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Research Article

Authentic Leadership in the Context of Organizational Change, Insights from Pakistani Health Sector Organizations

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Abstract

Objective and Background: Aim of this study is to measure impact of authentic leadership in developing affective commitment to change in health sector employees of Pakistan. Two positive beliefs related with change and employee factors i.e. Appropriateness of change and change efficacy are studied as mediator between authentic leadership and affective commitment to change. **Methodology:** Data was collected from 258 employees of four health sector hospitals undergoing major restructuring change. Structural equation modeling was used through AMOS 18.0 to test the hypothesis. Total of seven hypotheses were formulated. **Results:** Results revealed that authentic leadership was positively and significantly related with affective commitment to change. The positive relationship between authentic leadership and affective commitment to change was partially mediated by change appropriateness and change efficacy. **Conclusion:** This study offers theoretical as well as practical implication for researchers and practitioners as to focus on promoting authentic leadership style to foster positive perceptions in employees for the successful implementation of planned organizational change.

Key words: Authentic leadership, affective commitment to change, appropriateness, Pakistan

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Competing Interest: The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

Data Availability: All relevant data are within the paper and its supporting information files.

INTRODUCTION

Most defining challenge, leaders face is to achieve change recipients' support in order to successfully implement planned change initiatives[1]. Leaders play a critical role in managing planned change[2]. Leaders through their impact on organizational environment and interpersonal interactions influence successful implementation of planned change initiatives[3]. Oreg[4] revealed that trust in management based on employees' feeling about their leaders being accountable to their organizational interests is necessary to mitigate resistance and lack of trust in management was strongly related with negative emotions i.e., anger, anxiety, fear as well as behavioral and cognitive resistance. Kiersch and Byrne[5] found authentic leadership is positively and significantly related with affective commitment and negatively and significantly related with stress and turnover intention. Justice perception mediates the relationship of Authentic leadership with affective and commitment and turnover intention. They also suggested to investigate the likely interaction of authentic leadership with certain demographic variables, climate perceptions and key organizational outcomes i.e., affective commitment to change.

Health sector of Pakistan receives great attention due to its strong impact on masses. Every government wishes to reform this sector on priority so that its true effects be transferred to gross root level. Provincial Government of Sindh, Pakistan decided to handover five district hospitals alongwith scores of Taluka level hospitals and basic health units to Non-Governmental organizations under Public Private Partnership project in order to improve service quality of these hospitals. Health sector of Pakistan is unionized where doctors, paramedical staff and clerical staff have separate unions which sometimes collectively agitate for common cause. This privatization of health sector organizations also raised some concerns among employees which were apparent from their hue and cry published in daily newspapers.

Privatizations of Public Sector organizations in Pakistan face employee resistance and are major cause of employee withdrawals and cynicism[6]. Leaders play critical role in mitigating resistance and enhancing employee support for change. A very recent article found Authentic leadership positively related with trust in leaders which in turn enhanced positive emotions in employees during times of organizational change[7]. Authors also argue that there is dearth of empirical studies investigating role of authentic leadership in the context of organizational change. Mantler *et al.*[8] suggested health sector as very relevant context for authentic leadership as it can be 'driving force' in producing employees' positive work attitudes with strong display of honesty and integrity of leaders and adequate resource distributions ultimately benefiting patient care. This study aims to fill the gap to investigate role of authentic leadership in creating affective commitment to change with mediating role of positive beliefs about change i.e., change appropriateness and about oneself i.e., change efficacy.

Walumbwa *et al.*[9] defined 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, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development". In line with Walumbwa *et al.*[9] this paper posits that authentic leadership is comprised of four dimensions: self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing and internalized moral perspective. Herscovitch and Meyer[10]; based on Meyer and Allen[11] conceptualization of organizational commitment proposed multidimensional construct to measure commitment to change and it has been defined as "a mindset that binds an individual to a course of action deemed necessary for the successful implementation of a change initiative". Again, in line with Meyer and Allen conceptualizations of dimensions of commitment they proposed three mindsets that bind a person to target of change. the first mindset is regarded as affective commitment to change which is basically a belief of person about perceived benefits of change and intention to support thereof.

