



Building Leader-Follower Relationship through Authentic Leadership: The Success Mantra

Ruchi Tyagi & Poonam Puri

Bundelkhand University, Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh, India

Abstract

Every organization aims to grow and excel in their business activity. Human resource being the most critical element to the success of any organization, this paper is an effort to understand authentic leadership and its significance in the reference of building leader-follower relationship which not only affects the organizational goal accomplishment but also play important role in enhancing the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the organization. A leader's contribution in the organization is not only to take and execute decisions or formulate and implement strategies, but also to motivate and influence the team towards goal accomplishment. Whereas on the other hand, the extent to which a leader is seen as being authentic and honest influences the fate of goal achievement. This study is conceptual in nature with the motive to analyze the concept of authentic leadership in reference to leader-follower relationship. Authentic leadership is a positive mode of leadership with high moral standards, ethics, integrity and values. The study also emphasizes on the qualities of a leader which make them authentic and leader's authenticity enhances trust of employees in their leader through relational transparency which further develops strong leader-follower relationship. A new term for authentic leaders has been developed on the bases of their qualities of leading people and also suggested a model of 'authentic leadership and leader-follower relationship'.

Key words- Authentic Leadership, Leader-Follower Relationship, Relational Transparency, Authenticity, Trust, Goal Accomplishment

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Introduction

Leader and followers are the two critical and essential aspect of any organization. They play equally important roles in the success of an organization. It is the followers who make a leader. At the same time the followers would lose their strength and unity without a leader, thus making it a reciprocal phenomenon. This relationship cannot be ignored as it directly affects the organizational outcomes. The Leader follower relationships were not duly recognized in the initial phases of behavioral studies related to leadership and its implications. The (leader) manager's job was viewed as getting work done by the employees to achieve the organizational goals.

Employees were treated as only a factor of production and the appraisal was considered to be the prerogative of leaders.

With the passage of time, corporate houses identified the need of leaders being evaluated by their team members too. These efforts were made by the organizations to increase transparency in the system as well as in the relationship of (leader) manager and (followers) subordinates and also to build trust of the followers in the organization. The employees started to demand for genuine, ethical, trustworthy and authentic leaders. With this arose the need of identifying new parameters in leadership theory. Authenticity is one of the parameter which has attracted lot of attention lately. Authentic leadership is an optimistic approach of leadership which concentrates on transparent relationship between (leaders) managers and (followers) subordinates. Employees perform better if they perceive authenticity in leaders' behavior. Leaders' authenticity enhances trust between leaders and employees, which further improves leader-follower relationships. Literature demonstrates relational transparency (Gardner, Chan, Hughes, & Bailey, 2006) and self-disclosure as key components of authentic leadership, which increases employees' trust in leaders. This relationship is described by: (a) relational transparency, trust and openness, (b) motivation and positive direction towards goal accomplishment, and (c) proper concentration on follower's development (Gardner et al., 2005). Follower's behaviors are always influenced by their leaders which can be seen in their actions (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Fields, 2007; Zhu et al., 2011) and the development of subordinates (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Gardner et al, 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2010a). Leaders' ethical role modeling, unbiased decision-making, and transparency promote employees' positive extra role behaviors (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Avolio & Luthans, 2006) and positively relates with employees' self-determination (Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005).

Authentic Leadership

The idea of authentic leadership came into the existence from the ancient Greek philosophy. The word authentic arises from the Greek word 'authentikos', which means 'principle or genuine'. Ancient philosophers focused attention on authenticity as an essential state of being, as it focuses on being in the dominance of one's own life and destiny. Authentic leadership is known as fair and genuine type of leadership which is evolved from the history of these terms which generate from ancient Greek. It provides new direction to the leadership theories. This theory also works in the direction of welfare of followers, leaders and the organization of which they are associate (Luthan & Avolio, 2003; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing & Peterson, 2008).

It is a unique collaboration of transformational leadership (Avolio & Bass, 1988), full range leadership (Avolio, 2005), servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970), spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003), and ethical leadership (Trevino, Brown, & Hartman, 2003) and defined by Luthans and Avolio(2003) as a, 'process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self- awareness and self- regulated positive behavior on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self- development' (p.243).

