WHAT DEFINES YOU: A SUBORDINATE VIEW OF AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

by

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DEDICATION

To my brother, carve your own path, greatness will follow.

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ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of the second world war, literature and the real-world application of leadership in psychology has been of great interest to the growth of Industrial/Organizational (I/O) psychology. The push for developing theories on leadership has led to different leadership styles, thus providing the I/O psychology community with a wealth of information. In the past few decades, authentic leadership style has been at the forefront of most research in I/O psychology. The idea of authentic leadership describes an individual who allows themselves and their employees to freely expressive who they are as individuals. The literature on authentic leadership is broad, yet the focus of how subordinates identify and associate with the term authentic leadership is not as accessible. The literature over the years has had varying definitions of what authentic leadership is and means in the workplace (Gardner et al., 2011). The varying definitions of authentic leadership have caused some confusion in current and past research of the topic, but most researchers have agreed upon the theme of authentic leadership. There are some studies which have done a multi-dimensional study analyzing leaders and employees' perception of authentic leadership at the same time (Černe et al., 2014). However, few studies have focused specifically on the subordinate's view of workplace leadership style or level of satisfaction with authentic leadership. This study is to see how subordinates define what authentic leadership is and to see if their current definition of authentic leadership, when presented to subordinates, is associated with higher levels of satisfaction compared to other styles of leadership.

I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership has been a leading field of interest in industrial/organizational (I/O) psychology. The birth of leadership in I/O psychology was in big part because of the first two world wars and ever since then, there has been tremendous growth in the methodology of leadership (Lord et al., 2017). While the applied aspect of leadership was being used in the wars, theories on leadership style started to grow. Some of the earlier styles of leadership styles were authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-fair leadership (Nawaz et al., 2016). The three leadership styles, previously mentioned, have been used on countless occasions to measure effectiveness in an applied setting and have been used in literature reviews. However, leadership theory and research have started to change in the last decade to look at diverse theories of leadership (Dinh et al., 2014). Of late, older leadership styles like authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-fair leadership have started to not be the primary focus in literature.

In recent research, the new focus in leadership styles is the concept of authentic leadership has been the zeitgeist for I/O psychology research (Gardner et al., 2011). The idea of authentic leadership is to lead but by doing so in a way that allows employees to express who they are as individuals (Gardner et al., 2011). The one limitation of authentic leadership is there is variability in how authentic leadership is defined (Gardner et al., 2011). This can cause not only issues in literature reviews but also how to conduct studies that will benefit research in authentic leadership. With that being said, the definition has been narrowed down enough to conduct research but there is a lack of research on how authentic leadership is defined. Some of the literature goes as far as to say, without an exact definition of authentic leadership it could risk how researchers collect and analyze

the concept (Iszatt-White & Kempster, 2019). Even with a certain ambiguity associated with defining authentic leadership, there have been several successful studies measuring its effectiveness.

Even with an uncertainty of the definition of authentic leadership, several studies have been able to dive into the importance of authentic leadership in a research setting. More specifically, how research in authentic leadership is perceived by employees. In one study, it was found followers who have trust in their leaders are due to how they perceive authentic leadership in their managers (Agote et al., 2016). Another research article took this further and looked at how employees, who trust their leaders, due to high levels of perceived authentic leadership, tended to stay with their company longer (Arici, 2019). One study specifically analyzed how employees perceive authentic leadership but used multiple dimensions to measure how they perceived this leadership style (Černe et al., 2014). These three studies have shown the importance of how employees perceive leadership, but more importantly how they perceive authentic leadership. Employee perception is another aspect that has been used to help with understanding the concept of authentic leadership. A missing aspect of employee perception is how employees define authentic leadership.

