

## Research Article

### Authentic Leadership: An Emerging Issue in Project Management

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**Abstract:** Leadership has been a feature of general organizations but in project management much space is empty. New styles of leadership are being introduced and project leadership also can't escape. With the advancement in project management project leadership requires new effective behaviors in organizations if it is to remain relevant. Interestingly, still project leadership has no separate wing of theory under the subject of project management but striving to strengthen the concept as distinct branch of knowledge. The reason behind that is project management and project managers have long been considered as a part of technical field rather being a part of social sciences. Different leadership styles have been discussed with some empirical support and there is need to adopt the new styles like authentic leadership in project management. Although authentic leadership is at its initial stages but produced positive results in studies discussed so far. In this study importance of authentic leadership has been discussed theoretically as compared to other contemporary theories.

**Keywords:** Authentic leadership, project leadership, project success, transformational leadership

## INTRODUCTION

Project management and project managers have been features of human existence since people started to produce goods and serve the communities (Brooks, 1995; Yourdon, 2004). Project management plays an important role in the success of a project as well as in success of an organization (Meredith and Mantel, 2010). As compared to other fields of management sciences such as behavioral sciences and financial management the literature of project management is less acknowledged (Shenhar and Dvir, 2007a). Likewise, Kloppenborg and Opfer (2002) discussed that during four decades from 1960-2000 only more than 3000 studies were published in leading journals of social sciences which were less than 3% of total publications. Since the early 1990s the research trend toward project management has been accelerating (Greenberg, 2005; Shenhar and Dvir, 2007b). Projects are always temporary in nature and are different from each other; therefore, managing projects in prevailing systems require diverse approaches, demanding special skills and knowledge from project managers (Toor and Ofori, 2008). In extant literature of management, leadership has been accepted as an influential source for organizational success but in project management, the role of project managers' leadership still needs to be discussed in more detail (Turner *et al.*, 2009).

The study discusses the features of authentic leadership and attempted to highlight the importance of this leadership style as value addition in the family of leadership behaviors. Avolio and Gardner (2005) discussed that authentic leader is self-aware, possess high moral values and guided by a set of principles; is viewed as honest and transparent in their actions and takes balanced and fair decisions. For team building project leaders need to adopt some ethics, respect for others, trust and no misuse of power (Kloppenborg and Petrick, 1999). These behaviors are being discussed in authentic leadership. As George (2003) defined authentic leadership as being honest to yourself and developing an image of the person that who you are. Authentic leadership is wider than transformational and ethical leadership rather it incorporates some elements of both these leadership styles (Avolio and Gardner, 2005).

Structure of the paper contains some discussions of past, present and future project leadership then discusses and compares authentic leadership with two popular approaches: transactional and transformational with respect to project management. The next section explores that why there is need of authentic leadership in project management and project success. After that some discussions and conclusions are part of the text with a section containing limitations and future directions of the study.

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**Projects leadership perspective:** According to Hobday (2000) the projects are becoming popular across the globe in different type of organizations. Out of them some are pure project-based organizations, for instance theatre or film productions industries (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2007) the organizations carrying temporary project teams and organizations involved in events management activities (Thiry and Deguire, 2007). In these types of organizations, the traditional style of management is found as non-existent and sometime practiced at low level. Likewise Bredin (2008) concluded that in project-based corporations employees are engaged and involved with variety of different project teams. Others have termed these organizations as project based organizations (Meredith and Mantel, 2010) where the employees are continuously engaged with different types of projects. Such organizations always search and try to retain project managers having sound technical and administration experience along with leadership competencies. Hence there are also some other organizations where functional and project lines work side by side called matrix or mixed organization (Meredith and Mantel, 2010). Such organizations establish projects teams purposely in addition to functional line to get the benefits and to solve complex problems (Gareis, 1989). Moreover, some of the functional managers of traditional organizations actually manage the projects as part of their functional management role while being unaware of the concept of project management (Huemann *et al.*, 2007). Furthermore, Gaddis (1959) identified the new tasks and defined some important characteristics of a project manager. He discussed that project managers deal with both business and technological matters simultaneously. Gaddis (1959) depicted a picture of project manager as jack-of-all-trades who is capable of handling with diverse people, making budgets, meeting the deadlines, dealing with resources and establishing the relationship with internal and external stakeholders for the success of the organization and projects as well.