Bill George defined authentic leaders as honest, ethical, moral and character-based leaders in his book *Authentic Leadership* (2003), 'People of the highest integrity, committed to building enduring organizations ... who have a deep sense of purpose and are true to their core values who have the courage to build their companies to meet the needs of all their stakeholders, and who recognize the importance of their service to society'.

Theoretically, Walumbwa et al. (2008) define authentic leadership as, 'a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive

ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, and internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers fostering positive self-development' (p. 94). This definition and the theory of authentic leadership was developed to define four components- self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balance processing, and relational transparency. Self-awareness concerns willingness to look over, individual esteems, inclinations, and practices and in this manner, recognize shortcomings as well as abilities (Kernis, 2003; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Walumbwa et al.2008). It is an understanding of one's capabilities and shortcomings and the multi-faceted attitude of the self. It is a critical component of spiritual and emotional intelligence and is most important in the success of life. The internalized moral perspective construct contributes in the development of moral framework for authentic leadership. It is a self-regulation that is based on internalized moral values, which means doing right things. It cannot be imposed or forced by others instead it develops on its own or is self-imposed. Doing right things also portrays the internalized moral values of an individual. This is demonstrated in ethical behavior and ethical decision making. Moral and ethical perspective is highly associated with authentic leadership because it is a way of doing things positively, fairly and ethically. Balanced processing enables the leader to analyze minutely all the relevant information before making any decisions, decisions should not be made in hurry (Walumbwa et al., 2008). It is objective analysis of information before taking a decision. It means a leader must be open-minded when evaluating information before making decisions. A leader must be fair and open for any kind of ideas, including motivating others to confront or dare one's values. For that reason, authentic leadership concentrates on the combined objectives and perceives collective knowledge and differences in opinion can support and attain these more specifically. A leader must be at the receiving end too, inviting opinions for creating conducive and motivating environment for any issue to be discussed. Relational transparency is defined by Kernis (2003) as relational in nature, in as much as it includes esteeming and accomplishing receptiveness and honesty in one's close connections. It is by and large consistent with one's values and communicating this to others which includes the open sharing of information about one's thoughts and emotions. Authentic leaders show transparency in communication, they never manipulate the things for their own benefits. Hence, developing faith and increasing trust of its followers. They develop a transparent relationship with their colleagues and subordinates through honest communication.

Leader- Follower Relationship

Leader-follower relationship needs to be healthy and reliable to achieve organizational goal. This relationship develops by the mutual efforts of leader as well as followers. The leader is the person who influences and motivates the employees towards the accomplishment of organizational goal and their own development and growth. Success will be achieved when this relationship would be strong and close. Close relationship between leaders and followers increases the sense of belongingness, satisfaction and positive attitude in followers towards their leader and the organization. Northouse (2013) said, that if leader and followers are not close to each other, it can be the cause of discomfort, tension, low productivity and high turnover. One of the theory which describes the importance of this relationship is leader member exchange theory (LMX) developed in 1970. LMX theory is a two-way (dyadic) relationship based approach to leadership which establishes a genuine, self-governed, and synergetic relationship between leader and follower (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). It is defined by Northouse (2010), 'The LMX approach conceives leadership as process that is focused on the interaction between a leader and subordinates'. Further this theory describes this relationship on the basis of in-group relationship and out-group relationship: In the in-groups relationship, followers are close to their leaders,

interact more frequently and develop more informal relationship based on trust and high rewards, and another one is out-group theory in which follower interaction is very low, they establish a very formal relationship and the leader loses the confidence of their followers (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). Le Blanc & González-Romá (2012), found that interaction between leader and follower in in-group is of high quality and the out-group interaction is of low quality. Basically this theory is based on the exchange relationship. If a leader shows positive behavior towards his/her followers, the followers will follow the same pattern of behavior. Leaders' role is to influence employees' attitudes and behaviors (Bass, 2008). Literature suggests that leaders' unbiased and authentic behavior promotes employees' citizenship behavior through positive social exchange relationship between leaders and employees (Organ, 1988; Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Pain, & Bachrach, 2000). Social exchange behavior is individuals' voluntary behavior performed in return to others' positive behavior towards them (Blau, 1964). Trust, loyalty, and commitment are few factors that build foundation of social exchange relationship between leaders and employees (Blau, 1964; Clark & Mills, 1979; Rousseau & Parks, 1993). Relational exchange between leaders and employees motivate employees to get involved in job, take initiatives, and be responsible in addition to their formal job contract (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975). Rusaw (2000) suggests trust in leaders as foundation of social exchange, which is developed through reciprocal phenomenon between leaders and employees.

