

Authentic Leadership and Affective Organizational Commitment: The Mediating Role of Workplace Psychological Safety

Chandrahaas C S and Niranjana Narasimhan

*Department of Management and Commerce,
Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh, India*
chandrahaascs@sssihl.edu.in
niranjana@sssihl.edu.in

[Abstract] Employees' organizational commitment is highly sought after by organizations the world over. Research on the factors that influence the affective organizational commitment of employees, directly and indirectly, is thus the need of the hour. This study examined the influence of employee-perceived authentic leadership (AL) on their affective organizational commitment (AOC). Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) on the respondent data (N=283) revealed that the relationship between Authentic Leadership and Affective Organizational Commitment is fully mediated by Workplace Psychological Safety (WPPS). The findings of this study have several implications for theory and practice.

[Keywords] authentic leadership, affective organizational commitment, workplace psychological safety, PLS-SEM

Introduction

Organizations invest a lot of resources to induct, train and develop their employees (Ongori, 2007). Despite their efforts, the recent rise in the levels of employee turnover at a time when the demand for labor is very high has been a cause of concern for companies in several countries (Bloomberg Quint, 2021; Cox, 2021). The rapid rise of the gig economy (Healy et al., 2017) has made employees' long-term commitment to an organization a rare commodity that is sought after by organizations all over the world.

Organizational commitment has been extensively studied in the past few decades (Reichers, 1985; Cohen, 2007; Tucker, 2009). It has also been linked with various organizational outcomes, such as intra-role performance, turnover, and absenteeism (Harrison et al., 2006). Employees with high organizational commitment are unlikely to quit their organizations, are more likely to exhibit citizenship behaviors, and are likely to be better performers (Mathieu & Zajac 1990; Solinger et al., 2008; Angle & Perry, 1981). Organizational commitment is widely considered to be a multidimensional construct (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Meyer et al., 2002). Researchers have especially focused on affective organizational commitment (AOC), a subset of organizational commitment, as it has been strongly linked to several organizational behavior variables, such as work performance, absenteeism, turnover, and citizenship behavior (Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005). Further, researchers have demonstrated that affective organizational commitment is the quintessence of organizational commitment (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001; Mercurio, 2015). AOC has been found to decrease employee turnover and absenteeism and improve performance and citizenship behaviors (Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005).

Authentic leadership (AL) has developed into a significant area of research during the past decade (Farid et al., 2020), garnering interest from researchers across the world (Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; May et al., 2003). Authentic leaders provide support for employees' self-determination and, thus, are likely to positively impact employees' work behaviors (Walumbwa et al., 2004; Ilies et al., 2005; Smithikrai & Suwannadet, 2018). AL has been linked positively to several constructs and outcome variables like job satisfaction, job performance, and employee creativity (Zhang et al., 2021). AL is a crucial antecedent of employees' affective commitment (Leroy et al., 2012b; Avolio et al., 2004). The relationship between AL and affective organizational commitment is mediated by several constructs in extant literature, such as autonomy and trust (Bandura & Kavussanu, 2018) and behavioral integrity (Leroy et al., 2012).

Workplace psychological safety (WPPS) refers to employees' perceptions of the consequences associated with taking risks in the workplace (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). WPPS enables organizations and teams to perform better (Collins & Smith, 2006; Carmeli et al., 2012) and leads to augmented learning (Carmeli, 2007; Edmondson, 1999). Workplace psychological safety has been recently considered an important construct in organizational settings (Edmondson, 2014). Higher WPPS has been linked to improved organizational performance, engagement, and creativity (Edmondson, 2014). To the best of our knowledge, no study has explored workplace psychological safety as a mediator between authentic leadership and affective organizational commitment. In this study, we propose that the relationship between authentic leadership (AL) and affective organizational commitment (AOC) is mediated by workplace psychological safety (WPPS).

