

***THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP AND
EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT TO ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN
HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS***

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the correlation between authentic leadership and employee commitment to organizational change, a critical area that has seen limited exploration in leadership research. Although employee attitudes are pivotal in ensuring the success of change initiatives, few empirical studies have focused on the relationship between

authentic leadership and commitment to change. This research aims to fill that gap by examining how authentic leadership influences employees' commitment to organizational transformation. Using a quantitative, cross-sectional survey, data were collected from employees at higher education institutions in the Southern State Peninsula of Malaysia through an online panel. The findings reveal significant positive correlations between authentic leadership and the three dimensions of commitment to organizational change: affective, normative, and continuance commitment. Specifically, the results demonstrate that authentic leadership is strongly associated with affective commitment (estimate = 0.179, $p < 0.001$), indicating that employees who perceive their leaders as authentic are more emotionally attached and supportive of organizational change. Additionally, a significant correlation was found between authentic leadership and normative commitment (estimate = 0.155, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that authentic leadership fosters a sense of moral obligation among employees to support the change. Finally, the relationship between authentic leadership and continuance commitment (estimate = 0.151, $p < 0.001$) indicates that employees are more likely to stay committed to the change due to perceived costs of non-compliance. These findings contribute to the understanding of how leadership styles influence employees' attitudes toward change, offering practical insights for leaders in higher education institutions to enhance employee commitment during organizational transformations..

Keywords: *Authentic Leadership, Organizational Change, Employee Commitment, Higher Education Institutions.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly evolving landscape of higher education, institutions are increasingly called upon to implement significant organizational changes to remain competitive and meet the demands of modern education systems. However, the success of these change initiatives often hinges on the commitment of employees, particularly in environments where leadership plays a crucial role in shaping organizational outcomes (Musaigwa & Kalitanyi, 2024; Ouedraogo et al., 2023; Zulkarnain et al., 2024). Authentic leadership, a concept rooted in ethical behavior and self-awareness, has gained traction as a leadership style that fosters trust, transparency, and positive organizational outcomes (Musaigwa & Kalitanyi, 2024; Ouedraogo et al., 2023; Zulkarnain et al., 2024). Despite its rising prominence, the relationship between authentic leadership and employees' commitment to organizational change has not been extensively studied (Gardner et al., 2011), particularly within higher education settings.

Authentic leadership, as defined by scholars like Avolio & Gardner (2005), is characterized by self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing of information, and an internalized moral perspective. These traits have been linked to positive organizational behaviors, including employee engagement, trust, and commitment. As higher education institutions face unprecedented challenges and pressures to adapt, understanding how

leadership styles influence employees' commitment to change becomes increasingly important.

This study aims to investigate the relationship between authentic leadership and employee commitment to organizational change in a higher education context. By focusing on this relationship, the research seeks to contribute to the existing literature on leadership and change management and offer practical insights for leaders in educational institutions to better navigate the complexities of organizational transformation.

2.0 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the growing body of literature on authentic leadership and its positive effects on organizational outcomes, the specific relationship between authentic leadership and employee commitment to organizational change has not been thoroughly examined, particularly in the context of higher education institutions (McDonald, 2023; Roncesvalles & Gaerlan, 2021). Authentic leadership, characterized by self-awareness, ethical decision-making, and relational transparency, is increasingly recognized as a significant factor in fostering a supportive and adaptive workforce (Gifford, 2023; Roncesvalles & Gaerlan, 2021). However, there is a gap in empirical research investigating how these leadership traits directly impact employees' willingness and commitment to embrace organizational changes, especially within the rapidly transforming higher education sector.

In many institutions, organizational change is met with resistance or a lack of commitment, often due to insufficient leadership practices that fail to address the emotional, normative, and continuance commitment of employees (Gifford, 2023; Roncesvalles & Gaerlan, 2021). Understanding how authentic leadership can bridge this gap by enhancing employees' commitment to change is essential for the successful implementation of transformative initiatives in higher education settings. Without empirical data linking authentic leadership to change commitment, leaders may struggle to apply the appropriate strategies needed to guide their organizations through these transitions effectively.