As talked about, the weakness of the literature in authentic leadership is the lack of clarity of the definition. Further than that, there has been hardly any research done on how employees define the definition or if authentic leadership is the preferred leadership style over others. It is important to do this type of research because leadership styles can have a major influence in the workplace (Cheung et al., 2018). Depending on the leadership style that is used, it can make a difference in organizational growth or decline

(Cheung et al., 2018). Authentic leadership has been shown to help with office culture and long-term exposure to this leadership style can lead to enhancing motivation in the workplace (Kinsler, 2014). There are many practical applications of authentic leadership and when used correctly can lead to productive results in an organization.

The aim of this study is to see how people in the workplace define the concept of authentic leadership. Much of the literature does not have a narrow-downed definition of authentic leadership and the goal is to understand what subordinates, in a work environment, believe what authentic leadership is (Gardner et al., 2021). The other aspect of the study is when participants find their definition of authentic leadership, will it lead to higher levels of satisfaction compared to other leadership styles. I hypothesize that most individuals will associate authentic leadership with a person being honest, genuine, and open with employees. In addition, I hypothesize authentic leadership will be the preferred method of leadership compared to other leadership styles.

II. METHOD

Participants

Participants were students at Texas State University between the ages of 18-30 who completed the survey on the SONA Systems Pool. I attempted to recruit 150 participants to take my survey, the end result was 241 survey responses. Out of the 241 participants, only 31% of the participants were excluded for either missing one or each attention checks or excluded because they did not complete all the questions. Out of the 241 participants, 52 participants were excluded because they missed filling in some or all of the questions. Another 23 participants were excluded because they either failed one or

both attention checks. Thus, the final sample was n=166 useable participants, which is about an 11% increase from the original amount needed for the survey.

In the final sample, 36.1% of the participants were Caucasian, 33.1% were Hispanic or Latinx, 11.4% were African American, 3.0% were Caucasian / Hispanic or Latinx, 1.8% were African American / Caucasian, 1.8% Asian / Caucasian, 1.2% other, 0.6% Asian / Caucasian / Hispanic or Latinx, 0.6% were African American / Caucasian / Hispanic or Latinx, 0.6% African American / Hispanic or Latinx, 0.6% were African American / Native American, 0.6% were Caucasian / Hispanic or Latinx / Native American, 0.6% Caucasian / Native American, 0.6% were Caucasian / Pacific Islander, 0.6% were Hispanic or Latinx / Native American, and 0.6% were Native American. Of the 166 useable participants, 140 were females, 25 were males, and 1 identified as Non-Binary.

Procedure & Materials

The survey was designed using the Qualtrics Survey website from Texas State. The survey allowed the researcher to divide the survey into four blocks. The four blocks are the consent form, demographics, workplace/academic, and leadership questions. The consent form is used to give the participant an understanding of the study they are taking and to see if they are willing to move forward to participate in the study. The demographics block of the survey included questions about age, gender, ethnicity, class year, work/volunteer experience, and etc. The workplace/academic questions surveyed the purpose of finding what preference each participant has in a workplace setting. The leadership block had questions pertaining to how individuals define leadership and authentic leadership. The leadership block is the most important part of the survey

because it has questions relating to the hypothesis made in the introduction section of the paper. This particular study is an online survey, the participants would receive a link to take the survey. On average it took a participant about ten minutes to complete the study.

The Qualtrics Survey was used to build a survey to be distributed through the SONA Systems Pool. The SONA Systems Pool is a system from the psychology department at Texas State to recruit participants. A link was created on the Qualtrics Survey website and was inserted into the SONA system. The participants were recruited through SONA Systems Pool and participants from the SONA Systems Pool can log into the SONA website and use their Texas State protected username and password. The study was posted on the SONA website with a list of other studies for the participants to choose from. Once the student chooses a study there will be time slots or a link to take an online study, from there the student will either take an online survey or reserve a time slot to participate in a study. When the participants took the study, they receive external credit towards their introductory course in psychology at Texas State. The data collected from the survey is collected anonymously and the survey information does not provide the participants' names.