This paper has been organized as follows. First, we briefly explicate the constructs, authentic leadership, affective organizational commitment, and workplace psychological safety, and develop the hypotheses of this study. Next, the methods used for sampling and data analysis are detailed. The paper concludes with implications for research and practice.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Authentic Leadership (AL)

The construct of authenticity dates back to ancient Greeks, who valued "being true to oneself" (Harter et al., 2002). In positive psychology, authenticity can be defined as "claiming ownership of one's personal experiences, that include emotions, thoughts, preferences, needs, or beliefs, processes that are captured by the desire to know oneself" (Harter et al., 2002, p. 382; Seligman, 2002). Authentic leadership (AL), a relatively recent construct, has received considerable attention from management researchers (Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Avolio & Walumbwa, 2006; Avolio et al., 2004), as well as from practitioners (George, 2003; George & Sims, 2007; May et al., 2003). The initial conceptualization of AL by Luthans and Avolio (2003) elicited interest from management scholars who further refined the construct (Ilies et al., 2005; Gardner et al., 2005). Luthans and Avolio (2003, p. 243) defined AL as "a process that draws from a well-developed organizational context and positive psychological capacities, that results in self-regulated positive behaviors and a greater degree of self-awareness by leaders and their followers, thereby nurturing positive self-development."

Several authors insist that authentic leadership is a construct that is multidimensional in nature and that there is a lot more to AL than just being true to oneself (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Ilies et al., 2005). Walumbwa et al. (2008) proposed a multidimensional construct of AL using the conceptualizations of the construct given by Avolio and Gardner (2005) and Ilies et al. (2005). They defined AL as a leader behavior pattern that promotes a positive ethical climate and positive psychological capacities, nurtures greater self-awareness and a moral perspective that is internal in nature, creates balanced processing of information, and develops relational transparency with followers (Walumbwa et al., 2008). This definition is based primarily on Kernis and Goldman's (2006) four-dimension definition of authenticity and the self-determination theory proposed by Ryan and Deci (2003).

The four dimensions of AL as proposed by Walumbwa et al. (2008) are self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective. Self-awareness refers to demonstrating an understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses, which includes gaining insight into self through exposure to others and being aware of one's impact on others (Kernis, 2003). Relational transparency denotes expressing one's authentic self to others by openly sharing information and by communicating one's true feelings and thoughts while minimizing displays of emotions that are inappropriate (Kernis, 2003). Balanced processing refers to the leaders' ability to analyze all relevant data before arriving at a decision, objectively. These leaders might also seek views that contest their deeply held beliefs (Gardner et al., 2005). Internalized moral perspective refers to developing an integrated and internalized self-regulation based on one's values and internal moral standards that help one to act and make decisions that are aligned with these internal standards rather than based on selfish or political motives (Gardner et al., 2005; Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

Though AL overlaps with transformational leadership and is influenced by it deeply (Kalay, 2018), they differ in several major aspects; in particular, transformational leaders need not be necessarily authentic and need not show harmony between their words, values, and deeds (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Recent meta-analytical studies on AL and transformational leadership found that AL contributes uniquely in predicting some employee and organizational outcomes compared to transformational leadership (Hoch et al., 2018; Banks et al., 2016).

Affective Organizational Commitment (AOC)

Early research on organizational commitment was conducted by Becker (1960). Research on organizational commitment has gained popularity among management researchers over the years (Batra, 2020) and it is a widely studied work attitude (Harrison et al., 2006). Organizational commitment is the psychological attachment that the employees have with the organization, and it describes the extent to which thoughts and behaviors of the employees are affected by the characteristics of the organization, which, in turn, bind them to the organization (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Meyer & Allen, 1991). Several studies have revealed that organizational commitment is linked with numerous organizational outcomes, like performance, turnover, and absenteeism (Harrison et al., 2006).

Allen and Meyer (1990) suggested a model of organizational commitment that has three components: affective, normative, and continuance commitments. Though some researchers consider organizational commitment to be unidimensional (Solinger et al., 2008; Mercurio, 2015), the three-component model is widely accepted among management scholars (Batra, 2020). Affective organizational commitment (AOC) denotes an “employee’s emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization” (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 67). Normative commitment is the obligation felt to continue working at an organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 67). Continuance commitment means being aware of the costs that are associated with quitting the organization (Meyer & Allen 1991, p. 67). Solinger et al. (2008) concluded that AOC explains more organizational outcome variables in comparison to continuance and normative commitment. Hence, this study uses AOC to measure the commitment of the employees.