Objectives

- To examine the relationship between authentic leadership and employees' affective commitment to organizational change in higher education institutions.
- To assess the correlation between authentic leadership and normative commitment to organizational change among employees in higher education institutions.
- To investigate the impact of authentic leadership on employees' continuance commitment to organizational change in the context of higher education.

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Authentic leadership has emerged as a significant leadership style in modern organizational contexts, particularly due to its emphasis on ethical leadership, self-awareness, relational transparency, and an internalized moral perspective (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Authentic leadership is built on the idea of leading with genuine intentions, fostering trust, and developing transparent and trustworthy relationships with employees. These qualities are considered vital in organizational change contexts, where employee commitment to change is often seen as a decisive factor for the success or failure of change initiatives (Islam et al., 2021; Khaw et al., 2023).

Affective Commitment to Change

Affective commitment refers to an employee's emotional attachment and identification with an organization or change initiative (Astuty & Udin, 2020). Employees with a high level of affective commitment are more likely to support organizational changes because they see the change as personally beneficial or aligned with their values. Studies have shown that leadership styles, particularly those that emphasize openness and ethical conduct, such as authentic leadership, can positively influence employees' emotional investment in organizational changes (Ciftci & Erkanli, 2020). Authentic leaders create environments of trust and open communication, which foster strong emotional bonds between the organization and its employees, making them more receptive to change initiatives (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Men et al., 2020; Srivastava & Mohaley, 2022).

Normative Commitment to Change

Normative commitment is the sense of obligation employees feel towards supporting organizational changes. This form of commitment often stems from a moral or ethical sense of duty toward the organization, sometimes reinforced by a leader's moral perspective and transparent leadership behavior (Astuty & Udin, 2020). Authentic leaders, by fostering open, honest, and value-driven communication, instill a sense of moral duty in their followers, encouraging them to support organizational changes not just for personal gain, but because they feel ethically obligated to do so (Ciftci & Erkanli, 2020). Employees who believe in the integrity and moral leadership of their superiors are more likely to exhibit normative commitment and actively participate in the transformation processes (Godbless, 2021; Guohao et al., 2021).

Continuance Commitment to Change

Continuance commitment is based on the perceived cost of not supporting organizational change. Employees who exhibit high levels of continuance commitment may feel compelled to support change initiatives because they believe that not doing so would lead to negative consequences, such as job loss or reduced opportunities for advancement (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). While continuance commitment is often seen as less intrinsically motivated than affective or normative commitment, authentic leadership can still play a role by fostering environments where employees recognize the practical benefits of supporting change, as opposed to suffering potential losses (Semedo et al., 2016). Authentic leaders can reduce feelings of uncertainty and highlight the importance of change for long-term organizational sustainability, potentially increasing continuance

commitment through rational and transparent communication (Smollan & Morrison, 2019).

Hypotheses

Objective 1: To examine the relationship between authentic leadership and employees' affective commitment to organizational change in higher education institutions.

- H01: There is no significant correlation between authentic leadership and employees' affective commitment to organizational change in higher education institutions.
- HA1: There is a significant correlation between authentic leadership and employees' affective commitment to organizational change in higher education institutions.

Objective 2: To assess the correlation between authentic leadership and normative commitment to organizational change among employees in higher education institutions.

- H02: There is no significant correlation between authentic leadership and employees' normative commitment to organizational change in higher education institutions.
- HA2: There is a significant correlation between authentic leadership and employees' normative commitment to organizational change in higher education institutions.

Objective 3: To investigate the impact of authentic leadership on employees' continuance commitment to organizational change in the context of higher education.

- H03: There is no significant correlation between authentic leadership and employees' continuance commitment to organizational change in higher education institutions.
- HA3: There is a significant correlation between authentic leadership and employees' continuance commitment to organizational change in higher education institutions.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

To achieve the research objectives, this study will use a quantitative research approach. This approach is suitable because it allows for the collection and analysis of numerical data to identify relationships between authentic leadership and employee commitment to organizational change.

Research Design: A cross-sectional survey design will be employed. This means data will be collected at a single point in time from employees in higher education institutions to examine the relationship between authentic leadership and the three types of commitment (affective, normative, and continuance).

Population and Sample: The study will focus on employees working in higher education institutions in Malaysia. A convenience sampling method will be used, where participants are selected based on their availability and willingness to participate. The goal is to survey 300 employees.

