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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **The Effect of Authentic Leadership on Innovative Work Behavior Mediated by Work Meaningfulness**

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**| ABSTRACT**

Volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) relentlessly targeted the corporate and economic sectors in the twenty-first century. Innovative work behavior is seen as the most important contributor to the organization's performance and sustainability in the face of VUCA. Authentic leadership is a variable that impacts innovative work behavior. This research aimed to examine the effect of authentic leadership on innovative work behavior by mediating the role of work meaningfulness. 208 employees from one of the Learning & Consulting companies in Indonesia were selected by simple random sampling. Data analysis used a simple mediation model by Hayes. The result shows that work meaningfulness has a role booster as a mediator between authentic leadership and innovative work behavior. The results of the study revealed that organizations could enhance creative work behavior by offering authentic leadership development programs for all leaders. The leader can stimulate information and opinion, build trustworthy relationships with employees and communicate the company's vision, goal, objectives, and values linked to employees' personal values. Then for strengthening, companies can further support by explaining the importance of the meaning of work, the roles and contributions of employees to the company and the large purpose. It is hoped that this study has provided some insights into the effect of authentic leadership on innovative work behavior mediated by work meaningfulness.

**| KEYWORDS**

Authentic Leadership, Innovative Work Behavior, Work Meaningfulness

**| ARTICLE INFORMATION**

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### **1. Introduction**

VUCA relentlessly targeted the corporate and economic sectors in the twenty-first century. As a result, one of the most significant consequences is the challenge of managers describing and comprehending their surroundings (Pears, 2017). With the global influence of the VUCA phenomenon, it has become increasingly challenging to generate profitability and growth by acquiring a durable competitive edge. The organization, its executives, and its workers must recognize VUCA, implement suitable management models, and implement relevant tactics. Most academicians, practitioners, and experts now believe that VUCA is a continuous phenomenon whose effect is growing daily (Çiçeklioğlu, 2020).

The VUCA environment forces an organization to use its cognitive resources to quickly generate new ideas (Chawla & Lenka, 2018). Innovation is seen as the most important contributor to the organization's performance and sustainability in the face of unpredictable changes in market circumstances, rising technology breakthroughs, increasingly harsh worldwide competition and VUCA (Millar, Groth, & Mahon, 2018; Amalia & Handoyo, S, 2018). According to research by PricewaterhouseCoopers International Limited (Shelton & Percival, 2013), 1,757 executives reported that innovation is necessary for companies to stay relevant and competitive in industries that are changing quickly by predicting and adapting to market changes and client demands. However,

Indonesia was placed 87th out of 127 nations in the 2017 global innovation index. Indonesia's standing is low compared to Malaysia and Singapore (Amalia & Handoyo, 2018).

Innovation is the key to success for a company. It is universally acknowledged (Kurniawan, Kusnayain, Aulisaina, & Hakim, 2021; Janssen, Vliert, & West, 2004). The greatest strategy for becoming an innovative organization is to foster the innovative work behavior of employees (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010). Farr and Ford (1990) introduce innovative work behavior as an individual's behavior that attempts to initiate and intentionally introduce new and helpful ideas, processes, products, or procedures within a work position, group, or organization (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010; Farr & Ford, 1990).

Innovative work behavior commonly comprises possibilities exploration and the creation of fresh concepts (creativity related behavior), but it may also include behaviors aimed at implementing change, applying new information, or refining procedures to improve personal and corporate performance (implementation-oriented behavior). Innovative work behavior in the workplace as complex behavior is made up of a set of three distinct behavioral tasks: idea generation, idea promotion, and idea realization (Janssen, 2000; Scott & Bruce, 1994). Idea generation means the creation of fresh and practical concepts in any field and is the first step towards individual creativity (Janssen, 2000; Kanter, 1988; Woodman, Sawyer, & Griffin, 1993). Then, idea promotion is an employee must participate in social activities after coming up with an idea to find friends, sponsors, and investors for it or to form a coalition of supporters that will provide it with the essential backing (Janssen, 2000; Kanter, 1988). Last, the idea can be realized by creating an innovation sample or blueprint that may be used to explore and ultimately implement the innovation inside a work position, a group, or the entire company.