Workplace Psychological Safety (WPPS)

Psychological safety, as a construct, stems from the work by Schein and Bennis (1965) on organizational change. They described psychological safety as the extent to which individuals feel confident and secure when they manage change (Newman et al., 2017). Nearly 25 years later, Kahn’s (1990) work led to a renewed interest in psychological safety. He defined psychological safety as being able to display and employ one’s self without being afraid of any negative consequences to self-image, career, or status (Kahn, 1990, p. 708). Schein (1993) claimed that psychological safety aids people to overcome their learning anxieties and defensive attitudes when the data presented to them contradicts their expectations. Edmondson (1999) and Edmondson et al. (2007) defined workplace psychological safety (WPPS) as the belief that is shared amongst individuals with regards to whether it is safe to take interpersonal risks at the workplace. In a psychologically safe environment, employees feel that they would not be rejected (by colleagues and superiors) for saying what they think or being themselves, their competence is respected, they have positive intentions towards each other and engage in constructive conflicts, and they feel safe to experiment and be risk takers (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson et al., 2007).

Authentic Leadership and Affective Organizational Commitment

Authentic leadership (AL) is an important antecedent of affective organizational commitment (AOC) (Rego et al., 2013; Leroy et al., 2012b; Semedo et al., 2016, 2019; Gatling et al., 2016; Delić et al., 2017; Ribeiro et al., 2020). Braun et al. (2013) state that employees’ emotional attachments and identification with their leaders increase their AOC to their organization. By being honest and transparent in their relationships and by adopting a balanced information processing system for decision-making, authentic leaders forge high-quality relationships with their followers, and the followers reciprocate with a strong AOC to the organization (Paillé, 2009; Duarte et al., 2021). Based on the above discussion, we develop the following hypothesis:

H1: Authentic leadership positively influences affective organizational commitment.

Authentic Leadership and Workplace Psychological Safety

The relationship between a leader and his subordinates directly impacts the perceived psychological safety of the subordinates in the organization (Maximo et al., 2019). Authentic leaders maintain an honest relationship with their subordinates and also exhibit behavioral integrity (Leroy et al., 2012b). When leaders do not exhibit behavioral integrity, employees receive conflicting information about their leaders makes them feel psychologically unsafe (Liu et al., 2015). Employees consider authentic leadership (AL) to be a clue for behavioral integrity (Simmons, 2002) and, thus, AL can create a high sense of psychological safety at the workplace (Leroy et al., 2012a). Based on the above arguments, the following hypothesis is developed:

H2: Authentic leadership positively affects workplace psychological safety.

The Mediating Role of Workplace Psychological Safety

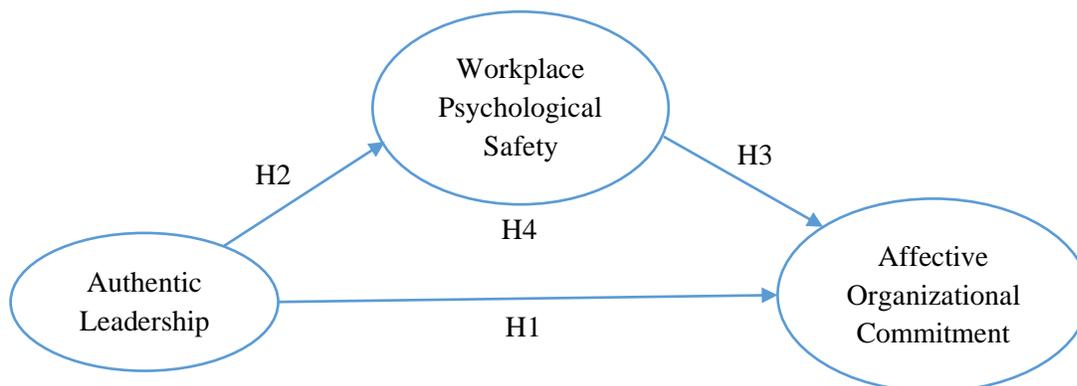
Personal and situational variables combine to influence work attitudes like affective organizational commitment (AOC) (Meyer et al., 1998). Prior research shows that work experiences are one of the best predictors of AOC (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 1998). Workplace psychological safety (WPPS) is a key work experience that enables employees to feel safe when they speak up (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Followers need to have a sense of certainty about their leaders' attitudes and behaviors and experience predictability about their leader to build a relationship that is realistic with the leader (Avolio et al., 2004, p. 810). Authentic leaders ensure this predictability by exhibiting consistency in their intentions, values, and actions (Spitzmuller & Ilies, 2010). This predictability should enable followers to experience a sense of comfort and security as they perform their organizational tasks (Avolio et al., 2004). Predictability of leader behavior would make the employees perceive their workplace to be psychologically safe, which would, in turn, increase AOC amongst the employees (Peus et al., 2012). Based on the above discussion, the following hypotheses are developed:

H3: Workplace psychological safety positively affects Affective organizational commitment.

H4: Workplace psychological safety mediates the relationship between authentic leadership and Affective Organizational Commitment.

The empirical validation of the conceptual framework shown in Figure 1 and analysis of data will be presented in the next section.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework



Method

Sample and Procedure

As part of a larger study, an online survey was created in Google Forms and emailed to a convenient sample of about 1000 employees working in various organizations. This survey collected data regarding the

respondents' perceptions of authentic leadership of their managers/leaders, workplace psychological safety (in their organizations), and their affective organizational commitment among other constructs. Snowball sampling was also used to collect the responses. In total, 310 responses were received, which gives a response rate of about 31%. A non-probabilistic sample of 283 respondents was obtained after the elimination of incomplete surveys and survey responses that did not meet the inclusion criteria. The sample size (N=283) is greater than the minimum sample size (N=119) recommended by Daniel Soper's a-priori sample size calculator for structural equation models (Soper, 2017), and, therefore, it was deemed to be sufficient.

The descriptive statistics of the respondents are given in Table 1. Seventy-five percent of the respondents are male and 25% are female. The respondents had worked for an average period of 5 years in their current organization and worked under the supervision of their manager/leader (about whom they were responding) for an average period of 3.6 years. The average age of the respondents is 33.5 years.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Indicators/Items

Descriptive Statistics				
Construct	Items	Abbreviation	Mean	SD
Authentic Leadership (AL)	My leader shows that he/she understands his/her strengths and weaknesses.	AL1	3.83	0.98
	My leader describes accurately the way that others view his/her abilities.	AL2	3.68	1.04
	My leader asks for ideas that challenge his/her core beliefs.	AL3	3.51	1.12
	My leader carefully listens to alternative perspectives before reaching a conclusion.	AL4	3.90	1.06
	My leader admits mistakes when they occur.	AL5	3.81	1.10
	My leader openly shares information with others.	AL6	3.66	1.21
	My leader has harmony between his/her words and actions.	AL7	3.74	1.13
	My leader is guided by his/her internal moral standards.	AL8	3.92	1.01
Workplace Psychological Safety (WPPS)	I feel safe to take a risk in my workplace.	WPPS1	3.70	1.14
	I feel secure/safe in my organization/workplace.	WPPS2	4.17	0.96
	If I make a mistake, it is often held against me.	WPPS3	3.31	1.11
	I can bring up complex problems and tough issues without any fear.	WPPS4	3.86	1.08
Affective Organizational Commitment (AOC)	I would be happy to spend the rest of my career with my organization.	AOC1	3.47	1.24
	I feel as if my organization's problems are my own.	AOC2	3.38	1.18
	I have a strong sense of belongingness to my organization.	AOC3	3.70	1.09

Measures

Authentic leadership (AL) was measured using the 8 items of the Authentic Leadership Inventory (ALI) developed by Neider and Schriesheim (2011). The scale consists of four dimensions: internalized moral perspective, self-awareness, relational transparency, and balanced processing. ALI is a theory-driven instrument, and respondents were asked to rate their manager's leadership style. Sample items include "My leader asks for ideas that challenge his/her core beliefs" and "My leader admits mistakes when they occur." Cronbach's α for ALI was 0.9.