At the times organizations are undergoing some remarkable changes in their system, role of leaders is very important[12]. It is the primary obligation of leaders to enhance employee commitment to change initiative through display of honesty, integrity and competence[13]. A cross-sectional, multilevel design study using multisource data form 177 members of 38 teams from different organizations of Germany, reveal that transformational leaders through providing 'Individual support' positively affect followers' affective commitment to change[14]. Moreover, Leaders by providing an appropriate model can enhance followers' affective commitment to change when they themselves are high in commitment to change. Santhidran *et al.*[15] presented a study of large energy corporation in Malaysia undergoing structural, cultural and technological changes found positive impact of transformational leadership on commitment to change. Hill *et al.*[16] also found positive relationship between transformational leadership and commitment to change.

A recent study of US hospitality industry involving 236 respondents found authentic leadership was interacting positively with organizational commitment and organizational commitment mediated the negative relationship between authentic leadership and turnover intention[17].

Rego *et al.*[18] found authentic leadership's positive impact on organizational commitment and relationship was mediated by self-efficacy, hope and optimism; elements of psychological capital. Tabak *et al.*[19] found authentic leadership positively related with organizational trust and organizational commitment and negatively related with organizational cynicism. Leroy *et al.*[20] found Leader behavioral integrity fully mediated positive relationship between authentic leadership and affective organizational commitment. Affective commitment fully mediated the relationship between authentic leadership and behavioral integrity and work role performance. One more findings confirmed two antecedents of authentic leadership i.e., leader self-knowledge and self-consistency[21].

Authentic leadership was found in positive relationship with outcome variables i.e., followers' satisfaction with supervisor, organizational commitment, extra effort and perceived team effectiveness. A study from Iranian context found positive correlations between authentic leadership and team commitment[22]. Comprehensive literature review found no any study investigating authentic leadership as antecedent to commitment to change however a study of voters' perception of authentic leadership and charisma during American presidential elections of 2008 found that perception of authentic leadership was negatively related with cynicism about change[23]. Authors suggested that authentic leadership may be investigated in the context of organizational changes. Thus this study hypothesizes that:

- H1: Authentic leadership will be positively and significantly related with affective commitment to change

Leadership practices based on transparency, fairness and justice can enhance positive feelings among employees regarding the need for change which may contribute towards employee intentions to support the change. Results of study conducted in public sector tertiary education sector of Pakistan reveal that procedural and distributive justice impact significantly on employees' perception of readiness for organizational change[24]. Employees' feelings of change appropriateness and change efficacy can impact on change intervention. In an experimental study, it was found that leaders can influence through motivational interviewing such that they can embrace change initiative resultantly leading to successful implementation of change program[25]. The author further suggested to investigate influence of leadership on readiness for change. Lines *et al.*[26] argued that high involvement of leaders in change process positively influence personnel change readiness and commitment. They supported the idea of change process being top down approach in which higher ups are more inclined to implement the change program than lower order individuals. Santhidran, argued that leaders' reputation based on their honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, commitment and sincerity is concerned with promotion of employee perception of change readiness. Based on above literature review this study hypothesizes as under:

- H2: Authentic leadership will be positively and significantly related with change appropriateness (a) and change efficacy (b)

Readiness for organizational change is an important construct in timely and successful implementation of organizational change. However, there is dearth of empirical studies investigating role of readiness for change in promotion of employee support for change[27] especially in the context of Asian countries like Pakistan[28]. Employee behavior either resist to change or support to change depends upon their belief about the change appropriateness[29]. Readiness for change fosters positive behaviors regarding support for change[30]. Thus it may be hypothesized that:

- H3: Change appropriateness (a) and change efficacy (b) will be positively related with affective commitment to change
- H4: Change appropriateness (a) and change efficacy (b) will mediate the relationship between authentic leadership and affective commitment to change

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The instrument was circulated among four district hospitals of Sindh Province undergoing restructuring change. Government of Sindh has announced to handover the operational control of five district hospitals and various Tehsil headquarters and BHUs and dispensaries to different non-governmental organizations under the project titled 'Public Private partnership'. This context where the change has been announced, formalities have been completed was a