Previous research has shown leadership as an important predictor of innovative work behavior (Pradhan & Jena, 2019; Jung, Wu, & Chow, 2008). According to research by Horney, Pasmore and O'Shea (2010), Leaders must continually assess people, systems, innovations, and structures; this requires rapid and agile decision-making. An excellent relationship with workers is one of the distinctive ways in which leaders boost employees' innovative work behavior. Leaders assist workers with difficult tasks through strong and quality-based relationships. Recognize employees' efforts in uncertain and dangerous situations and supply the appropriate task-related resources, which considerably increases employees' innovative work behavior (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2007).

Research by Yamak and Eyupoglu (2021) conducted in the banking industry found a strong influence of real leadership on innovative work behavior. Also, another research explained how authentic leadership affected innovation work behavior because authentic leaders give psychological aid and psychological safety to their workers by being truthful, sharing, and supporting, which are seen as essential elements in employee voice behavior (Černe, Dimovski, Marič, Penger, & Škerlavaj, 2013).

Authentic leadership was described by Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, and Walumbwa (2005) and Ilies, Morgeson, and Nahrgang (2005) as a pattern of leader conduct that draws on and develops both positive psychological capacities and a good ethical environment, in order to generate higher self-awareness, an integrated moral viewpoint, balanced information processing, and relational transparency on the part of leaders interacting with followers, supporting positive self-development (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, and May 2004.; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008). Avolio et al. (2004) describe Authentic leaders as people who are viewed by others as conscious of their own and others' beliefs, knowledge, and strengths; mindful of the context in which they work; and confident, optimistic, resilient, and of good moral character. So, authentic leadership makes the most of a leader's capabilities, acknowledges and trades off leader flaws, and accepts full responsibility for our effect upon others in the company.

George (2003) said that authentic leadership is a leadership style that prioritizes self-awareness over other factors. According to Avolio and Gardner (2005), authentic leadership consists of four dimensions: self-awareness, transparency, moral perspective, and a balanced process. Self-awareness means an awareness of one's strength and responsibility as well as the complex nature of oneself, which involves knowing one's own nature via exposure to others and being aware of how one affects others. Transparency in such conduct encourages trust via open communication, the expression of one's actual sentiments, and a conscious effort to avoid displaying improper emotions. Next, moral perspective refers to the form of self-regulation for producing decision-making and action that are stated and adhere to these internalized principles. Last, a Balanced Process means evaluating all pertinent information objectively before making a choice.

On the other hand, previous scientists have examined the link between leadership and innovative work behavior and found a favorable association between both (Khan, Ismail, Hussain, & Alghazali, 2020). Khan et al. (2020) reported that organizational culture is proven to significantly mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and innovative work behavior and the relationship between transactional leadership and innovative work behavior. Research showed that psychological empowerment influenced the association between transformational leadership and innovative work behavior. The research

discovered that transformational leadership positively impacts innovative work behavior, encompassing both idea generation and idea implementation (Afsar, Badir, & Saeed, 2014). Therefore, it is necessary to examine the role of a mediator between authentic leadership and innovative work behavior for a strong impact. Hayes (2018) said that to understand the phenomena that occur better, we need to answer "how" the independent variable affects the dependent variable by examining variables that can act as mediators.

This research proposes that work meaningfulness can be a mediator in explaining how authentic leadership can contribute to employees' innovative work behavior. Bawuro, Shamsuddin, Wahab, and Usman (2019) said that work meaningful is one of the factors for creativity and innovation. Previous research conducted by Sagnak & Kuruöz (2017) shows that meaningfulness is the mediating role of the relationship between authentic leadership and altruistic behavior. Another study has found that work meaningfulness acts as a mediator between servant leadership and employees' innovative work behavior (Cai, Lysova, Khapova, & Bossink, 2018). This is also supported by research that shows transformational leadership positively influences workers' psychological well-being, with work meaningfulness acting as a mediator (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway, & McKee, 2007).