Workplace psychological safety (WPPS) was measured using 4 items adapted from the scale developed by Edmondson (1999). Sample items include "I feel safe to take a risk in my workplace" and "If I make a mistake, it is often held against me." Cronbach's α for WPPS was 0.75.

Affective organizational commitment (AOC) was measured using 3 items adapted from the scale developed by Meyer and Allen (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Meyer et al., 1993). Sample items include "I feel as if my organization's problems are my own" and "I have a strong sense of belongingness to my organization." Cronbach's α for AOC was 0.87.

All responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree; and 5 = strongly agree). The reliability of the constructs is considered good because the Cronbach's α values for all the constructs are greater than 0.7 (Taber, 2018).

Common Method Bias

Since the data for the study was collected only through surveys, concerns regarding the possibility of common method bias might arise. To investigate this, a full collinearity test as suggested by Kock (2015) was conducted at the construct level. The values of a variance inflation factor (VIF) for the constructs were 1.51, 1.25, and 1.92, respectively, for authentic leadership, workplace psychological safety, and affective organizational commitment, all of which were lower than the threshold value of 3.3 as suggested by Kock (2015). Thus, it can be concluded that there is no common method bias.

Analytical Method

Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was performed using SmartPLS3 software (Ringle et al., 2014) to empirically validate the conceptual framework in Figure 1. The PLS algorithm is a non-parametric method of estimation (Hair et al., 2014), and it is advantageous over traditional covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) as it does not have the parameter identification problems that might occur in CB-SEM (Bollen, 2019), and it does not require the data to be distributed normally (Chin, 1998). Also, since studies indicate that the results of CB-SEM and PLS-SEM do not differ substantially, PLS-SEM-based estimates can be considered good proxies for CB-SEM based estimates (Hair et al., 2014).

Path Model Specification

The path model was specified in SmartPLS3 based on a one-way relationship between the latent variables (AL, WPPS, AOC) with the respondent data as input. Since all the latent variables are reflective, the consistent PLS algorithm was run with the maximum iteration limit set at 300. Mediation analysis through bootstrapping procedure according to the guidelines given by Baron and Kenny (1986) was performed on the output generated by the algorithm. The evaluation of PLS-SEM follows a two-step procedure involving separate assessments of both structural and measurement models (Hair et al., 2011). The results generated by the algorithm were rigorously evaluated against the structural and measurement model requirements specified by Hair et al. (2014). These are outlined in the next section.

Results

Mediation Analysis

In the path model specified, workplace psychological safety (WPPS) acts as a mediator between authentic leadership (AL) and affective organizational commitment (AOC). Based on the conditions for mediation according to Baron and Kenny (1986), mediation analysis was performed by first removing the mediator

variable from the model and estimating the PLS model to check if the effect of AL on AOC was significant. To calculate the statistical significance, the consistent bootstrapping procedure was performed with 5000 sub-samples in SmartPLS3. The effect of AL on AOC (0.458) was found to be significant (p-value < 0.00001). Next, the mediator variable, WPPS, was included in the model to calculate the direct and indirect effects. The indirect effect of AL on AOC via the mediator WPPS (0.388) was found to be significant (p-value < 0.00001). Thus, the first two conditions for mediation – the effect of AL on AOC when the mediator WPPS is removed, and the indirect effect of AL on AOC through the mediator WPPS are both significant – are satisfied. The 3rd condition is that the direct effect of AL on AOC with the mediator WPPS included should not be significant. This was found to be not significant (0.063 with a p-value > .05). Finally, the variance accounted for (VAF) was calculated. VAF is the ratio of the direct effect absorbed by the indirect effect and is calculated by using the following formula: $VAF = \text{Direct Effect} / (\text{Direct Effect} + \text{Indirect Effect})$. VAF value for the mediation model was found to be 86.03%, and, therefore, it is said to be a full mediation (Hair et al., 2014).

