

AUTHENTIC LEADERS AND THEIR EMPLOYEES' POWER

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***Abstract:** Authentic leaders have faith in their employees and that is also the reason why the delegate more responsibilities on them. That is the reason why we hypothesized that authentic leaders in fact empower their employees or with other words, they give them power. Through our research we wanted to understand how being under authentic leadership determines individual's formal and informal power in an organization or a company. We recognized a certain influence of authentic leadership on individual's informal and formal power.*

***Keywords:** Authentic Leader, Leadership, Power, Organization, Employees.*

1. Introduction

Power is an important part of our lives; as well personal as organizational. Power can basically be defined as the ability to implement ones will. The expanded definition of power states that it is the ability to influence various outcomes by mobilizing resources (human and material) to get things done within a web of relations [REES 1999]. Empowerment is the process by which managers help others to acquire and use the power needed to make decisions affecting themselves and their work [SCHERMERHORN ET AL. 2002].

Authentic leadership is the latest evolutionary stage in leadership development and emphasizes the leader's authenticity. For a leader to be authentic we believe that one should have an in depth knowledge of the people with whom he is working which can be achieved through communication.

The aim of our study is to present, explore and outline the relationship between authentic leadership in organizations and the power or empowerment that the employees have because they are working under such kind of leadership. Hence, the focus of this study is on the impact that authentic leadership has on employee's power. We examine the relationship between these two concepts because leadership is a key mechanism to make things happen. More than ever before, managers in progressive organizations are expected to be good at (and highly comfortable with) empowering the people with whom they work [SCHERMERHORN ET AL. 2002].

We will determine the correlation between various aspects of authentic leadership and employee's power and will also test how are employee's formal and informal power determined through the variables that we use to determine the construct of authentic leadership.

2. Power and Empowerment

Power is in its basic form the ability to get someone to do something you want done or the ability to make things happen in the way you want them to [SCHERMERHORN ET AL. 2002] and in addition it is the ability to resist unwanted influence in return [WAGNER & HOLLENBACK 2010]. Individuals who have power in an organizational environment often have power in personal lives and vice versa.

We could say that power concerns the capacity of individuals to exert their will over others. Traditionally power is viewed as a “thing” that is always associated with resource dependency [ASIMAKOU 2009].

In a company or in an organization there are basically two kinds of power: formal and informal power [MINTZBERG 1983]. The distinction between the two kinds of power is not always clear. Formal power comes from the organization’s hierarchy in which the relations between individuals are adjusted to convey the relative authority of employees [ROSENBAUM 1980]. Formal power on an individual’s level is composed from: legitimate power, reward power, coercive power, information power [GEORGE & JONES 2008].

Aside from the formal relations in an organization there are also informal relations based on which informal power is developed. Informal power on the other hand is less defined and often more important than formal power. On the one hand it is connected to formal power, but on the other it is affected with interpersonal connections to other employees and even to the outside world. Informal power on an individual’s level is composed from: expert power, reference power, charismatic power [GEORGE & JONES 2008].

An individual’s power is very relative; one could have it one day and lose it on another [MINTZBERG 1983]. Or one could have power in one group, and have none in another group of people simultaneously. Robbins [SENIOR 2002] argues: “Power has been described as the last dirty word. People who have it deny it, people who want it try not to appear to be seeking it, and those who are good at getting it are secretive about how they got it.”

Power is difficult to measure, since it can only be perceived. That is also the reason why can an individual’s power in organizations be best assessed with observations [FINN 1995]. However, on the other hand that is a long process, sometimes even subjective and would take a lot of man-hours to implement on a larger sample. That is why the power evaluating process takes part only on smaller samples at a time; for instance one company or one branch of a company at a time.

From the social-psychological perspective, a person’s behavior is affected by his or her behavioral intentions, which are in turn influenced by an attitude and set of perceptions. Behavioral intention is regarded as a key antecedent in determining one’s future behavior [WU, CHANG, & GUO 2008].