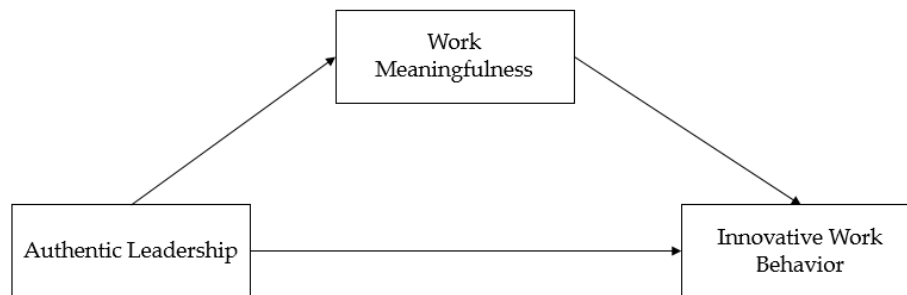


Figure 1. Research Conceptual Framework

Authentic leadership has a positive impact on the meaning of work because employees who perceive their leaders as authentic report feeling more engaged, committed, and satisfied with their jobs, leading to a greater sense of meaningfulness in their job (Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005). Authentic leaders encourage employees to take the initiative, share ideas, and take ownership of their work, which can increase employees' sense of engagement and satisfaction (Wong & Laschinger, 2012). Leaders who act and communicate authentically can foster a sense of purpose and shared values within the company, increasing the meaning of work for their employees. This meaningful work experience will psychologically affect employees' innovative work behavior. Cai, Lysova, Khapova, and Bossink (2018) explained that when employees perceive work as meaningful, they find purpose, value and significance in tasks making them intrinsically motivated to work. This intrinsic motivation makes employees translate their motivation into a higher effort to generate, promote and realize their innovative activities. Based on the explanation above, the authors assume that work meaningfulness acts as a mediator that boosts the effect of authentic leadership on innovative work behavior.

## 2. Methodology

This research examined three variables: innovative work behavior as the dependent variable, authentic leadership as the independent variable, and work meaningfulness as the mediating role of both. 208 employees from one of the Learning & Consulting companies in Indonesia were selected by simple random sampling. The authors used Likert scale surveys by Google Forms. The innovation work behavior scale conducted by Syaui (2007) was based on the concept of innovative behavior put forward by Kanter, namely idea generation, idea promotion, and idea realization (Kanter, 1988; Janssen, 2000). Syaui (2007) shows the instrument has a reliability of 0.926. Additionally, its instrument was used in Pramudya's research (2012) with a reliability of 0.850, and Ayuningtyas's research (2015) showed a reliability of 0.962.

Authentic leadership is measured by the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) scale developed by Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, and Peterson (2008) with the translation process into Bahasa by Hayuningtyas (2014) with a reliability of 0.880. Meanwhile, work meaningfulness is measured by the work meaningfulness inventory (WAMI) developed by Steger, Dik and Duffy (2012) and adapted into Indonesian by Agustina (2019) in research that shows a reliability of 0.93.

Data analysis was carried out using a simple mediation model that Hayes (2018) developed with the bootstrapping method. The bootstrapping analysis can be applied to normalized or unnormalized distribution data (Hayes, 2018; Ng & Lin, 2016). Simple mediation analysis focuses on measuring the indirect effects relationship of independent and dependent variables throughout the mediator variable, whether its direct effect is proven significant or not (Hayes, 2018).

**3. Results**

The total number of participants in this research was 206 persons consisting of 174 persons (84,5%) male employees and 32 persons (15,5%) female employees. In terms of age, the participants who filled in the most were in the age range of 27-33 years old as many as 89 persons (43,2%), while participants aged 20-26 were 44 persons (21,4%), aged 34-40 years old were 44 persons (21,4%), aged 41-47 years old as many as 21 persons (10,2%), and aged 48-54 years old as many as 8 persons (3,9%). From an education perspective, most participants were from high school, as many as 120 persons (58,3%), while participants with a diploma, 16 persons (7,8%) with a bachelor's degree, 61 persons (29,6%), and graduates were 9 persons (4,4%).