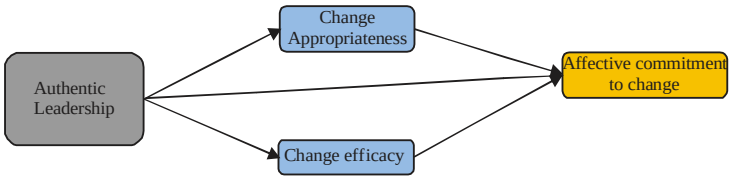

Fig. 1 : Theoretical framework
Developed for this study

better time to test the instruments contained in this study[31,32]. Though in Pakistan surveys are not common and people are reluctant to give their views in black and white on sensitive issues like restructuring and role of leadership[33]. In this study researcher made personal efforts to collect the data from the employees by personally visiting them. Target of study were Doctors, Nurses and paramedical staff which is related with health care. Individuals related with support staff group i.e., ward boys and ayahs or the students (Nurses and Dispensers) were not invited for this study. Of five hospitals which were being handed over to private sector under PPP project four hospitals were contacted. Out of them till writing of these lines data from three hospitals is received and subjected to analyses. Response rate in health sector is falling due to high engagements of physicians in their job and time constraints[34]. Response rate for this study was better for the reasons that the questionnaires were handed over to respondents and they were asked to return after some days. Frequent visit and thanks to some personal contact[35] a total of 258 usable responses were collected for this study.

Authentic Leadership (AL) was measured by using the questionnaire of Walumbwa *et al.*[9] developed 16 items. AL has 4 sub scales: Relational transparency (5 items), self-awareness (4 items), internalized moral perspective (4 items) and balanced processing (3 items). These subscales form a higher order Authentic Leadership factor. Cronbach Alpha for 15 items of the AL used in this study was 0.95. Change appropriateness and change efficacy were measured using subscales from multi item measure of readiness for change[36]. Change Appropriateness measures extent to which organizational change is felt by its member as legitimate, necessary and beneficial to organization as a whole. Sample items include (1) I think that the organization will benefit from this change. (2) It does not make much sense for us to initiate this change (Reverse scored). This dimension consists of 7 items. Cronbach Alpha for 7 items obtained through SPSS was 0.919. Change efficacy measures extent to which employees feel that they have ability to adapt to the change; have requisite skills to implement the change and they can easily do new work roles and functions. Cronbach Alpha for five items was 0.909. To measure affective commitment to change a 6-item instrument of Herscovitch and Meyer was used. The scale measures employees' desire to support the change based on underling benefits to the organization. Cronbach alpha reported in Herscovitch and Meyer was 0.94. same for this study was 0.90 (Fig. 1).

RESULTS

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was carried out using AMOS 18.0. CFA used to measure the construct reliability. In order to confirm whether variables used in the model are theoretically and empirically linked construct reliability is measured using three measures of convergent validity, discriminant validity and nomological validity. For convergent validity Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Construct Reliability (CR) were calculated based on factor loadings greater than 0.50. CR and AVE for Affective commitment to change (CR = 0.86; AVE = 0.51), for Change Appropriateness (CR = 0.918, AVE = 0.62), for Change efficacy (CR = 0.91, AVE = 0.66) and for authentic leadership (CR = 0.963, AVE = 0.64) show adequate construct validity (Table 1).

In order to measure discriminant validity squared inter construct correlations were compared with AVE of respective construct. Table 2 reveals that values of AVE for all variables are greater than value of SIC for each corresponding variable thus indicate that all variables used in this study are different from each other thus demonstrate good discriminant validity. Moreover, data presented in Table 1 also demonstrate good nomological validity indicating a natural link among variables as values of Inter-construct Correlations (IC) estimates are positive and significant ($p<0.01$).

Analysis of model fit indices reveal excellent model fit as chi square (CMIN/DF) value of 0. 2.127, ($p = 0.000$) is >3 and within the accepted range[37]. Other indicator of fitness of model include CFI = 0.911, GFI = 0.812, AGFI = 0.781, NFI = 0.846, RMSEA = 0.066 (PCLOSE = 0.000). these results demonstrate that measurement model of CFA show excellent fitness of model[37].

After achieving best model fit, it is pertinent to test hypothesis using structural equation modeling. As this study has used mediation model therefore three step procedure

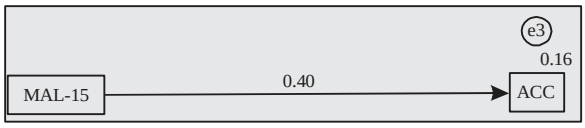

Fig. 2: Direct path (AL-ACC)

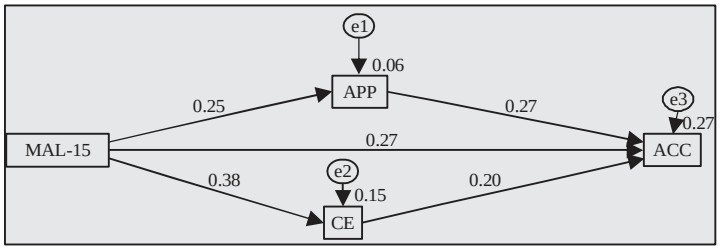

Fig. 3: Indirect paths (AL-APP-CE-ACC)