Data Collection: Data will be collected using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire will have two sections:

- **Authentic Leadership Inventory.** The Authentic Leadership Inventory (ALI; Neider & Schriesheim, 2011) is a 16-item questionnaire ($\alpha = .95$) asking participants to measure how each statement fits their current or last supervisor on a five-point scale (Disagree strongly; Disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Agree; Agree strongly). The ALI contains four questions focusing on self-awareness, four on relational transparency, four on balanced processing, and four on internalized moral perspective.
- **Commitment to Change Scale (CTCS)** to measure employees' affective, normative, and continuance commitment to organizational change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). **Affective Commitment:** Focus on how the employee feels emotionally connected to the change, reflecting their positive outlook on the benefits and success of the change for the institution. **Normative Commitment:** Emphasize employees' feelings of obligation or duty towards the institution and their role in supporting the change. **Continuance Commitment:** Reflect employees' perceived costs of not supporting the change, including personal investments or fear of negative consequences from opposing the change.

Data Analysis: The collected data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants and inferential statistics (such as correlation analysis) to determine the relationships between authentic leadership and the different types of commitment to change.

Ethical Considerations: Participants will be informed about the purpose of the study, and their responses will remain anonymous and confidential. Participation will be voluntary, and participants can withdraw at any time.

5.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the gender distribution of the respondents, with 125 males (41.7%) and 175 females (58.3%), indicating a higher representation of females in the sample. According to Table 2, 133 respondents (44.3%) hold academic positions, while 167 (55.7%) are in non-academic/administrative roles, showing a slightly larger proportion of non-academic staff. Table 3 highlights the respondents' duration of employment, with 34 employees (11.3%) having worked for 0-5 years, 87 (29.0%) for 6-10 years, 70 (23.3%) for 11-15 years, 89 (29.7%) for 16-20 years, and 20 (6.7%) having been employed for over 21 years. The largest group consists of those who have been with their institution for 16-20 years,

followed closely by those with 6-10 years of service, reflecting a diverse range of tenure among the respondents.

Table 1: Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	125	41.7	41.7	41.7
	Female	175	58.3	58.3	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Position

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Academic	133	44.3	44.3	44.3
	Non Academic/ Admin	167	55.7	55.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: Duration

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0-5 years	34	11.3	11.3	11.3
	6-10	87	29.0	29.0	40.3
	11-15	70	23.3	23.3	63.7
	16-20	89	29.7	29.7	93.3
	Over 21 years	20	6.7	6.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Measurement Model

The measurement model in Figure 1 incorporates four exogenous latent constructs: Self-Awareness (SA), Relational Transparency (RT), Balanced Processing (BP), and Internalized Moral Perspective (IM). Each construct is measured by multiple observed variables, with factor loadings ranging from 0.74 to 0.86, indicating strong relationships between the latent variables and their respective indicators. The model fit indices demonstrate an excellent fit with Chi-Square = 85.708, df = 84, ChiSq/df = 1.020, GFI = .964, AGFI = .948, CFI = .999, and RMSEA = .008, all of which indicate an exceptional

overall fit according to the recommended thresholds. This suggests that the proposed model accurately reflects the data and effectively captures the relationships between the authentic leadership constructs.