Empowerment is the process by which managers help others to acquire and use the power. Higher levels of empowerment motivate employees, increase organizational attachment and improve job satisfaction [COLEMAN 2009]. The willingness to share power with others is also a common theme in the profile of successful managers.

3. Authentic leadership

People are divided into two groups: the leaders and those who are led. Vast majority of people is led and those who have the desire to be leaders need power to gain followers. Leadership facilitates quality relationships and balances power [PINCHOT 1992] which does not mean that everyone understands what leaders do and why it matters [HALLIDAY 2009]. It is essential to understand that having power is necessary to achieve desired outcomes [PFEFFER 1992].

A look at the taxonomy of the concept of authentic leadership will show us that leading researchers from the field of organizational behavior are interested in it [LUTHANS AND

AVOLIO 2003; GEORGE 2003; AVOLIO ET AL. 2004; GARDNER AND SCHERMERHORN 2004; AVOLIO AND GARDNER 2005; GARDNER ET AL. 2005; ILIES ET AL. 2005; SPARROWE 2005; COPPER ET AL. 2005]. First Slovenian researchers to dedicate the attention to authentic leadership and development of positive organizational identity of learning organization are Penger [2006], Peterlin [2007] and Dimovski et al. [2009]. Multi-dimensional influence of authentic leadership that reaches all employees is the main reason why so many researchers are looking into it.

Latest empirical and qualitative researchers of organizational behavior and leadership [AVOLIO AND GARDNER 2005] emphasize that we need to concentrate on the main construct of all positive forms of leadership and its development - authentic leadership [AVOLIO ET AL. 2004]. Scientists [LUTHANS AND AVOLIO 2003] are becoming aware of the fact that in order to achieve and retain desirable results of business, strategy of authentic leadership development at the level of strategic business organizational units is necessary [GARDNER AND SCHERMERHORN 2004; COOPER ET AL. 2005]. Lately (after the year 2004) research of the concept of authentic leadership is intensively gaining attention. Authentic leaders are capable to motivate commitment, satisfaction and participation, all of which is necessary in order for employees to constantly improve their performance [AVOLIO ET AL. 2005].

The construct of authenticity has been researched already by ancient Greek philosophers as »know thy-self«, and »thy true self«. The essence of authenticity is knowing one-self, accepting and remaining who you really are. Instead of accepting authenticity as a theoretical construct it is better to understand it as element of continuum where leaders and their followers are becoming more and more authentic the more they are preserving their true values, preferences and identity [COPPER ET AL. 2005]. Authentic leaders follow five dimensions [GEORGE 2003]: understanding their purpose, practicing solid values, leading with heart, establishing connected relationships and demonstrating self-discipline. Authentic leaders are people with high level of authenticity: they know who they are; what they believe in; what they appreciate; and in interaction with others they act in accordance with their values and beliefs [AVOLIO AND GARDNER 2005]. Authentic leaders are self-confident, full of hope and trust, optimism and ethical [COOPER ET AL. 2005].

Main advantage of authentic leadership is the chance for constant development that its environment and philosophy enables [GARDNER AND SCHERMERHORN 2004]. Crucial challenge of authentic leadership demonstrates itself in the awareness of leaders that an individual is the most important part in the organizational network of knowledge [STORR 2004; SPARROWE 2005]. Authentic leaders need to identify the advantages of their followers and help them to develop them and connect them with common goal, purpose, vision and identity of the organization. Even though authentic leadership may have direct impact on the behavior of followers [JENSEN AND LUTHANS 2006; ILIES ET AL. 2005; GARDNER ET AL. 2005; HARVEY ET AL. 2006], its impact is much stronger and motivating if followers identify with their leaders.

Authentic leader's dedication to progress and development, starting at one's self, works as an indispensable example for co-workers. Authentic leaders need to be committed to constant learning that requires self-changing, high level of motivation for learning from one's mistakes, emotional power for dealing with fear and unpredictability, ability for establishing connected relationships and demonstrating self-discipline and self-trust.