Authentic Leadership and Leader-Follower Relationship

Building trust and commitment is every organization's priority. The responsibility lies on the leader to create conducive environment and win the confidence of his/her followers by creating transparent relationships. This creates a need for developing insight into authentic leadership and leader-follower relationship. Authentic leaders promote trustworthy relationship with followers, colleagues as well as with organization also. Mutual respect, cooperation, commitment, reliability, and equity explain trust in leader-member relationships (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Open self of Johari Window also promotes transparent relationship. It is known as open self of individual's personality in which he/she knows about him/herself and are willing to disclose information to others and others know about them too, this builds trust. It works in relationship development between leader and followers. The leaders should maintain or move to the position of open self thus leading to self-disclosure. Self-disclosure is a process of communication through which an individual reveals personal information to others. Taylor & Altman (1987) describe stages of relationship development that could be applied in developing authentic and transparent relationships between leaders and employees. Transparent relationship between leaders and employees further increases trust between leaders and employees. Inappropriate and unethical leadership style may create misunderstanding and dysfunctionality among teams and organizations, which negatively affects team and organizational performance (Motowidlo, 2003). Avolio and Gardner (2005) also described that authentic leader-follower relationship supports transparent and genuine communication because of intensely grasped common values which further encourages the pursuit and accomplishment of shared objectives. Followers get motivated towards the achievement of organizational goals when their leaders communicate the things genuinely and honestly. Communication plays an essential role in success of leader-follower relationship as authentic leaders adopt two way communication process for open discussions. It makes the relationship more understandable and reliable. This relationship works for the self-development of leader and followers as well as creating environment to understand each other on professional grounds (Gardner, Avolio, and Luthans, 2005). It develops a cohesive team which works for the success of an organization. This cohesiveness in relationship does not develop because of the perception of leader and follower's action instead, depends on the leader or

follower's judgment of attributions regarding the other's intentions, effectiveness and authenticity (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). Further Lewis (2011) identified a relationship between authenticity and leadership effectiveness which is mediated by leader member exchange and concluded that authentic leaders are perceived more effective and efficient in development of positive relationship with their subordinates. Literature suggests that genuine, ethical and trustworthy leaders develop employees' behavioral authenticity and appropriateness.

Authentic Leadership and Leader-Follower Relationship Model

The motive of this paper is to highlight the role of authentic leadership in leader-follower relationship. Literature suggests, in this respect that authentic leadership impacts positively on this relationship and helps to grow self-development of leader as well as followers. This relationship directly impacts the organizational success, which further increases organization's trust in their employees (leader and follower). It improves employer- employee relationship and develops healthy environment in the organization. It can be done only by the good leaders, as leaders play the role of mediator in between employers and employees. Leader is a person who, directly interacts with the employees, and communicates and implements, the policies and decisions of the management to the employees. In this way, employees find themselves more connected with their leaders and develop a relationship with him. This relationship works in positive way when employees get their leaders genuine and authentic. As leader's role is to influence and motivate their team towards goal accomplishment.

Authentic leadership is proved as a new mantra of success for organizations. It is giving favorable results to the organization. Authentic leaders not only emphasize on the accomplishment of organizational goals instead they give importance to every aspect of organization which contributes in organizational success. Even though they evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses through the self-awareness process which is one of the essential dimensions of authentic leadership. If a leader is able to evaluate himself/herself or able to identify his/her own strength and weakness, only then he would be able to take right decisions for himself/herself, team members and organization. These types of practices increase the closeness of team members with their leader. Authentic leaders always evaluate and collect information regarding problems on which they have to make decisions. They see all the alternatives and evaluate them properly on the basis of his/her and team strengths and weaknesses. This is called balance processing. Authentic leaders not only make right decision but also develop their morals and values which come from the internalized moral perspective or self-motivation not from the forceful environment. These types of leaders who have high moral values, always do right things and make right decisions, not because of management pressure but also for their self-satisfaction. They develop and share these values with their team members, which makes team and organizational environment ethical and trustworthy. All these practices develop relational transparency between leader and follower relationship.

