

## Meaningful Connections: Authentic Leadership and Trust

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the predictive relationship between authentic leadership and trust to supervisor. The data were collected from 104 employees from a variety of jobs and industries in a collectivistic culture, Turkey. In the scope of this study, existing scales are used to collect data. Employees completed the ten-itemed one factor solution trust to supervisor scale and sixteen-itemed four factor solution authentic leadership scale. Structural equation modeling was conducted to test the research hypothesis. The structural equation modeling results showed a strong positive relationship between authentic leadership and trust to supervisor. The results are discussed along with practical implication, suggestions for future research and limitations.

**Keywords:** *Trust to supervisor, Authentic leadership, Meaning, Self-awareness, Positive organizational behavior*

**JEL Classification:** M12, D23

### Anamlı Bağlantılar: Otantik Liderlik ve Güven

### Öz

Bu araştırmanın amacı otantik liderlik ile yöneticiye güven arasındaki yordayıcı ilişkiyi incelemektir. Araştırma verileri, çeşitli mesleklerde ve sektörlerde çalışan 104 kişilik bir örneklem grubundan toplulukçu kültürden Türkiye’de toplanmıştır. Araştırma kapsamında verileri toplamak için mevcut ölçekler kullanılmıştır. Çalışanlar on ifadeli tek faktör çözümlü yöneticiye güven ölçeğini ve onaltı ifadeli dört faktör çözümlü otantik liderlik ölçeğini doldurmuşlardır. Araştırma hipotezini test etmek için yapısal eşitlik modellemesi uygulanmıştır. Yapısal eşitlik modellemesi sonuçları otantik liderlik ile yöneticiye güven arasında güçlü olumlu ilişkinin var olduğunu göstermiştir. Sonuçlar tatbiki mümkün uygulamalar, gelecek araştırmalar için öneriler ve kısıtlılıklar çerçevesinde tartışılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Yöneticiye güven, Otantik liderlik, Anlam, Öz-farkındalık, Pozitif örgütsel davranış*



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## **Introduction**

Since the ancient times, philosophers and thinkers have been focusing on the concept of happiness and trying to understand the factors that make human beings satisfied and happy. Organizational behavior researchers have developed various models that explain the external/internal factors affecting the happiness. One of the most significant factors that affect well-being of the employees in work life is the leadership style of supervisors. According to Wayne, Shore, and Liden (1997: 103): *the exchange between an employee and his or her direct supervisor is the primary determinant of employee behavior*. Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) highlights reasons for the outcomes of attitudes and behaviors of leaders and employees. That is; various work roles, exchanges and negotiation (Dienesch & Liden, 1986) between leader and employee determine the relationship between the two. According to Blau (1964) social exchanges can only be developed under trust, loyalty and commitment and all of these are related with the attributions of actors of the exchange relationship (Konovsky & Pugh, 1994). Considering these issues, when leaders in organization know and act upon their true values and present their authentic self they would be likely to win the respect and trust of followers (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wensing, & Peterson, 2008). Following this idea, in the present study relationship between leader and follower was examined at the individual level, direct manager of an employee was accepted as the leader.