4. Hypotheses

We will explore the influence of one's superiors "authentic leadership" with respect to an individual's formal and informal power in an organization or company. Our hypotheses are:

H1: Individual's informal power is dependent of his superiors "authentic leadership" properties.

H2: Individual's formal power is dependent of his superiors "authentic leadership" properties.

H3: The correlation between formal and informal power is positive.

5. Methodology

5.1 Sample

Participants in this study were selected randomly. The sample consisted of 283 men and 282 women (n=565). The age range of the respondents was between 21 and 66 years. The average age of the respondents was 36.38 years.

5.2 Instruments and Variables

The questionnaire was of a closed type and contained 12 questions referring to the following:

- 1) General data
 - A. Age
 - B. Gender
- 2) Authentic leadership (What is your leader like?)
 - C. Leader has a positive attitude towards work and colleagues.
 - D. Leader is optimistic and has a strong personal self-image - a strong "I".
 - E. Leader gives hope for the development of solutions.
 - F. Leader builds trust among colleagues.
 - G. Leader has a lot of psychological support from colleagues.
 - H. Leader has a high degree of personal self-esteem.
 - I. Leader is primarily focused at finding the positive values of colleagues.
 - J. I personally identify myself with the leader (we have "the same view of the world").
- 3) Individual's informal power within a company or organization
 - K. I have power.
- 4) Individual's formal power within a company or organization
 - L. Placement in the Companies' or Organizations' Hierarchy.

Questions from 3 to 11 were measured on a scale ranging from 1 to 5 where: 1 – always false; 2 – mostly false; 3 – nor true nor false; 4 – mostly true; 5 – always true.

The following hierarchical scale was used for question L: (1) manual worker, (2) head of the shift, (3) routine administrative staff, (4) non-routine administrative staff, (5) expert, (6) lower management, (7) middle management, (8) top management.

For questions 3 to 12 we calculated the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The value calculated is 0.775, which indicates great reliability of measurement. With regard to the composition and characteristics of the sample, we believe that it is representative.

6. Results and Discussion

6.1 Results

We begin by constructing the frequency tables for the variables that we have used in our research.

Tab. 1: Frequency tables for the variables

	n=565		Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
	Valid	Missing					
Authentic leadership							
C	565	0	3,73	4	0,861	1	5
D	565	0	3,64	4	0,874	1	5
E	565	0	3,63	4	0,851	1	5
F	565	0	3,52	4	0,886	1	5
G	565	0	3,39	3	0,869	1	5
H	565	0	3,61	4	0,850	1	5
I	565	0	3,54	4	0,894	1	5
J	565	0	3,32	3	0,959	1	5
Individual's informal power within a company or organization							
K	565	0	3,16	3	1,017	1	5
Individual's formal power within a company or organization							
L	565	0	3,54	3	1,888	1	8

Tab. 2: Pearson R Correlation Coefficients (n=565)

	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
D	,317**								
E	,392**	,330**							
F	,455**	,284**	,489**						
G	,364**	,257**	,402**	,438**					
H	,342**	,401**	,322**	,326**	,298**				
I	,449**	,225**	,420**	,463**	,443**	,376**			
J	,308**	,116**	,308**	,362**	,339**	,147**	,410**		
K	,096*	,161**	,081	,088*	,153**	,080	,138**	,198**	
L	,287**	,193**	,290**	,229**	,233**	,216**	,352**	,234**	,339**

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

We can see that there are positive correlations between all of the variables. All the variables were measured on an increasing scale. As seen in the table above there is a correlation between the informal power and all of the statistically significant dependent variables are above 0.088 and between the formal power and all of the statistically significant dependent variables are above 0.216. Thus we can conclude that the variables that represent power in this study are dependent of the variables representing “authentic leadership”.