In terms of position level, the participants who filled mostly from the BOD -3 position level of 180 persons (87,4%), meanwhile participants from the BOD-1 positions level 8 persons (3,9%), and from the BOD-2 position level were 18 persons (8,7%). Lastly, in terms of division, participants who filled mostly from Learning Facilities Management were 76 persons (36,9%). Meanwhile, participants from Assessment Center & Consulting were 8 persons (3,9%), from Corporate Secretary were 8 persons (3,9%), Finance & HR were 19 persons (9,2%), from Internal Audit, were 3 persons (1,5%), Knowledge Management, were 19 persons (9,2%), from Learning were 24 persons (11,7%), and from Residence & MICE were 49 persons (23,8%).

The empirical mean for innovative work behavior, work meaningfulness and authentic leadership is higher than the hypothetical mean. It indicates that the research subject's perception of innovative work behavior, work meaningfulness and authentic leadership is higher than the estimated research scale reference. So, based on the hypothetical data's categorization, The research subject's perception of innovative work behavior, work meaningfulness dan authentic leadership fit within the medium category.

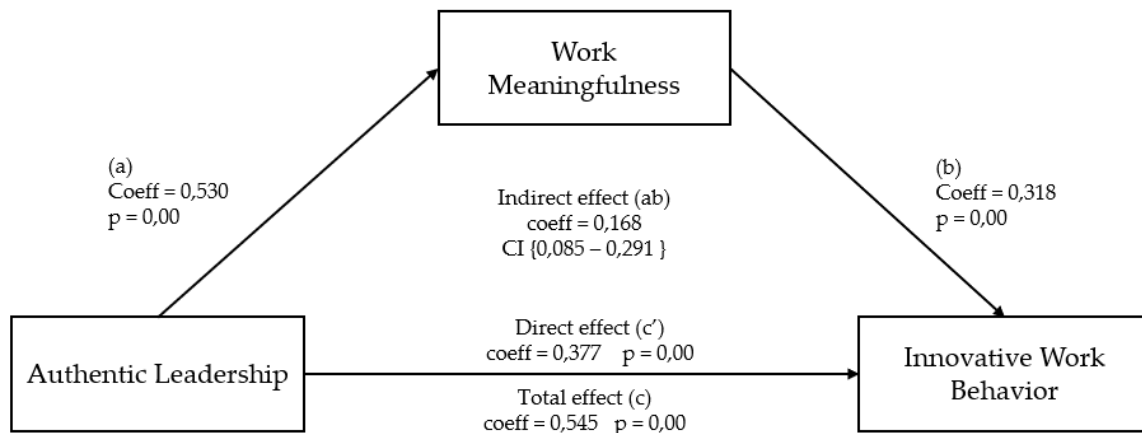


Figure 2. Work meaningfulness as the mediating role of the effect of authentic leadership on innovative work behavior

According to the result of the simple mediation analysis model (Hayes, 2018), it shown that authentic leadership predicts work meaningfulness significantly ( $p < 0,05$ ) with a coefficient value of 0,530. Furthermore, work meaningfulness also predicts innovative work behavior significantly ( $p < 0,05$ ) with a coefficient value of 0,318. The direct effect of authentic leadership on innovative work behaviors is significant ( $p < 0,05$ ) with a coefficient value of 0,377. The indirect effect of authentic leadership on innovation work behavior through work meaningfulness produces a coefficient value of 0.168 with a bootstrap confidence interval BootLLCI = 0.085 and BootULCI = 0.291. The bootstrap confidence interval does not pass at 0 (zero), so it can be concluded that the indirect effect is significant. The total effect of this model produces a coefficient value of 0.545. These results prove that work meaningfulness acts as a mediator that boosts the effect of authentic leadership on innovative work behavior.

**4. Discussion**

Authentic leadership was found to directly and indirectly, affect innovative work behaviour through work meaningfulness. Work meaningfulness has a role booster as a mediator between authentic leadership and innovative work behavior. Employees who perceive their leader as authentic feel more engaged, committed, and satisfied with their job, leading to a greater sense of meaningfulness in their work (Ilies et al., 2005). This meaningful work experience will psychologically affect employees' innovative work behavior. Employees who perceive work as meaningful find purpose, value, and significance in tasks and benefit some greater good. They provide more energy and the ability to create innovation (Cai et al., 2018; Kashdan, Rose, & Fincham, 2004). This result is in line with previous research, which showed that meaningfulness as a mediator of the effect of servant leadership on employee' innovative work behavior (Cai et al., 2018), meaningfulness as a mediator of the effect transformational leadership and employee innovation (Pradhan & Jena, 2019), work meaningfulness as a mediator of the effect authentic leadership to altruistic behavior (Sagnak & Kuruöz, 2017), and work meaningfulness as a mediator of the effect transformational leadership to the psychological

well-being of workers (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway, & McKee, 2007). Also, research by Khan et al. (2020) found the role of organizational culture as a mediator in the relationship between transformational leadership and innovative work behavior.