## **Literature Review**

### **Authentic Leadership and Trust to Supervisor**

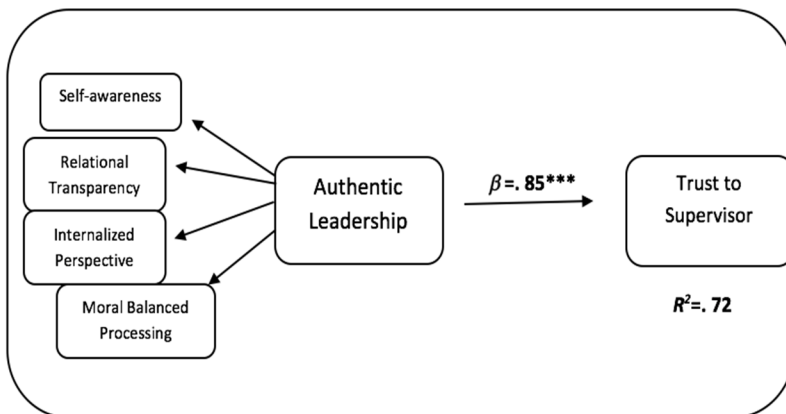
Authenticity, origins from Greek *authentikos*, is defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary as "true to one's own personality, spirit, or character". Researchers theorize that some leaders are seen as effective because they exhibit a style labeled "authentic leadership". Avolio, Luthans, and Walumbwa (2004: 4) define authentic leaders as *"those who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others' value/morale perspectives, knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and of high character"*. According to theoretical frame developed by Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May and Walumbwa (2005) authentic leadership has four dimensions: **self-awareness** refers to awareness of both individual's strengths and weaknesses as well as the multiple self-nature. Self-awareness shows the way of deriving meaning of the world that leads to self-perception of an individual over time (Walumbwa et al., 2008). **Relational transparency** refers to presenting one's authentic (real) self rather than opposed to a fake or distorted self to other people. This kind of behavior triggers trust through individuals that include sharing information openly and expression of individual's true feelings and ideas as well as trying to minimize displaying of improper emotions (Kernis, 2003). **Balanced processing** refers to an absence of denials, exaggerations, distortions, or ignorance of internal experiences, private knowledge, and external evaluations of the self as a basic element of authenticity (Kernis, 2003). Such leaders also analyze objectively all relevant data before making a decision. Finally, **internalized moral perspective** refers to what degree the leader sets a high standard for moral and ethical conduct for his/her decisions and behaviors. Many researchers

(Luthans & Avolio, 2003; May et al., 2003; Avolio & Gardner, 2005) claimed that the construct of authentic leadership needs to have a positive moral/ethical component. According to Gardner et al. (2005) it is expected that leaders who are self-aware, who engage in balanced processing of self-relevant and other information to arrive, who are more transparent in their relationship and who exhibit moral perspective would be perceived by their followers as a more authentic in leadership.

Trust refers to one's expectations, assumptions or beliefs about the likelihood that another's future actions will be beneficial, favorable, or at least not detrimental to one's interests (Robinson, 1996: 576). The importance of trust is labeled as interpersonal trust in organizations. According to Tzafrir and Dolan (2004) one of the most critical factor that affects leader-subordinate relations is interpersonal trust. Interpersonal trust is defined as "psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviors of another" (Rousseau et al., 1998). Mayer et al. (1995) found that supervisor's ability, benevolence and integrity are the three main characteristics that are seen as antecedent of trust to supervisor. It is believed that supervisors' attitudes and behaviors have great influence on building and maintaining trust between supervisors and subordinates. In order to create managerial trust, supervisor should adopt certain behaviors such as behavioral consistency, behavioral integrity, sharing and delegation of control, communication and showing of concern (Whitener et al., 1998). Börü (2001) also determined the characteristics of trustworthy supervisors and emphasized ten dimensions: supportive, honest and fair, team leader, creator of a positive work atmosphere, self-confident, easy going, information sharer, trustworthy, competent, empowering and caring.

Avolio and Gardner (2005) proposed that transparency in relationships would foster trust by making values, belief, desires explicit for subordinates. When supervisors act transparently and consistently, their subordinates can predict their supervisors' intentions and behaviors and build up positive expectations about them. Clapp-Smith, Vogelgesang, and Avey (2009) found that authentic leadership have positive effect on trust at the group level. Thus, direct relationship can be expected between authentic leadership and trust to supervisor.

### Research and Methodology Model and Research Goal



**Figure 1.** The Conceptual Model

As it is indicated in the Figure 1, authentic leadership is expected to increase employee's trust to supervisor. Thus, it is hypothesized that

**H1:** Authentic leadership has a positive contribution on employee's trust to supervisor

### **Data Collection and Participants**

The data of this study were collected from the employees who work in public and private companies in Turkey using an online survey with a convenience sampling method. The questionnaire involved three parts and each consisted of one variable and demographic information. The aim of the study, a full confidentiality guarantee was introduced in the first page of the questionnaire. The participants of this study were 104 employees (57 females, 47 males; 53 married, 51 single;  $M_{age} = 35.8$  years,  $SD = 8.2$ ). Respondents had experience in their firm with an average of 7.5 years, and 13 years in their total experience. Education level of employees were at and above graduate degree; fifty-one employees (49%) had graduate degrees; forty-one employees (39%) had master and doctorate degrees. Forty-five participants were the employees of public (43%) whereas fifty-nine of them were the private sector employees (57%). Forty-seven employees have management role in their firm (45%).