Tab. 3: Regression Analysis for the Dependent Variable “I have power” (n=565)

R=0.257; R²=0.066; Δ R²=0.053

Predicators	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1,907	,265		7,192	,000
Leader has a positive attitude towards work and colleagues.	-,016	,059	-,013	-,264	,792
Leader is optimistic and has a strong personal self-image - a strong "I".	,169	,054	,145	3,106	,002
Leader gives hope for the development of solutions.	-,049	,061	-,041	-,813	,417
Leader builds trust among colleagues.	-,046	,061	-,040	-,762	,446
Leader has a lot of psychological support from colleagues.	,094	,058	,080	1,627	,104
Leader has a high degree of personal self-esteem.	-,017	,058	-,014	-,296	,767
Leader is primarily focused at finding the positive values of colleagues.	,055	,060	,048	,906	,365
I personally identify myself with the leader (we have "the same view of the world").	,178	,050	,168	3,589	,000

Dependent Variable: I have power

With the predictors that we have used to describe “Authentic leadership” 5.3% variance of “I have power” is explained. “I personally identify myself with the leader (we have "the same view of the world")” ($\beta=0.168$) has the most influence. Individuals personally identifying themselves with their leaders perceive themselves as more powerful.

Tab. 4: Regression Analysis for the Dependent Variable “Placement in the Companies’ or Organizations’ Hierarchy” (n=565)

R=0.412; R²=0.170; Δ R²=0.158

Predicators	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-,912	,464		-1,966	,050
Leader has a positive attitude towards work and colleagues.	,226	,104	,103	2,184	,029
Leader is optimistic and has a strong personal self-image - a strong "I".	,121	,095	,056	1,267	,206
Leader gives hope for the development of solutions.	,262	,106	,118	2,468	,014
Leader builds trust among colleagues.	-,077	,106	-,036	-,725	,469
Leader has a lot of psychological support from colleagues.	,048	,101	,022	,469	,639
Leader has a high degree of personal self-esteem.	,081	,101	,037	,805	,421
Leader is primarily focused at finding the positive values of colleagues.	,437	,105	,207	4,142	,000
I personally identify myself with the leader (we have "the same view of the world").	,147	,087	,075	1,688	,092

Dependent Variable: Placement in the Companies’ or Organizations’ Hierarchy

With the predictors that we have used to describe “Authentic leadership” 15.8% variance of “Placement in the Companies’ or Organizations’ Hierarchy” is explained. “Leader is primarily focused at finding the positive values of colleagues” ($\beta=0.207$) has the most influence. Leaders who are primarily focused at finding the positive values of colleagues also place these employees in higher positions in the companies or organizations hierarchical structure.

The differences among individuals are present in companies and organizations all over the world. One of the most important differences is the amount of power that one has. We also have to distinguish between two forms of power – formal and informal.

In Table 5 we can see that not even one individual who has management positions in a company or organization believes that he does not have power. Individuals in the highest hierarchical positions in 61.1% even believe that they always have power. And on the other hand only 1.7% of the lowest positioned in the hierarchy believe that they always have power. We can also see from the table that none of the higher positioned in the hierarchy ever think

that they are powerless. Pearson's r correlation coefficient between the two variables is 0.339 with the correlation being significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Tab. 5: An Individual's Position in the Hierarchy Compared to an Individual's belief of having power (n=565)

		I have power					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
Placement in the Companies' or Organizations' Hierarchy	1	11,3%	42,6%	23,5%	20,9%	1,7%	100,0%
	2	3,2%	23,8%	34,9%	31,7%	6,3%	100,0%
	3	4,7%	11,2%	50,5%	29,9%	3,7%	100,0%
	4	6,2%	16,5%	32,0%	39,2%	6,2%	100,0%
	5	6,5%	14,0%	33,6%	34,6%	11,2%	100,0%
	6	,0%	2,8%	52,8%	33,3%	11,1%	100,0%
	7	,0%	,0%	63,6%	22,7%	13,6%	100,0%
	8	,0%	,0%	,0%	38,9%	61,1%	100,0%
Total		5,8%	19,1%	35,9%	31,0%	8,1%	100,0%

Of course, characteristics do not fit every single individual but we still think that people who have achieved higher positions in the companies or organizations hierarchy also believe that they have more power.