Measurement Model – Evaluation

Evaluating the reflective measurement model involves assessing: (1) the internal consistency of the latent variables by calculating the composite reliability; (2) the indicator reliability by calculating the values of the indicators' outer loadings and their statistical significance; (3) the convergent validity by computing the average variance extracted (AVE); and (4) discriminant validity by calculating the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) of the latent variables (Hair et al., 2011; Hair et al., 2014). Composite reliability for all the three latent variables (AL, WPPS, AOC) were found to be above the lower limit of 0.7, thereby confirming the internal consistency of the latent variables (Hair et al., 2014).

For assessing the indicator reliability, the outer loadings for all the indicators of the latent variables (AL, WPPS, and AOC) were calculated (Table 2). The indicators AL2, AL3, AL6, WPPS3, and WPPS4 were found to have values less than the minimum value of 0.7 suggested by Hair et al. (2014). These indicators were deleted one by one to assess the constructs and check if their deletion decreased the average variance extracted (AVE) values below the lower limit of 0.5 and composite reliability values above the threshold of 0.9. As this wasn't the case, all these indicators were retained (Hair et al., 2014).

Table 2
Outer Loadings of the Indicators

	Affective Organizational Commitment	Authentic Leadership	Workplace Psychological Safety	p-values
AOC1	0.808			0.000
AOC2	0.692			0.000
AOC3	0.982			0.000
AL1		0.775		0.000
AL2		0.709		0.000
AL3		0.698		0.000
AL4		0.741		0.000
AL5		0.730		0.000
AL6		0.680		0.000
AL7		0.826		0.000
AL8		0.732		0.000
WPPS1			0.871	0.000
WPPS2			0.775	0.000
WPPS3			0.435	0.000
WPPS4			0.57	0.000

Convergent validity is the extent to which a measure of a construct correlates positively with alternative measures of the same construct. This was assessed by calculating the average variance extracted (AVE), a grand mean value of the squared loadings of the indicators associated with the construct, for all three constructs. The AVE values for AL and AOC were greater than the lower limit of 0.5 as suggested by Hair et al. (2014). In the case of WPPS, the AVE value is 0.468 (which is not much less than 0.5) and also, WPPS is adapted from team psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), which has been tested in multiple studies (see Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Thus, convergent validity was established.

Discriminant validity is defined as the degree to which a construct differs from other constructs by empirical standards. This was assessed by calculating the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) for all three constructs. Since all the three constructs (AL, WPPS, AOC) have HTMT ratio values less than the threshold value of 0.85 as suggested by Hair et al. (2014), discriminant validity was established.

Structural Model – Evaluation

Instead of the traditional goodness of fit measures that are applied for assessing a structural model in CB-SEM, in PLS-SEM, the structural model is assessed based on heuristic criteria. These criteria are determined by the predictive capabilities of the model (Hair et al., 2014). The evaluation of a structural model involves examining the model's predictive capabilities as well as the relationships among the constructs. Evaluating the structural model in PLS-SEM involves assessing: (1) the structural model for collinearity issues; (2) the significance and relevance of the structural model relationships; (3) the coefficient of determination (R^2) of the endogenous constructs; (4) the effect size (f^2) of the exogenous constructs; and (5) the predictive relevance Q^2 (Hair et al., 2011; Hair et al., 2014).

First, the structural model was assessed for collinearity as the path coefficients might be biased if the indicators of the predictor constructs have high collinearity levels (Hair et al. 2014). To assess collinearity, the variance inflation factor (VIF) values of all the indicators of the predictor constructs (AL and WPPS) were calculated and were found to have VIF values below 5.0, indicating that there are no collinearity issues (Hair et al., 2014).

Second, the significance and relevance of structural model relationships were assessed by obtaining the estimates of the path coefficients by running the consistent PLS algorithm. These path coefficients denote the hypothesized relationships between the constructs (Hair et al., 2014), and these have standardized values between -1 and +1. The significance of the path coefficients was assessed through bootstrapping (the bootstrapping algorithm was run for 5000 subsamples) (see Table 3). The p-value for the path coefficient from AL to AOC was found to be not significant, as it would be for a mediation model.