### **Measurement**

*Trust to supervisor* was measured with ten-itemed scale developed by İslamoğlu, Birsel and Börü (2007). Sample item for the scale is; my supervisor shares her/his knowledge. One-factor solution confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated that it fit the data well and the scale exhibited a high composite reliability and validity ( $CR = .95$ ;  $AVE = .64$ ). Responses were made on a six-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 6= strongly agree.

*Authentic leadership* was measured with sixteen-itemed scale developed by Gardner et al. (2005). It includes four dimensions: self-awareness (4 items), balanced processing (3 items), relational transparency (5 items), and internalized perspective (4 items). The scale exhibited a high composite reliability and validity ( $CR$  and  $AVE$  for Self-awareness and balanced processing= .94, .62;  $CR$  and  $AVE$  for transparency and internalized perspective = .89, .56). Responses were made on a six-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1= never to 6= always.

### **Analysis and Results**

Research model proposed in Figure 1 was tested through performing structural equation modeling (SEM). Global assessments of model fit were based on several goodness-of-fit statistics. Goodness-of-fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI), comparative fit index (CFI), normed fit index (NFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) were calculated.

### **Findings**

The means and standard deviations are shown in Table 1. The subscales of authentic leadership; transparency and internalized perspective and self-awareness and balanced processing showed means of 3.16 ( $sd = 1.21$ ) and 2.85 ( $sd = 2.85$ ) respectively.

The means of authentic leadership was 3.80 (sd = 1.05) and trust to supervisor was 3.38 (sd = 1.37). Correlations for research variables are shown in Table 2. The bivariate correlations indicate that all variable have positive and high relationship with each other. Authentic leadership dimensions are significantly inter-correlated. The highest correlation is seen between authentic leadership and its dimension of self-awareness and balanced processing. On the other hand, the lowest correlation is seen between trust to supervisor and transparency and internalized perspective.

**Table 1.** Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations

		Mean	Std. D.
1	Transparency & Internalized perspective	3.16	1.21
2	Self-awareness & Balanced Processing	2.85	1.17
3	Authentic Leadership	3.80	1.05
4	Trust to Supervisor	3.38	1.37

Note. N=104, \*\*p< .01 (2-tailed)

**Table 2.** Correlations between Variables

		1	2	3	4
1	Transperancy&Internalized perspective	-			
2	Self-awareness&Balanced Processing	.768**	-		
3	Authentic Leadership	.894**	.971**	-	
4	Trust to Supervisor	.724**	.855**	.859**	-

### Test of the Model

The structural model is evaluated via standardized path coefficients, their significance level (t-statistics) and R<sup>2</sup> estimates. The analysis resulted with GFI= .992, AGFI = .952, CFI = .998, .991, RMSEA = .050, TLI = .994, SRMR = .0590.

Table 3 represents the results of structural model. It was seen that authentic leadership has contribution on trust to supervisor ( $\beta = .85, p < .001$ ). The R<sup>2</sup> of trust to supervisor is 0.72 which shows that the exogenous variable authentic leadership have explanation power more than 70% of the variance of trust to supervisor. R<sup>2</sup> value is greater than the recommended value of 0.10 (Falk & Miller). In the light of these findings, hypothesis 1 is supported. It can be concluded that there is a positive relationship between authentic leadership and trust to supervisor.