Table 1: Summary of Construct Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Constructs	CR	AVE
Authentic leadership	0.963	0.636
Affective commitment to change	0.8572	0.5132
Change appropriateness	0.918	0.62
Change efficacy	0.9051	0.6578

Source: Developed for this study by author using primary data

Table 2: Discriminant validity

Construct	AVE	Correlations between variables			IC	SIC	SE	CR	P
	0.51								
ACC	0.62	ACC	<-->	Appr	0.487	0.23717	0.042	4.484	***
	0.66	ACC	<-->	Ch.Ef	0.472	0.22278	0.047	4.615	***
	0.64	ACC	<-->	AL	0.43	0.1849	0.049	4.52	***
	0.62								
APP	0.66	App	<-->	Ch.Ef	0.421	0.17724	0.045	4.794	***
	0.64	App	<-->	AL	0.223	0.04973	0.042	3.074	0.002
	0.66								
CE	0.64	CE	<-->	AL	0.395	0.15603	0.054	4.966	***

ACC: Affective commitment to change, APP: Appropriateness, CE: Change efficacy, AL: Authentic Leadership, Source: Developed for this study by author using primary data

suggested by Baron and Kenny[38] is applied. They stated that three steps must be met before proceeding to mediation. According to them the relation between independent and dependent variables (1st step), independent and mediator variables (2nd step), mediator and dependent variables (3rd step) must be significant. Only then mediation analysis can be done. Therefore, to test first step i.e., impact of authentic leadership (IV) on affective commitment to change (DV) separate equation was entered in AMOS. Results of Fig. 2 reveal that regression coefficient between AL and ACC is positive 0.400 and significant (p=0.000). Thus indicate positive and significant relationship between AL and ACC. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Figure 3 shows the mediation paths of Change appropriateness and change efficacy between authentic leadership and affective commitment to change. Second hypothesis evaluate impact of authentic leadership on mediators i.e., appropriateness and change efficacy. Table 2 shows that path between AL and APP is positive and significant (r = 0.246; p = 0.000) and path between AL and CE is also positive and significant (r = 0.384; p = 0.000) thus Hypothesis 2a and 2b are accepted. Hypothesis 3a and 3b state the relationship between mediators i.e., APP and CE with ACC. Analysis of Fig. 3 and Table 3 reveal that both relationships are also positive and significant with regression coefficient of 0.268 (p = 0.000) and 0.196 (p = 0.000) for

Table 3: Regression analysis

Ser	Hypothesis	Path	Direct paths r, p	Indirect paths r, p	Support
Impact of AL on affective commitment to change					
H1	AL positively and significantly influence ACC	AL®ACC	0.400***		Supported
Impact of AL on change appropriateness and change efficacy					
H2a	AL positively and significantly influence APP	AL®APP	0.246***		Supported
H2b	AL positively and significantly influence CE	AL®CE	0.384***		Supported
Impact of change appropriateness and change efficacy on ACC					
H3a	APP positively and significantly influence ACC	APP®ACC	0.268***		Supported
H3b	CE positively and significantly influence ACC	CE®ACC	0.196***		Supported
Mediating Role of APP and CE between AL and ACC					
H4a	APP mediates between AL and ACC	AL®APP®ACC	0.400***	0.287***	Supported
H4b	CE mediates between AL and ACC	AL®CE®ACC	0.400***	0.319***	Supported

AL: Authentic Leadership, ACC: Affective commitment to change, APP: Appropriateness, CE: Change efficacy, Source: Developed for this study by author using primary data

paths between APP and ACCC and CE and ACC respectively thus both hypothesis are also accepted.

As three steps as suggested by Baron and Kenny[38] are satisfied thus mediation can be tested. Data in Table 3 reveals that value of standardized regression coefficient between AL and ACC before introduction of mediator was 0.400 and after the introduction it is decreased to 0.287 and 0.319 respectively. The relationships are significant (p = 0.000). This indicates that APP and CE partially mediate the relationship between AL and ACC. Thus hypotheses 4a and 4b are also accepted.