6.2 Discussion

Several limitations of this study need to be considered before interpretations of the results can be explored. First; the discussed findings and implications were obtained from a single study; generalizing the results should be done with caution. Second; the whole research was focused mostly on how individual's superiors "authentic leadership" properties affect one's power. We have had that in mind already in the beginning when we were defining the goal of the study so that it is relatively simple with a concept that is influenced by many other variables that are not included in our study.

From Table 2 we can see that there is a Pearson correlation between the variable representing informal power and his superiors "authentic leadership" properties and the correlations are above 0.088 for all of the statistically significant dependent variables. From the same table we can also see that there is a Pearson correlation between the variable representing formal power and the variables representing his superiors "authentic leadership" properties and in this case all of the dependent variables are statistically significant and the correlations are above 0.193.

Thus we can confirm that the variables that represent power in this study are correlated to the variables representing individual's superiors' "authentic leadership" properties and although the correlations are not very high they are significant.

Research confirmed the H1 hypothesis that individual's informal power is dependent of his superiors "authentic leadership" properties (adjusted $R^2=0.053$). From this we see that

authentic leaders empower their employees and the employees themselves believe to have more power over decisions and over others.

Research also confirmed the H2 hypothesis that individual's informal power is dependent of his superiors "authentic leadership" properties (adjusted $R^2=0.158$). Confirmation of the H2 hypothesis shows us that the leaders are more authentic higher up the organization's or companies' hierarchical scale.

And we have also confirmed the H3 hypothesis that there is a positive correlation between an individual's formal and informal power within a company or organization ($r=0.339$) and it is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Another very important point to add here is that the respondents answered the questionnaire the way that they perceive that their surrounding perceives their informal power, which would be better if it would have been constructed from observations of others. And the respondents gave their subjective views on their superiors "authentic leadership" properties. However, in this case using this method of open random survey is impossible. The problem with these answers is that one often perceives oneself better than those around perceive one's self-image [CIALDINI 2001].

According to the findings, the perceptions and the "size" of an individual's power in a company or in an organization depends on his superiors "authentic leadership" properties. One man once said that all people are divided into two groups; the leaders and the followers. Most people are simple followers but those who want to be leaders need power to achieve that someone will follow them. Leadership facilitates quality relationships and balances power [PINCHOT 1992] and not everybody understands what it is that leaders do and why it matters [HALLIDAY 2009].

We can all agree that there is a lot more to power than just these variables that we used in our study to determine it but still even this simple study shows that there are some basic predispositions to having power and that one of them are also one's superiors "authentic leadership" properties.

7. Conclusion

An individual's power is an always important factor in one's personal as well as business life. Superiors' "authentic leadership" properties are a factor in one's power yet the mere presence of them will not give you power. From our research and the hypotheses that were tested we can draw three conclusions.

The first conclusion is that authentic leaders empower their employees and that their employees believe to have more power over decisions and over others. Empowerment and trust in employees is one of the basic parts of being an authentic leader.

Our second conclusion is that the leaders are more authentic higher up the organization's or companies hierarchical scale which is logical because the lower management's work mostly consists of routine assignments where as the top management's work is mostly diverse and only in a small portion routine. The diverse part of one's work is what allows personal authenticity and in relation to that authentic leadership.

And of course there is a positive correlation between an individual's formal and informal power within a company or organization which is logical and was expected although we expected that the correlation would be higher.

This study provides basic insights into the connection between one's superiors' "authentic leadership" properties and power and it can be summarized as follows: an individual's superiors' "authentic leadership" properties are one of many things that compose into individual's power. However, it does not explain the whole concept of power because there is an infinite number of variables that influence one's power and we can only explain them in parts.

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