Excel was used to help with cleaning the data. What was first done was to download the data of each participant from the Qualtrics Survey website. There is an option to download the data in choice text and numeric values and both were downloaded for the purpose of cleaning the data. Before anything was done, any identifying information such as IP addresses was deleted from the Excel sheet. Any other identifying information was deleted and discarded to protect the participants' confidentiality. The

next step was to exclude and include participants in the survey. Participants were excluded from the survey if they missed an attention check, left missing blanks, or simply did not complete the survey. After the data was cleaned for excluding participants, the next step was to include variable names for each question in the survey. The purpose of giving each question a name is to make data analysis much easier to do when the data was exported and imported into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Before SPSS was made, a numerical key was used to help identify what numerical values meant for each variable.

The SPSS program was used to analyze the data that Excel is not capable of doing. The data, which was cleaned through Excel, was exported and imported into the SPSS program. The SPSS program was used to help with using descriptive statistics to provide demographics for the participant section of the paper. The other half of the analyses was for the results section of the paper. Frequency tables and descriptive statistics to test the two main hypotheses presented in this research project. The SPSS program was essential for thoroughly analyzing the two hypotheses presented in the paper.

III. RESULTS

Testing Main Hypotheses

To determine the two hypotheses a frequency table was created for both hypotheses. The frequency tables were able to provide the frequency or number of people who chose a certain answer choice. The frequency table also provided percentages to help give context to the rest of the responses to a specific question. Another analysis that was run for the two hypotheses was the use of descriptive statistics. The descriptive statistics

provided the mean, standard deviation, and variance for each question.

The first hypothesis stated most people would associate authentic leadership with someone who is honest, genuine, and open with their employees. The frequency table showed 50.6% (84 participants) of the participants agreed with associating authentic leadership with someone who is a genuine leader (Figure 1). Another 38.6 % (64 participants) of the participants thought an authentic leader is someone who is self-aware (Figure 1). Lastly, 10.8% (18 participants) of the participants thought an authentic leader is someone who draws their behavior based on the environment (Figure 1). Looking further into the first hypothesis the mean of the data represents 1.88 (STD = 0.939).

Figure 1. Defining Authentic Leadership
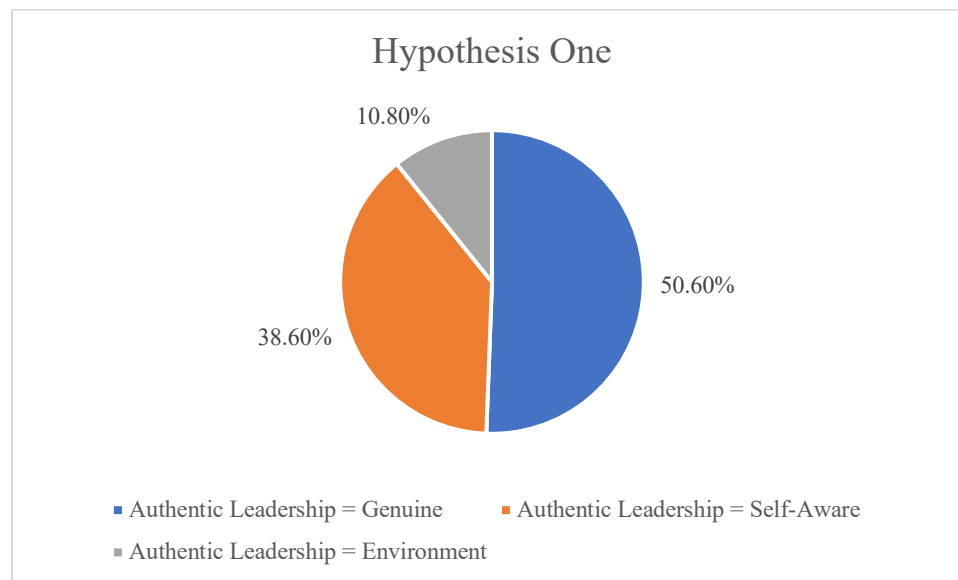
The second hypothesis stated authentic leadership would lead to higher satisfaction compared to other leadership styles. The frequency table showed 56.6% (94 participants) of the participants preferred authentic leadership over the others (Figure 2). In the second place, democratic leadership style was selected 32.5% (54 participants) of the time, authoritative leadership style was selected 7.8% (13 participants) of the time,

