumbwa enrich the theoretical meaning of authentic leadership from different perspectives. Terry's Authentic Action Wheel emphasizes systematic integration of elements; Ilies et al.'s four-dimensional model focuses on interconnections among psychological constructs; Gardner et al.'s self-based model highlights the central roles of self-awareness and self-regulation; George et al.'s practical attributes model focuses on leaders' behavioral characteristics; Avolio et al.'s trust-centered model places trust at the core; Walumbwa et al.'s four-dimensional integrative model provides operationalized measurement tools.

Empirical research demonstrates that authentic leadership positively influences organizational effectiveness, employee well-being, and innovation behavior. Studies in the Chinese context also validate its applicability, revealing distinctive manifestations of authentic leadership under Chinese cultural background. However, existing research exhibits limitations in context, methodology, and cultural considerations, with a notable deficiency in systematic investigation of authentic leadership practices among deans in Chinese public universities.

Future research should focus on this population, adopt qualitative methods, incorporate indigenous cultural perspectives, and develop authentic leadership theoretical frameworks applicable to the Chinese higher education context. By filling this research gap, deeper theoretical understanding of authentic leadership can be achieved, providing practical guidance for enhancing leadership effectiveness in Chinese universities.

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