**Project leadership past, present, future:** According to Lloyd-Walker and Walker (2011) in the last century project leadership has been discussed with reference to iron triangle (i.e., time, cost and quality) and Return on Investment (ROI). Moreover, they asserted that project leadership is changing in unanimity with all other disciplines which refers that a generational change in leadership is happening, as the Baby Boomers are handing over the responsibility for project leadership to the next i.e. called generation Y (Gen Y) and generation X (Gen X) people. Three of these groups have shaped values and aspirations in very different on texts. In addition, on the basis of Baby Boomers' management style at that time, they were called effective project leaders and not necessarily called so effective in this emerging era dominated by project managers of Gen X and Gen Y (Lloyd-Walker and Walker, 2011). Likewise, a study was undertaken by Sirias *et al.* (2007)

with sample size of 434 people in general management context, after conducting the factor analysis they examined the generational effects on team work within a changing workforce. According to their findings they discussed that these are teams who build the organizational values, already some of the Gen Y workers are handling project teams-and some of the oldest members are now turning thirty (Lloyd-Walker and Walker, 2011). They further discussed that value change is occurring, because of generational or evolutionary context of the contemporary era. Similarly, Twenge and Campbell (2008) concluded that, "The profits of the twenty first century will go to businesses that can harness the unique traits of Generation Y to their benefit and that of their company."

**Important categories of leadership:** Leadership has been discussed in many layers and with many theories since its inception. It is very difficult to discuss all of the theories of leadership in one paper therefore, history and evolution cannot be summed in single study, hence the article only focuses on the three contemporary theories of leadership; transactional, transformational and authentic leadership especially with reference to project managers leadership.

There are three well known theories of leadership in 21<sup>st</sup> century i.e., transformational leadership, transactional leadership and authentic leadership. Bass (1985) differentiated transformational leadership from transactional leadership for the first time in the history of leadership studies. He closely observed leadership and developed different sets of leaders' characteristics. In addition, he explored different types of leadership behaviors suitable in different organizations that enabled the other researchers toward transactional and transformational leadership theories and still these types of personalities are practiced in various organizations.

Likewise, Robbins *et al.* (2009) discussed that when transformational leaders provide obvious guideline to their followers and define everyone's role clearly, this type of personalities are suitable for static environment. However, this type of leadership is mainly based on contingent reinforcement (Muenjohn, 2008). Bass (1985) argued that transactional leadership deal with three main components. First is 'contingent reward' which refers to exchange of rewards among leaders and followers in which good performance is rewarded and poor performance is punished. Second is 'management by exception' (passive) which states that a leader intervenes in a group only when specific task or standards are not met (Bass and Avolio, 1997). Third is 'management by exception' (active) when leaders monitor their followers and detect mistakes. Moreover, Bass and Avolio (1997) discussed Laissez-faire leadership behaviors as non-leadership. This type of leadership behavior exists when leaders avoid resolving conflicts, have poor decision making skills and avoid clarifying the expectations.

On the other side, Robbins and Coulter (2007) discussed that transformational leaders have the ability to arise the interest of the followers by defining goals and task requirements clearly. In addition, transactional leaders possess a charisma and leaders can get extraordinary results with and through their followers. Furthermore, Ergeneli *et al.* (2007) emphasized that theories of transformational leadership are considered as most advanced theories in the sense that they have widened the scope of leadership theory by recognizing the importance of emotional, symbolic and highly motivating behaviors that they appeal directly to follower's minds and hearts and account for results over and above ordinary leadership. Moreover, they discussed that transformational behaviors of leaders are associated with four major categories: First is called 'idealized Influence'; when a leader perform as a role model for his or her followers and share common visions, encourage them and provide them a strong sense of purpose. Further in 'inspirational motivation' a leader expresses the importance of desired objectives of the organization and motivates the followers for high level of expectation from them. Third type is known as 'intellectual stimulation' which refers to a concept that when a leader challenge the normal ideas of followers for solving the problems and present them with innovative ideas. Finally, 'individualized consideration' is that when a leader spends more time in teaching and coaching the followers on individual basics for better performance. Similarly, transformational leadership is also considered as charismatic leadership as it has considerable emotional appeal to the subordinates and possesses ability to inspire them in a particular way (Ergeneli *et al.*, 2007).