**Table 3.** Hypothesis Test

Research hypothesis	$\beta$	t-value	R <sup>2</sup>	Results
Authentic Leadership-->Trust to supervisor	.85	16.566***	.72	Supported

\*\*\*p < .001

## Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, the contribution of authentic leadership on trust to supervisor has been investigated. The result indicates authentic leadership explain trust to supervisor. It can be concluded that authentic leader enables unconditional trust between the leader and his/her followers through introducing himself/herself as the way he/she is, being open and clear, being consistent with his/her values and behaviors. This kind of interaction helps followers to take responsibility more eagerly (Mayer et al., 1995) and thus, results in desired individual outcomes in organizations like trust to supervisor.

This study suggests that as the employees perceive their leaders as more authentic they would likely to trust to leaders more. In organizations, in order to build trust to leaders, characteristics of authentic leadership can be enhanced via trainings or creating engaged and ethical organizational culture/climate by top management. Isaksen (2007) suggests that required climate creation is the responsibility of leadership within any organization. In future studies, organizational reciprocal relationship between organizational climate and authentic leadership can be studied.

One of the most crucial limitations of this study is the number of sample. Though 104 individuals were included from different sectors, this figure is not enough for the generalizability of the study. Data is collected at one point of time. Therefore, causal relationship is not available. Another limitation is the term "authentic leadership" is a relatively new concept and there have not been adequate empirical studies on this concept. Though the Turkish version of the authentic leadership scale was first introduced by Gardner et al. (2005) we do not have sufficient information about the cultural compatibility of the scale.

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## Özet

Bireylerin özlerinde iyi olma ve iyi olana dönüşme eğilimleri olduğunu öne süren pozitif psikoloji, örgüt temelinde örgütün güçlü ve olumlu yönlerine odaklanarak en iyi olana ulaşmayı hedef alır. Bireyin kişiliğine, ruhuna ve karakterine uygun davranması olarak tanımlanan otantiklik pozitif psikoloji olarak ele alınırken pozitif örgütsel davranış alanında otantik liderlik tarafından düşüncelerinin, davranışlarının derinlemesine farkında olan, başkaları tarafından da değer/ahlak bakışı açısına, bilgisine, güçlü yönlerine sahip olduğu şeklinde algılanan ve bunları nerede kullanacağını bilen, kendisine güvenen, umutlu, iyimser, dirençli ve ahlaklı birey olarak ele alınmaktadır. Otantikliğin temelinde kendini bilme ve her koşulda bu bakış açısı ile davranma yatar.

Otantik liderlik dört boyut ile ele alınmıştır. İlk boyut olan öz-farkındalık bireyin güçlü ve zayıf yanlarının farkında olması, kişiliği ve duyguları hakkında bilgi sahibi olmasını içermektedir. Dolayısı ile otantik liderler erişilebilir ve gerçek hedefler koyarlar. Otantik olmak bireyin değerleri, duyguları ve inançları temelinde ve kendi benliği ile uyum içerisinde hareket edebilmesi ile ilintili olduğu vurgulanmaktadır. İkinci boyut olan ilişkilerde şeffaflık bireyin diğer insanlar ile kurduğu ilişkilerde gerçek olması "sahte olmaması" anlamını içermektedir. Hesap verilebilirlik durumunun vuku bulduğu ilişkilerin baskın olması lider-üye ilişkisine ve daha sağlam paydaş ilişkilerine olumlu yönde katkıda

bulunur. Üçüncü boyut olan bilgiyi dengeli ve tarafsız değerlendirme bireyin kendisi hakkındaki değerlendirmeyi inkâr etmeden, abartmadan, çarpıtmadan veya görmezden gelmeden yapması olarak ifade edilmektedir. Bireyin olumlu ve olumsuz yönlerini kabullenmesi ve objektif bir şekilde değerlendirmesini içermektedir. Bahsi geçen objektiflik neticesinde takipçilerde adalet algısı oluşmakta ve lider takdir edilmektedir. Dördüncü boyut içselleştirilmiş ahlak anlayışı olarak ifade edilirken bireyin karar alırken yüksek ahlaki standartlar ve yetenekler ile hareket edebilmesi olarak tanımlanmıştır. Öz-farkındalığı, ilişkilerde şeffaflığı, bilgiyi dengeli ve tarafsız değerlendirmesi, içselleştirilmiş ahlak anlayışı yüksek olan liderler çalışanlar tarafından otantik olarak değerlendirilmektedir.