Table 3
Path Coefficients and their Significance

	Path Coefficients	p-values
Authentic Leadership -> Workplace Psychological Safety	0.724	0
Workplace Psychological Safety -> Affective Organizational Commitment	0.536	0
Authentic Leadership -> Affective Organizational Commitment	0.063	0.54

Third, the coefficient of determination R^2 was calculated for the endogenous constructs (AOC and WPPS) as it is a measure of the model's predictive accuracy. R^2 is the squared correlation between an endogenous construct's predicted and actual values. The PLS-SEM algorithm aims at maximizing the R^2 values. To avoid a bias towards complex models, adjusted R^2 values were calculated. Adjusted R^2 values were found to be 0.34 and 0.524 for AOC and WPPS, respectively, which are considered good in the field of behavioral sciences (Hair et al., 2014).

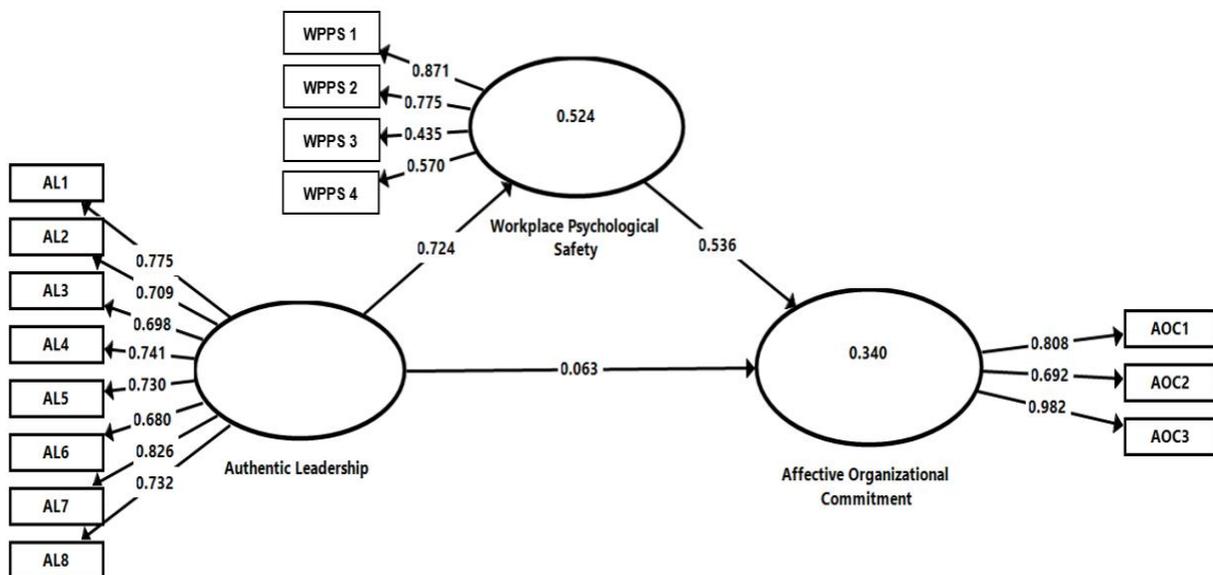
Fourth, the effect size f^2 was evaluated for the exogenous constructs (AL and WPPS). f^2 is the change in the R^2 value of an endogenous construct when a specified exogenous construct is excluded from the model. The f^2 values for AL on WPPS (1.099) and WPPS on AOC (0.207) are considered to be large and small effects, respectively (Hair et al., 2014). Thus, the exogenous constructs in the model have a substantial impact on the endogenous constructs.

Finally, Stone-Geisser's Q^2 values for the endogenous constructs (WPPS and AOC) were calculated. The Stone-Geisser's Q^2 value (Geisser, 1974; Stone, 1974) is an indicator of a model's predictive relevance. It was calculated by using the blindfolding procedure, a sample reuse technique in which every d^{th} data point is omitted. The blindfolding technique with cross-validated redundancy was performed with an omission distance of 7. Q^2 values for AOC (0.2) and WPPS (0.22) indicate that the predictive relevance for these constructs is medium and, thus, this model has predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2014).