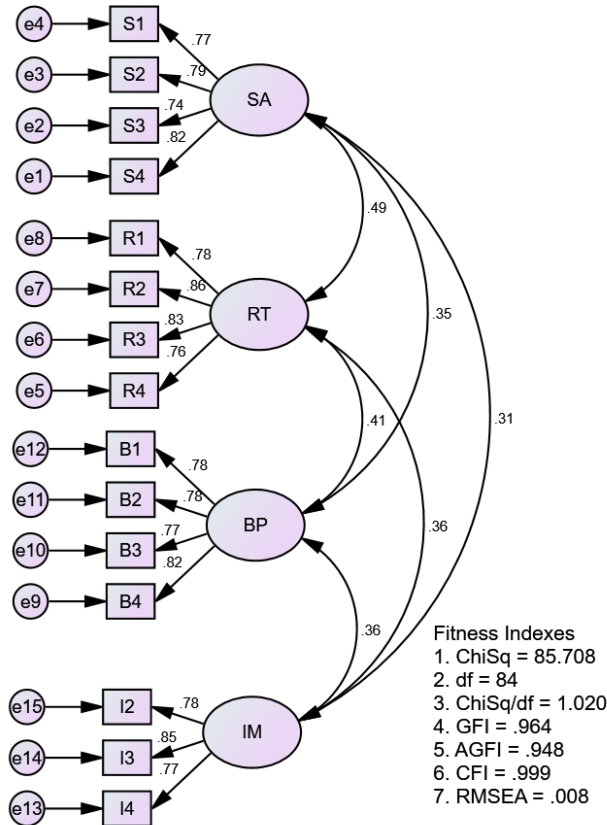


Figure 1: The Measurement Model combining All Exogenous Latent Constructs Simultaneously

The measurement model depicted in Figure 2 incorporates three endogenous latent constructs: Affective Commitment (Affec), Normative Commitment (Norm), and Continuance Commitment (Cont). Each latent construct is measured by five observed variables, with factor loadings ranging from 0.73 to 0.89, indicating strong relationships between the latent constructs and their indicators. The model fit indices demonstrate an excellent overall fit with Chi-Square = 109.234, df = 87, ChiSq/df = 1.256, GFI = .955, AGFI = .938, CFI = .992, and RMSEA = .029, all of which fall within the acceptable ranges for a well-fitting model. This model effectively captures the relationships among the commitment constructs within the context of organizational change.

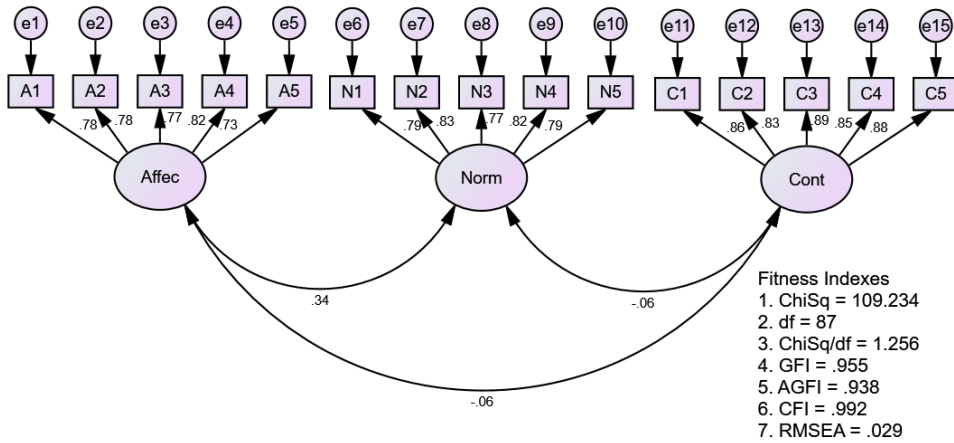


Figure 2: The Measurement Model combining All Endogenous Latent Constructs Simultaneously

Analyzing The Correlation

The covariance estimates presented in Figures 3, 4, and 5 display the relationships between Authentic Leadership (Aut Leader) and three forms of commitment: Affective Commitment, Normative Commitment, and Continuance Commitment. Figure 3 illustrates the covariance between Authentic Leadership and Affective Commitment, with an estimate of 0.18. Figure 4 shows the covariance between Authentic Leadership and Normative Commitment, estimated at 0.16. Figure 5 highlights the covariance between Authentic Leadership and Continuance Commitment, with an estimate of 0.15.

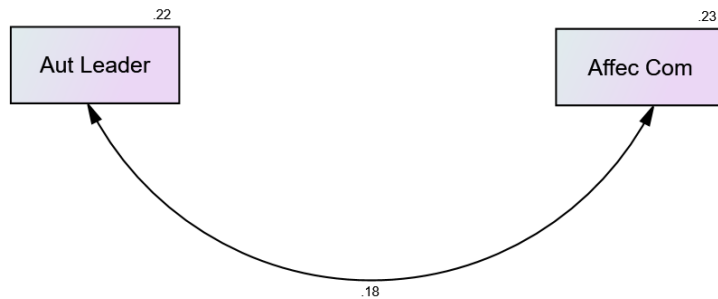


Figure 3: The covariance estimates for the variables Authentic and Affective Commitment