and laissez-faire leadership style fell last being selected 3.0% (5 participants) of the time (Figure 2). The mean from each leadership style showed similarities to the percentages of the frequency table as authentic leadership had the lowest mean with 1.55 (STD = 0.718). Democratic leadership style had a mean of 1.85 (STD = .727), authoritative leadership style had a mean of 3.05 (STD = .855), and laissez-faire leadership style had a mean of 3.54 (STD = .727).

Figure 2. Preference of Leadership Styles
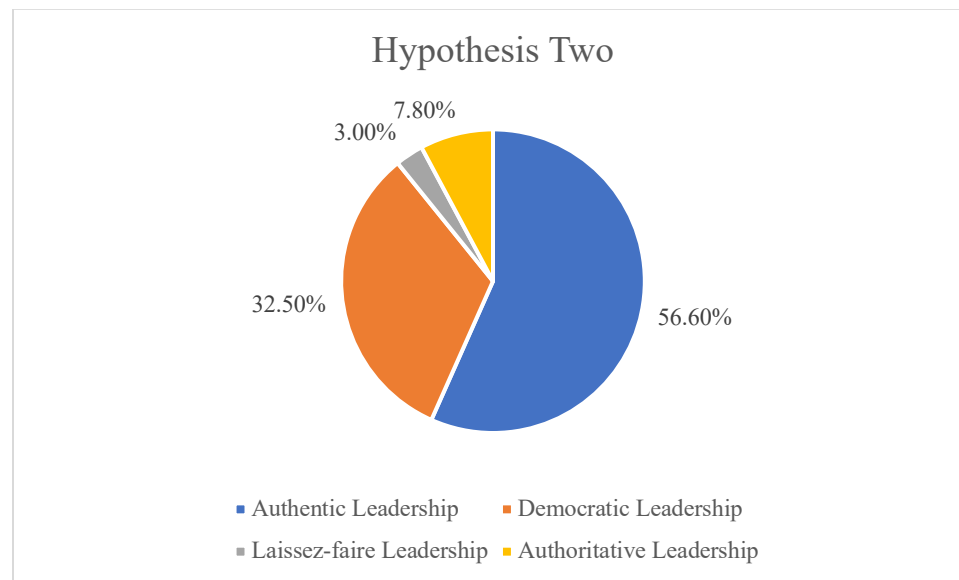
IV. DISCUSSION

Limitations & Future Directions

The final results of the research paper lined up with the proposed hypotheses in the introductory section of the paper. Participants would choose a specific definition of authentic leadership with themes of the leader being open, genuine, and kind to their employees. The results for the second hypothesis showed that in comparison to other leadership styles that authentic leadership is the more preferred leadership style.

There is a multitude of limitations in the study as the participants only came from

one concentrated area in Texas State. The research paper is geared to focus on people with work experience and a few of the participants did not have work experience. When volunteer experience was asked in the survey and most had some form of work or volunteer experience, but all of the participants are students in college. For most participants, they are working on their degree and many have not held subordinate positions, and this is another limitation of this study. This study would have worked better if the participants were selected from different businesses that range in size and positions held. The survey suffered from sampling bias because there was a lack of diversity in the participants as the participants were all from Texas State. This makes the study less likely to be generalizable to the population due to the sampling bias.

Another issue with the study in itself was when presented with free response banks with how participants define leadership and/or authentic leadership there was a form of the recency effect. For example, before a free response was given to the participants, they were given multiple-choice options of how they define leadership and authentic leadership. Thus, participants would give a similar free-response definition to the options that were presented in the multiple-choice questions. This was a problem found in the majority of the participants who completed the survey. The free response provided little information to analyze and was not necessary, but it did provide the researcher an idea that many of the participants are not familiar with the idea of authentic leadership.