Work meaningfulness has a role booster as a mediator of the relationship between authentic leadership and innovative work behavior. In the process, authentic leaders have an important role in influencing or shaping work meaningfulness. According to Sagnak and Kuruöz (2017), authentic leader shape the identity, vision, mission and goals of the employee organization and influences the meaning of work. Authentic leaders create meaning to tasks and goals by associating them with employees' values, beliefs, and identities. Employees who personalize these values will shape their self-concept, thereby increasing the meaning of work (Chaudhary & Panda, 2018; Zhu, Trevino, & Zheng, 2016).

Authentic leaders create trusting relationships with employees by acting consistently with values, building credibility, encouraging differing views and being transparent (Ahamed, Hassan, & Hashim, 2013; Sagnak & Kuruöz, 2017). Authentic leaders inspire employees to act authentically and consistently with morals and beliefs, thereby causing them to experience the meaning of working at a higher level (Chaudhary, 2021; Chaudhary & Panda, 2018; May, Chan, Hodges, & Avolio, 2004). Authentic leaders clearly understand their identity, purpose in life, values and beliefs. With a good understanding of ourselves, leaders can create a work environment that allows employees to apply values in work. This can help employees feel a match between personal and organizational values, increasing the level of work meaningfulness.

Employees who perceive work as meaningful of work, then will find purpose, value, and significance in tasks and benefit some greater good, so employees are more internally motivated to manage difficult work (Cai et al., 2018; Simonton, 1999; Steger et al., 2012). This internal motivation creates employees with a higher level of effort to generate, promote and realize innovative activities (Cai et al., 2018; Tu & Lu, 2013). According to Chaudhary (2021), Luthans and Avolio (2003), authentic leaders can discover potential and empower employees to make a difference. Authentic leaders are open and consider information from employees before making decisions. Also, be able to create a safe and secure work environment. This makes employees feel that work is valued and more meaningful (Chaudhary & Panda, 2018; Stephens & Carmeli, 2017; Eid, Mearns, Larsson, Laberg & Johnsen, 2012). Then, meaningful work increases the individual's belief in their ability to generate creative ideas and engage in creative pursuits (Chaudhary & Panda, 2018). In addition, employees also feel secure in experimenting with innovative ways to solve organizational problems.

This finding can be explained by the job characteristic model of Hackman and Oldham (1980), which demonstrates that work meaningfulness is a key psychological state that mediates the relationship between job characteristics and outcomes. These findings indicate that work meaningfulness is an important mediator between job characteristics (in this study, authentic leadership) and outcomes (in this study, innovative work behavior), supported by that theory (Tummers & Knies, 2013; Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007; Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway, & McKee, 2007). Based on these results, companies can promote authentic leadership so that employees perceive work as meaningful, which can increase innovative work behavior.

## 5. Conclusion

The current study aimed to examine the effect of authentic leadership on innovative work behavior by mediating the role of work meaningfulness. Authentic leadership was found to directly and indirectly, affect innovative work behaviour via work meaningfulness. Work meaningfulness has a role booster as a mediator between authentic leadership and innovative work behavior. Employees who perceive the leaders as authentic leaders will perceive work as meaningful, which can increase innovative work behavior. Based on these results suggest that organizations can enhance innovative work behavior by offering authentic leadership development programs for all leaders. The leader can stimulate information and opinion, build trustworthy relationships with employees and communicate the company's vision, goal, objectives, and values linked to employees' personal values. Then for strengthening, companies can further support by explaining the importance of the meaning of work, the roles and contributions of employees to the company and the large purpose. It is hoped that this study has provided some insights into the effect of authentic leadership on innovative work behavior mediated by work meaningfulness.

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