In addition, authentic leadership has been discussed by several authors, as conceptualized from the arena of positive psychology (Seligman, 2002), authenticity has been defined as "owning one's personal experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, preferences, or beliefs, processes captured by the injunction to know oneself" and behaving in accordance with the true self (Harter, 2002). Moreover, Robbins *et al.* (2009) asserted that former leadership theories have contributed well enough to understand the leadership more effectively and journey is still continued. In recent approaches of 21<sup>st</sup> century authentic leadership is one of them. They further argued that authentic leaders know about themselves that who they are, know about what they believe in and their values and they practice those beliefs and values candidly and openly. These leaders would be considered as ethical people.

Furthermore, due to recent emergence of the concept there is lack of research on authentic leadership (Robbins *et al.*, 2009). A charismatic or transformational leader may possess a vision, they can communicate it influentially, but that vision may not be always true, or the leaders may be imposing their own

needs or pleasures (Ilies *et al.*, 2005). Therefore, role of authentic leadership can't be ignored. According to authentic leadership theory, the leaders must exhibit the core components of authentic leadership to lead effectively such as relational transparency, self-awareness; internalized regulation also called as authentic behavior, positive moral perspective and balanced processing of information (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2008).

These three leadership styles are considered as modern leadership style of the century. However, transactional leadership is also called the traditional leadership theory and may still be practiced effectively in highly task-oriented projects (Yang *et al.*, 2013). Though, Price (2003) reported the weaknesses of transactional leadership as: "transactional leadership adopts a markedly uncritical view of the selves engaged in these exchanges. This form of leadership appeals to us simply as we are whatever our desires and preferences might be and regardless of their perhaps questionable normative force."

However, since 1990s trend towards transformational leadership approaches have been found better with the implementation of skilled knowledge work. Moreover, skillful knowledge workers may not get adjusted when they are treated as machines. They like to work in an environment where the situations are chosen wisely from a wide gamut of possible responses (Lloyd-Walker and Walker, 2011).

George *et al.* (2007) asserted that "authentic leaders demonstrate a passion for their purpose, practice their values consistently and lead with their hearts as well as their heads. They establish long-term, meaningful relationships and have the self-discipline to get results. They know who they are." This view of leadership explains that leaders use the same lenses for their practices, actions and behaviors.

They were Toor and Ofori (2008) who for the first time discussed the concept of authentic leadership in construction industry and called for more future studies in the field of project management. They provided a comprehensive review of literature in their paper regarding project leadership with respect to authentic leadership. Despite very few have considered their call seriously. Moreover, Toor and Ofori (2008) claimed that in construction industry there is need for new project leadership. This is not true because authentic leadership is not only important for project leaders in construction industry but also for other project leaders practicing in different other industries. Therefore, it is argued that scope of authentic leadership is more widened as compared to traditional iron triangle, but also possess knowledge sharing and retention of knowledge, ethical behavior that not only promises the project success and it equally contributes toward the organizational success.

Lloyd-Walker and Walker (2011) asserted that just achieving project efficiency is not sufficient for long term business growth, because stakeholders of the projects are now not satisfied with the traditional measures of success, other important success measures such as impact on customers and project teams are also considered important. The ultimate purpose of the projects is to deliver the benefits to all stakeholders (Thiry, 2005; Bradley, 2006) the statement indicates that these are not only the customers who appreciate a benefit from project, the parent organization is also benefited directly or indirectly, in doing so the organizations learn and build their present and future capabilities (Cooper *et al.*, 2002; Sense, 2003; Maqsood *et al.*, 2004).

In addition, another purpose for investing in projects, particularly in new ones, organizations embrace new learning opportunity that enable the organization to tackle the future effectively (Brady and Davies, 2004). Toor and Ofori (2008) discussed the kind of leadership centrally focused on the construction industry; rather authentic leadership can also be applied to several other projects. Additionally project leadership has also been studied in various organizations such as, (IT) services projects (Thite, 2000; Lee-Kelley and Leong, 2003; Yang *et al.*, 2012), construction projects (Yang *et al.*, 2013) and clinical research projects (Kangis and Lee-Kelley, 2000), design consulting projects (Cheung *et al.*, 2001) and in complex projects of NASA (Mulenberg, 2000).