Since the model meets the requirements for mediation outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986) and, also, the rigorous measurement and structural model criteria outlined by Hair et al. (2014), the proposed conceptual framework (Figure 1) has been empirically validated and the output of the consistent PLS algorithm with the R^2 values and the path coefficients is given in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Consistent PLS Algorithm – Output



Discussion and Implications

In this article, we set out to deepen our understanding about whether authentic leadership (AL) influences the affective organizational commitment (AOC) of employees, specifically, through workplace psychological safety (WPPS). The data analysis validates all four hypotheses that were proposed earlier. While several studies with different samples have validated the strong relationship between AL and AOC, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to propose and empirically validate the mediating role of WPPS. The data analysis revealed that the relationship between AL and AOC is fully mediated by WPPS. The theoretical and managerial implications of the findings of this study are discussed in the next section.

Theoretical Implications

Several studies have shown the efficacy of authentic leadership (AL) on various employee-related outcomes

(Avolio et al., 2004; Walumbwa et al., 2004) and organizational outcomes (Caldwell & Dixon, 2010). Researchers have also called for studies on the impact of AL on work attitudes (Leroy et al., 2012b). In this study, we found that WPPS fully mediates the relationship between AL and AOC. Thus, based on this result, we can safely propose that authentic leaders generally are able to foster affective organizational commitment amongst the employees of their organizations by creating a psychologically safe workplace (high WPPS), where the employees feel secure to be themselves and can express their ideas/opinions without the fear of being judged or ostracized. This enriches our understanding of the pathways through which authentic leaders influence the organizational commitment of employees in organizations. Empirical evidence on the relationship between authentic leadership and follower work attitudes is relatively scarce in extant literature because AL is a recent construct (Peus et al., 2012). Hence, the findings of this study extend and enrich the literature on AL, WPPS, and AOC.

Managerial Implications

Understanding the factors that impact employees' affective organizational commitment (AOC) is crucial for managers, as they are related to organizational effectiveness (Guerrero et al., 2015). Studies have shown that it might be less effective for organizations to recruit employees who are predisposed to being affectively committed to the organization, and organizations could be better off by carefully managing the employees' experiences at their jobs following their recruitment (Meyer et al., 2002; Irving & Meyer, 1994). Thus, organizations should focus on creating a psychologically safe workplace (high WPPS – a key experience at work) for their employees in which the employees' unique identities and potentially conflicting ideas are not judged or looked down upon, or ignored. Employee-perceived WPPS at both team-level and organizational-level need to be measured through employee surveys, and leaders/managers need to take measures to improve the WPPS of their teams.

Top-level leaders of organizations who are concerned about increasing the AOC of their employees can do so by augmenting the AL of their managers, which can be done through training. After training, such managers could work on their leadership qualities in terms of adapting and practicing the four components of AL. Studies indicate that managers can improve their self-awareness through 360-degree feedback other than self-introspection and then taking appropriate action (Rosti & Shipper, 1998). Balanced processing while making decisions can be achieved by managers/leaders by soliciting views from employees of diverse opinions and experiences and, also, by combining their reliance on hard data with soft data, such as emotional- and social-related data (Gatling et al., 2016). OD interventions could also be used effectively either at the organization-level or team-level to achieve these ends; that is, higher WPPS increases the AOC of employees and effective AL. The advantage with OD interventions is that, if properly done, employees can be institutionalized in the organization for posterity, and future generations could foster these aspects mentioned above.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

First, this study used a convenient sample of employees (N=283) from business organizations working at different levels of management (top-level, middle-level, lower-level) and across multiple industries. Future studies could use a larger random sample of employees across different geographies and industries to see if the model proposed in this study holds good in various contexts. Second, this study looked at the mediating effect of workplace psychological safety (WPPS) on the relationship between authentic leadership (AL) and affective organizational commitment (AOC) in isolation. Future research can measure the mediating effect of WPPS on the relationship between AL and AOC in the presence of other latent variables that have been identified in extant research as mediators of this relationship: participative safety climate, behavioral integrity, and happiness at work (Guerrero et al., 2014; Leroy et al., 2012b; Semedo et al., 2019). Finally, this study used a cross-sectional survey-based method to test the hypotheses, wherein a full collinearity test was conducted to show that there was no common method bias in this study. Future studies could use experimental research and longitudinal surveys to test the relationship between AL, WPPS, and AOC.

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