So, all the dimensions of authentic leadership directly or indirectly impacts the leader-follower relationship. Authentic leaders know this thing clearly, that healthy relations with team members will help them to achieve organizational goals. Literature demonstrates that, unhealthy leader follower relationship produces negative consequences for organizations as employees turnover, low productivity, absenteeism, low morale and motivation and low confidence in employees. This makes negative impact on the overall growth of the company. That's why organizations concentrate on healthy and positive relations in organization.

After analyzing these dimensions and literature of authentic leadership, some characteristics of authentic leadership which impact more consistently on leader-follower relationship are found. Transparency, open communication, authenticity, positive motivation, frequent interaction of leader and follower, shared values and goals are those type of characteristics which helps to increase or develop trust in leader-follower relationships. Trust is the important factor which makes the relationship stronger. If the followers find their leaders trustworthy only then they get motivated and influenced and work according to them.

Transparency (relational) in leader-follower relationship, increases the follower’s trust in their leader and relationship. Relational transparency arises due to sharing and open information about one’ thoughts and feelings, and a close relationship is established between them. This close relationship is not only beneficial to leader and follower at professional ends but also on personal end. Relational transparency is considered as the important dimension of authentic leadership by Avolio et al (1988). This dimension of authentic leadership basically works on the relationship development with their team members, colleagues and management to establish transparency in the organization system as a whole. Open and honest communication by the leader also increases transparency and trust in the leader and follower relationships. Self-discloser of a leader promotes open and honest communication which builds faith in follower’s mind for their leader and organization.

Authenticity is another factor which promotes leader follower relationship. If followers find their leader authentic and genuine, in communication and decision making, they support him positively and work according to his guidance and direction. Genuine and honest leader interacts with their followers frequently and motivates them not only for achievement of organizational goals but also for their self-development. They work as team members instead of boss and employee. The leader discusses all the things with team members before taking decisions which make employees closer to leader and organization. They develop a value system which is shared by each and every member that makes them more honest, trustworthy and authentic to each other. Jointly, all these factors contribute in trustworthy relationship, which further enhances leader and follower relationship. The paper suggests a model of authentic leadership and leader-follower relationships. The model describes how authentic leadership establishes strong leader-follower relationships. Authentic leadership promotes relational transparency between leader and follower which further increases trust and acceptance between them. Trust and acceptance between leader and followers develops strong bonding in the relationship.

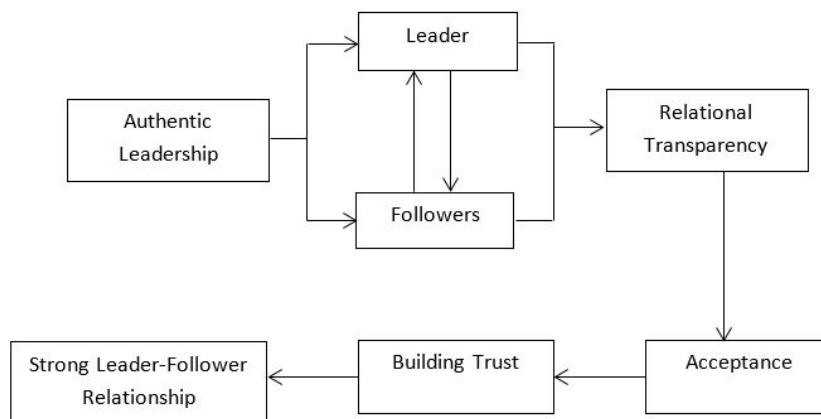


Figure 1. Authentic Leadership and Leader-Follower Relationship Model

In an organization set up, the followers look upon their leaders for many issues, direction and support, mostly for professional reasons but at time on the personal front too. Their day to day interactions lead to building up formal as well informal relationships, and when they come together to achieve the organizational goal. The followers expect clarity, transparency and authenticity from their leader. Transparency related to the procedures, outcomes and rewards. The team performance would always be at higher level, if the followers believe that there are not hidden goals of the leader and the leader has high acceptance for own weaknesses.