Table 4: The hypothesis testing for the covariance between Authentic and Affective Commitment

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Authentic <--> Affective	.179	.017	10.736	***

*** Indicate a highly significant at < 0.001

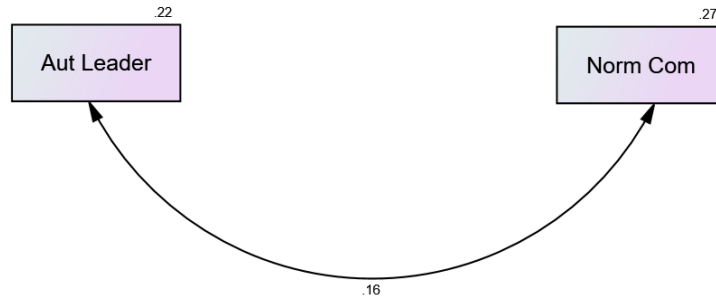


Figure 4: The covariance estimates for the variables Authentic and Normative Commitment

Table 5: The hypothesis testing for the covariance between Authentic and Normative Commitment

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Authentic <--> Normative	.155	.017	9.276	***

*** Indicate a highly significant at < 0.001

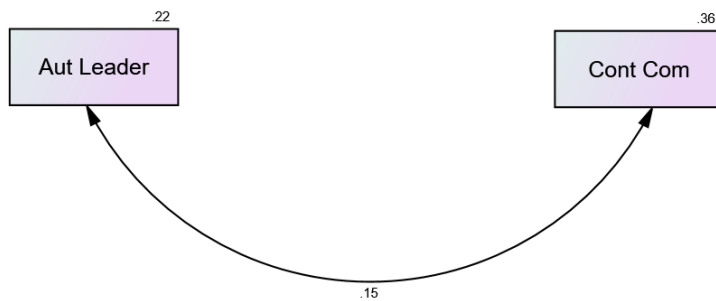


Figure 5: The covariance estimates for the variables Authentic and Continuance Commitment

Table 6: The hypothesis testing for the covariance between Authentic and Continuance Commitment

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Authentic <--> Continuance	.151	.019	8.133	***

*** Indicate a highly significant at < 0.001

Tables 4, 5, and 6 provide the hypothesis testing results for these covariances. Table 4 shows that the covariance between Authentic Leadership and Affective Commitment is highly significant with an estimate of 0.179, S.E. = 0.017, C.R. = 10.736, and $P < 0.001$. Table 5 reports that the covariance between Authentic Leadership and Normative Commitment is also highly significant with an estimate of 0.155, S.E. = 0.017, C.R. = 9.276, and $P < 0.001$. Lastly, Table 6 indicates a significant covariance between Authentic Leadership and Continuance Commitment with an estimate of 0.151, S.E. = 0.019, C.R. = 8.133, and $P < 0.001$. All these results suggest highly significant positive correlations between Authentic Leadership and the different forms of organizational commitment.

6.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provides empirical evidence of the significant role that authentic leadership plays in influencing employees' commitment to organizational change in higher education institutions. The positive correlations between authentic leadership and affective, normative, and continuance commitment highlight the importance of leadership practices that emphasize self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and an internalized moral perspective. Authentic leaders are shown to foster a deeper emotional connection (affective commitment), a strong sense of obligation (normative commitment), and a recognition of the practical benefits of supporting change (continuance commitment) among employees.

These findings suggest that institutions aiming to implement successful organizational changes should focus on promoting authentic leadership as a strategic approach to enhance employee dedication and minimize resistance to change. By fostering trust, ethical behavior, and open communication, authentic leaders can significantly impact the overall success of organizational transformation efforts. Future research could further explore the mechanisms through which authentic leadership impacts other aspects of organizational change and examine its effects in different cultural or institutional contexts..

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Nasir, N. S. M.: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software; Ya'cob, Z.: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Writing-Original Draft; Zakaria, U. A. U. M.: Validation, Writing-Reviewing and Editing; Shahzada, M. R.: Validation, Writing-Reviewing and Editing

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The manuscript has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration by other journals. All authors have approved the review, agree with its submission and declare no conflict of interest on the manuscript.

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