**Why authentic leadership is better?** Authentic leadership is a part of leaders' particular behavior that refers to "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" (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2008). In simple words, under authentic leadership, leaders represent the extent to which they are aware of and shows clarity and openness in their behaviors toward others by sharing the needed information to take effective decisions, accepting inputs from others and revealing their, personal values, sentiments and motives in a way that can enable followers to assess more accurately the morality and competence of the leader's actions (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2010).

The overview of the core components transformational and ethical leadership theories explains that there is a conceptual overlap between these two theories but authentic leadership has distinction over transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is also better than authentic leadership in some behaviors. For the clarification of the reader, Table 1 has been adapted from Walumbwa *et al.* (2008).

Table 1: Adapted from Walumbwa *et al.* (2008)

Components of leadership	Authentic Leadership	Transformational leadership
Authentic leadership (discussed by Walumbwa <i>et al.</i> (2008)		
Leader self-awareness	⊗	*
Relational transparency	⊗	⊗
Internalized moral perspective	⊗	*
Balanced processing	⊗	⊗
Transformational leadership (discussed by Bass and Avolio (1995)		
Idealized influence	⊗	⊗
Intellectual stimulation		⊗
Inspirational motivation		⊗
Individualized consideration		⊗

⊗: Focal component; \*: minor or implicit component

In addition, as per recent literature review, the definition of authentic leadership extends to several underlying dimensions (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2008). Luthans and Avolio (2003) defined authentic leadership "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 behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development". Moreover, several other authors have discussed authentic leadership with different aspects for instance, positive psychological capacities of optimism, resilience hope and confidence (Cooper *et al.*, 2005; Shamir and Eilam, 2005; Sparrowe, 2005). Additionally, Ilies *et al.* (2005) suggested a more focused authentic leadership model based on four components from the conception of Kernis (2003) that included unbiased processing, self-awareness, authentic relational orientation and authentic behavior/acting. Similarly, Shamir and Eilam (2005) added that the leaders with following attributes are called authentic leaders:

- The role of the leader is a central component of their self-concept
- They have achieved a high level of self-resolution or self-concept clarity
- Their goals are self-concordant
- Their behavior is self-expressive

Moreover, authentic leadership theory is at its early stages of conceptualization (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2010). However, roots of authenticity construct are found in psychology (Rogers, 1959, 1963) and philosophy (Harter, 2002; Heidegger, 1962). Likewise, the construct of authenticity in recent years, has been refined and clarified through some empirical research and theoretical developments (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Kernis, 2003; Ryan and Deci, 2001, 2003). Kernis (2003) after reviewing the comprehensive literature advanced a developmental model which stated that when individuals accept themselves with their weaknesses and strengths and display themselves with

high levels of stable, self-esteem is called to be authentic. He further discussed that these individuals are also open heart and are free from defensive biases as compared to less mature persons. Moreover, they are transparent and have close relationships with others and exhibit authentic behaviors which reflect the consistency among their beliefs, values and actions. In addition, Ryan and Deci (2003) opined that those individuals who possess strong internal values, as opposed to inducements, external threats, rewards and social expectations.

### CONCLUSION

This study focused only on theoretical investigation of authentic leadership construct. In addition a comparison has been made between three contemporary models of leadership in project management and authentic leadership is more recent among them. With the help of prior literature, that authentic leadership theory is at its initial stages and can be applied effectively in different types of organizations. In addition, earlier studies on project management focused on technical competencies of project managers such as administrative and technical skills and few studies discussed the project manager role as leader and their competencies for project success. It is the need of the time that project success rates may increase gradually because 30% of the global economy is project based (Turner, 2009). For the reasons the countries no matter they are developed or developing trying to save their projects from failure because the succeeded projects not only benefit the organizations but also contribute to the national economies (Lewis *et al.*, 2002).

**Limitations and future directions:** The study is theoretical in nature and lacking the empirical support. The studies with empirical support produce more valuable results and conclusions. The empirical findings can agree or produce some contrary results with the available literature conducted so far. Therefore, authentic leadership needs further attention to be discussed empirically and theoretically to handle with the issue of generalizability. Moreover, the project leadership behaviors must be studied in different industries and sectors especially there is a need to discuss the project leadership in developing countries where the situation is worst as compared to advanced countries.

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