To build up trust, the leader should make sincere effort to encourage his team members. To participate in discussion, admit his own mistakes, avoid ambiguous statement, evaluate his/her own behavior, do not jump to the conclusion and above all have an empathetic approach. A leader who keeps his promises and believes and does not give false commitment, avoids highlighting weaknesses of others and negotiates honestly has highest probability of being viewed as authentic leader. Similarly, the followers move toward an open-self and encourage each other to create relational transparency and facilitate decision making with prior discussion and develop an understanding of the leader's expectations, resulting into better leader-follower relationship.

While discussing about authentic leadership, in this paper an approach has been developed to identify the traits which contribute in the increasing credibility and authenticity of a leader, Being G.R.A.T.E.F.U.L. Approach.

G- Genuine/ Generosity

R- Responsible

A- Ardent

T- Tolerant

E- Empathetic

F- Flexible

U- Unbiased

L- Loyal

Genuine- 'A genuine attempt to do things right'. Authentic leaders describe things, situations and behavior honestly or genuinely as they exactly happen. They develop an authentic, trustworthy and sincere relationship with their followers. This leads to positive outcomes as a strong leader-follower relationship.

Responsible- 'Capable of being trusted'. Authentic leaders show accountability for his/her team and their performance whether it is positive or negative. Team members/followers work sincerely and honestly when they find their leader responsible and liable towards the team and organization. Responsible leaders always develop close relationship with followers.

Ardent- 'Enthusiasm and passion increases efficiency'. Authentic leaders demonstrate devotion, enthusiasm and passion for their work, team and organization which further increases ardent of followers for their leader, team and organization. Ardent behavior/feelings lead to positive and fruitful environment in organization.

Tolerant- 'Tolerance to his/her opponents' opinions'. Authentic leaders respect the opinions, beliefs and practices of others. They allow their followers to share their ideas and opinions before making decisions. These types of practices make leader more reliable and authentic.

Empathetic- 'Ability to imagine how others feel'. Authentic leaders understand and share the feelings of followers and easily find out their needs and problems. They show empathy for their followers and develop an empathetic relationship with their team members. It promotes transparent and trustworthy relations between leader and followers.

Flexible- 'Capable of being flexed'. Authentic leaders have the capability to adjust to new, different and changing things easily. They use this capability to become more involved in organization's new strategies and initiatives as well as in the lives of followers.

Unbiased- 'Free from all prejudice and favoritism'. Authentic leaders take fair and impartial decisions. They are never influenced by favoritism and biased opinions which color their fair judgment. They develop transparent system which serves each and every person in a same manner.

Loyal- 'True-hearted'. Authentic leaders always show loyalty for their team and organization. They fulfill their commitments and words and always support their followers. In return they get back same response from their followers as loyalty is not a one way street. It comes from both the sides.

Authentic leaders possess number of qualities which makes them different from other types of leader. This paper tried to find out the qualities of authentic leaders and explain them in a new way- G.R.A.T.E.F.U.L..

Conclusion

This paper is a conceptual study that underlines the role of authentic leadership in development of leader-follower relationships. The literature provides sufficient evidence indicating the role and importance of authentic leadership in leader-follower relations. The qualities of a leader makes him authentic and authentic leadership leads to transparent and trustworthy relationship between leader and followers. This paper tried to find out the qualities of authentic leader which promotes leader-follower relations and also suggested a new term for authentic leaders- G.R.A.T.E.F.U.L. Apart from this a new model has also been developed which shows the relationship between leader and followers through authentic leadership. In a nut shell, this paper is an effort to conclude that authentic leadership positively impacts leader-follower relations which increases overall effectiveness and efficiency of organization. Authentic leadership is a relatively new concept and has lots of scope for further research. Further research in this reference is recommended to study and analyze this concept empirically.

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Authors' Profile

Ruchi Tyagi is pursuing her Ph.D. in Management (Leadership) from Bundelkhand University (Jhansi), India. She is having more than 12 years of experience in academics and research. Her areas of interest are Human Resource Management, Organizational behavior, Industrial Relations, Research Methodology.

Poonam Puri is working as Professor at Institute of Management Studies, Bundelkhand University, Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh, India. She has authored and co-authored multiple peer-reviewed scientific papers and presented works at many national and International conferences. Her contributions have acclaimed recognition from honourable subject experts around the world. She is actively associated with different societies and academies. Her academic career is decorated with several reputed awards and funding.