The problem with the recency effect seen in the data could have been due to the design of the survey. The survey did not include randomization, which could have been used to limit the recency effect. Not only recency effect could have been a problem, but

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order bias could have been experienced because of the lack of randomization in the questions. If there was randomization in the survey it could have influenced the results slightly and the way the survey was designed could have led the respondent to react differently to the questions. Future studies could look at redesigning the survey to help with some of the limitations.

Future studies could look into providing not only confirming how authentic leadership is defined but providing real-life situations of how the style of authentic leadership is used in a work setting. Providing real-life examples in a study can help give context to the participants for them to fully understand not only how authentic leadership is defined but how it is used in a situation requiring it. Future studies should also broaden the range of participants by focusing strictly on older participants who have work experience in a subordinate position. It would be interesting to see if a longitudinal study could be done to see if a subordinate's definition of authentic leadership or leadership in general changes over time due to organizational influences.

Conclusions

The study was a success in proving the two hypotheses in the results. Authentic leadership was clearly defined by the participants and authentic leadership was preferred over other leadership styles from the previous literature. The implication of the study is it raises questions of not only how authentic leadership is defined, but how employees' definition of authentic leadership changes over time. With time and experience will subordinates have different opinions or views on leadership styles and do their personality traits have an influence on leadership definition and preference? Another aspect the study did not address was how does the type of occupation impact an

employees' leadership style and preference. Further studies will need to dive further into these questions and to improve upon the literature on authentic leadership.

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Figure 1. Defining Authentic Leadership

Hypothesis One

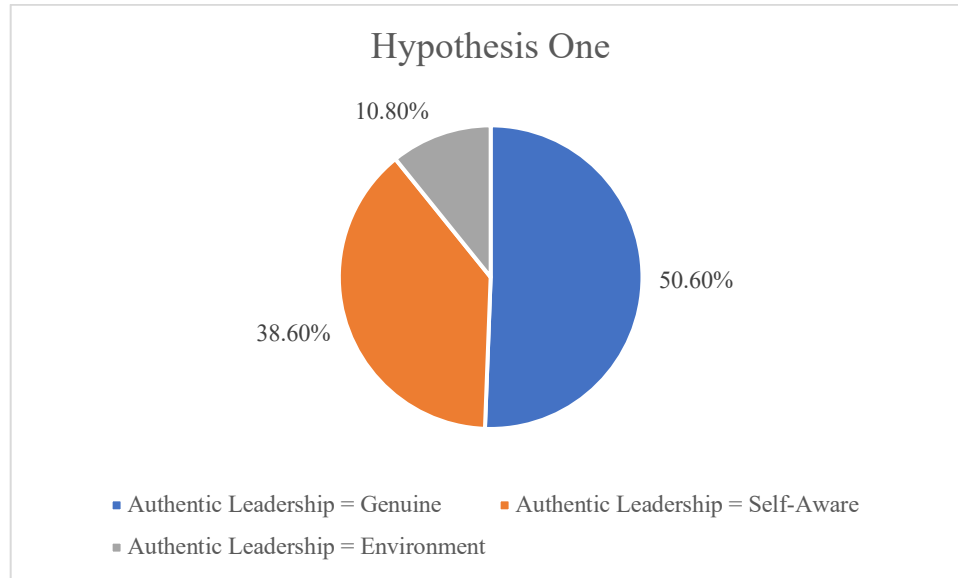- Authentic Leadership = Genuine
- Authentic Leadership = Self-Aware
- Authentic Leadership = Environment

Figure 2. Preference of Leadership Styles

Hypothesis Two

- Authentic Leadership
- Democratic Leadership
- Laissez-faire Leadership
- Authoritative Leadership