Güven "bir tarafın diğer bir tarafın çıkarlarına zarar vermeyeceğine ve aleyhinde davranmayacağına dair beklentileri, varsayımları veya inançları" olarak tanımlanmıştır. Lider-üye ilişkisinde ise güven çoklukla kişiler arası güven olarak ele alınmaktadır. Kişilerarası güven ise "karşı tarafın niyet ve davranışlarına dair olumlu beklentiye dayalı savunmasız olmayı kabul etmeyi içeren psikolojik durum" olarak tanımlanmıştır. Yöneticinin yeteneği, yardımseverliği, karakter bütünlüğü yöneticiye güvenin temel öncülerinden olarak gösterilmiştir. İlişkilerde şeffaflık yönetici hakkında çalışanlara daha çok bilgi vermesi açısından kişilerarası güveni arttırmaktadır. Ayrıca, otantik lider grup düzeyinde güveni arttırmaktadır. Bundan dolayı, otantik lider ile güven arasında doğrudan olumlu bir ilişki olması beklenmektedir.

Araştırmanın örneklemini kolayda ulaşılabilir örneklem yöntemi ile kamu ve özel sektörde çalışan 104 katılımcı oluşturmaktadır. Yöneticiye güven ölçeği 10 ifadeli ölçek ile ölçülmüştür. Doğrulayıcı faktör analizi (DFA) sonuçları ölçeğin yüksek bileşik geçerlilik ve güvenilirliğe sahip olduğunu göstermiştir. Otantik liderlik on altı ifadeli ölçek ile ölçülmüştür. DFA sonuçları ölçeğin yüksek bileşik geçerlilik ve güvenilirliğe sahip olduğunu göstermiştir.

Korelasyon sonuçları otantik liderlik ile yöneticiye güven arasında olumlu ve yüksek ilişki olduğunu göstermiştir. Yapısal eşitlik modelin (YEM) sonuçları modelin veri ile uyumlu olduğunu göstermiştir. YEM sonuçları otantik liderliğin yöneticiye güven üzerinde anlamlı katkıya sahip olduğuna dair kurulan hipotezi doğrulamıştır.

Yunan felsefesinde, kendini bilme olarak ifade edilen otantiklik örgüt temelinde bireyin kendi alanında usta olması olarak ifade edilmektedir. İnsan kaynağının, değer-davranış bütünlüğünün çok daha fazla önem kazandığı günümüzde öne çıkan en önemli örgütsel değişkenlerden biri liderliktir. Otantik liderliğin yöneticiye güven üzerindeki katkısının incelendiği bu araştırma sonucunda otantik liderliğin yöneticiye güven üzerinde açıklayıcılığa sahip olduğu bulunmuştur. Olduğu gibi görünen, açık ve net olan, değerlerine göre davranan lider, çalışan ile güven ilişkisi içinde olmaktadır. Bir başka deyişle; dürüst, tutarlı, bütünlük içinde tutum sergileyen, söylediği ile yaptığı bir olan liderler kendisine karşı güven duygusunun oluşmasını sağlamaktadır.

Araştırma sonuçları, örgüt ortamında önem ihtiva eden güven kavramının oluşmasında otantik liderliğin elzem olduğunu vurgularken bir yandan da otantik liderliğin kurum içi eğitim, etik/adanmış örgüt kültürü ve iklimi ile ortaya çıkabileceğini önermektedir.

Araştırmanın en önemli kısıtlılığı örneklem sayısının yeterli düzeyde olmayışından dolayı sonuçların genellenmesinin mümkün olmamasıdır. Daha geniş bir örneklem grubu ile genellenebilir çıkarımlar yapılabilecektir. Veriler tek seferde toplandığından ve araştırma kesitsel olduğundan sebep-sonuç ilişkisi yapılamamaktadır. Bir başka kısıtlılık ise otantik liderliğin görece yeni bir kavram olması ve hakkında yeterince görgül araştırma olmamasıdır. Bu bakımdan, daha kapsamlı ve özgün saha araştırmalarına ihtiyaç duyulmaktadır.