DISCUSSION

Aim of this study was to measure impact of authentic leadership in developing affective commitment to change in health sector employees of Pakistan. Two positive beliefs related with change and employee factors i.e. Appropriateness of change and change efficacy were studied as mediator between the relationship. In other words, it was hypothesized that authentic leadership will not only directly influence employees' affective commitment to change but it will indirectly influence through first creating employee beliefs regarding appropriateness of change and developing efficacy in employees to deal with the change[16]. Total of seven hypotheses were formulated and all were supported due to their positive and significant regression coefficients.

Results support overall view that when employee feel their leaders demonstrate integrity and fairness they are likely to develop positive image of change program thus believing in the change message regarding the need for the change[20]. This is evident from positive impact of Al on appropriateness (H2a). Leaders' authenticity and integrity also develop employee feeling of being incharge of themselves and having capacity to adapt to new and dynamic environments when organizations are facing serious blows to their statuesque and are moving to new directions characterized by uncertainty and insecurity. In such a scenario authentic leaders enhance employee confidence in themselves thus enhance self-efficacy regarding change. It is evident from the positive and significant path between AL and Change efficacy (H2b). this result is in line with Laschinger *et al.*[34] study of Canadian health sector. Relationship of change appropriateness was also positive and significant with affective commitment to change (H3a). This result is in line with explain by Neves[27]. Another result of our study which found change efficacy (H3b) positively related with affective commitment to change was not in line with Neves[27].

Darvish and Rezaei[22] found positive relationship of authentic leadership with employee commitment to teams. They suggested to investigate role of self-efficacy in the relationship between authentic leadership and commitment. This study found self-efficacy partially mediating the positive relationship of authentic leadership with affective commitment to change (H4b). Though no study found so far to investigate a link of authentic leadership with commitment to change. Self-efficacy is found mediating positive link of authentic leadership with number of employee outcomes i.e. organizational commitment[18], Burnout and Job Satisfaction[39]. This study also found partial mediation of change appropriateness between the positive relationship of authentic leadership and affective commitment to change. Neves, found change appropriateness and self-efficacy negatively related with turnover intention. The relationship was fully mediated by affective commitment to change.

In nutshell overall results demonstrate that leaders can foster employee commitment to change by displaying authentic leadership style and promoting positive beliefs about not only change itself i.e., need for the change, felt discrepancy or appropriateness but regarding something within the employee capabilities to cope with the change i.e. change efficacy[40].

CONCLUSION

This study measured authentic leadership in Pakistani health sector. Other variables of study were related with content of change and individual factors i.e. appropriateness and change efficacy. Affective commitment to change was used as dependent variable in this study as surrogate to employee intention to support the change based on underlying benefits of change program. This study employed structural equation modeling involving data from 258 employees of health sector including Doctors, Nurses and para medical staff. SEM applied on sample more than 200 yield better results which are valid and reliable. Thus, findings of this study will contribute much towards the understanding of impact of authentic leadership in context of change. Regarding practical implications of this study it may be inferred that organizational leaders in Pakistani Health Sector must adopt authentic leadership style to demonstrate fairness and transparency in their decision making to influence employee behaviors related with supporting the change initiative. Moreover, as the authentic leadership is a malleable, policy makers must envisage programs regarding development of authentic leadership in health sector managers. Cross sectional nature of this study precludes the establishment of causal links in this model. Therefore, future studies must explicitly measure casualty in longitudinal designs of study. This study collected data from health sector organizations of Pakistan undergoing major changes in their management structure. Though this was highly suitable context for this study for not only the authentic leadership but for the type of change. Need for such context was felt by different authors. However, future studies must take data from larger organizations of Pakistan i.e. Pakistan Railways which is undergoing major reforms in their system after a longer period of felt inefficiency and having greater importance in economy as well as in the eyes of public services. This study has reported impact of AL on single dimension of commitment to change i.e. affective commitment to change, future studies must study all three dimensions of commitment to change to root out employee intentions to support the change which may be based on costs associated with not supporting the change (Continuous commitment to change) or it may be due to felt duty or social norm (normative commitment to change). Future studies may also benefit from investigating focal and discretionary behaviors related with change supportive behaviors as outcome variables.

SIGNIFICANT STATEMENT

Leaders' role as transparent, morally obliged person is integral to obtaining positive outcomes from employees amid the situation where various frauds in organizations are unearthed. This aspect is under researched in globe in general and in Pakistan in particular. This study will contribute to literature by providing insights of authentic leadership amid scenarios of organizational change.

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