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## Follower Perceptions of Authentic Leadership: A Comparison between Respondents from Romania and the United States

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### Abstract

As a reaction to negative examples of contemporary leadership practice in various societal areas, authentic leadership theory proposes to offer an alternative values-based model. Drawing upon the work of Kernis (2003), Avolio and Gardner (2005) and Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, and Peterson (2008), the present endeavor employs the concept of authentic leadership as consisting of the following four dimensions: self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing. Based on previous research about the influence of national culture on leadership behavior, the present endeavor develops a model, which proposes that employees in low power distance cultures perceive their leaders as more authentic than employees in secular and high power distance cultures. The hypothesis was tested among employees from Romania and USA (N = 42). The results revealed there were no significant differences between the two groups in what the four dimensions of authentic leadership are concerned. Implications for leadership research are discussed.

*Keywords:* authentic leadership, cultures, Romania, USA

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### 1. Introduction

In the context of many negative leadership examples in the contemporary business realm and their impact on the economy and other societal areas, popular press authors such as leadership consultant Kevin Cashman, called for a new type of genuine and values-based leadership – authentic leadership (Gardner, Cogliser, Davis, & Dickens, 2011). Gardner et al. (2011) investigated 91 publications that focused on authentic leadership and underlined that the description of authentic leadership begins with defining authenticity. The concept of authenticity has its roots in

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Greek philosophy and it means “to thine own self be true” (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 319). Avolio and Gardner (2005) proposed the development of authentic leaders will foster the development of authentic followership “as followers internalize values and beliefs espoused by the leader their conception of what constitutes their actual and possible selves are expected to change and develop over time” (p. 327). The present endeavor investigates authentic leadership in the context of two different countries: Romania and the USA.

## 2. Authentic Leadership

Gardner et al. (2011) underlined that the first attempt to define leadership authenticity belonged to Hoy and Henderson (1983) and encompassed the following elements: (a) acceptance of personal and organizational responsibility for actions, outcomes and mistakes; (b) the non-manipulation of subordinates; and (c) the salience of the self over role requirements. More recently, Kernis (2003) and Avolio and Gardner (2005) proposed the following components of authentic leadership: self-awareness, balanced processing, relational transparency, authentic behavioral action. Based on these dimensions, Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, and Peterson (2008) built and validated a higher order multidimensional construct of authentic leadership.

Referring to the foundational theories of authentic leadership, Gardner et al. (2011) underlined a few approaches that researchers have employed to date. Authentic leadership researchers have applied affective process theories attribution and social perception theory, ethical leadership, neo-charismatic leadership, positive psychology, and well being/vital engagement. One of the main aspects of authentic leadership consists of the emphasis it places on the development of both the leader and follower. When followers internalize the values portrayed by the leader, their selves also develops and changes over time. It is in this process that Avolio and Gardner (2005) saw the differentiation from transformational leadership. Unlike transformational leadership which aims to transform followers, authentic leadership does not set to transform but ends up doing this by role modeling. Avolio and Gardner also differentiated between authentic leadership and servant leadership, by pointing out that servant leadership missed to recognize the mediating role of follower self-awareness and regulation, positive psychological capital and positive organization.

Though, as acknowledged by Walumbwa et al., there have been many conceptualizations of authentic leadership, their work draws on the research by Avolio and Gardner (2005) and Ilies, Morgeson, and Nahrgang (2005) for three reasons. Their research is deeply rooted in social psychological theory and research on authenticity; it articulates the central role of an internalized moral perspective to authentic leadership, and focuses on the development of authentic leaders and followers. Walumbwa et al. defined authentic leadership as follows:

a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development. (p. 94)

The items developed by Walumbwa et al. (2008) to measure authentic leadership were based on an extensive review of the literature on authentic leadership and development, recently completed dissertations on authentic leadership and discussions with a group of researchers and graduate students. As a result, the following domains emerged as part of the authentic leadership construct: self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing. Self-awareness refers to the process of authentic leaders coming to understand their unique talents, strengths, values. Relational transparency assumes that leaders are transparent about their true emotions and feelings to followers. Thirdly, the internalized moral perspective is a form of self-regulation guided by internal moral standards and values. Lastly, balanced processing refers to the process of objectively analyzing all relevant data and consulting other perspectives before making a decision. Avolio and Gardner (2005) proposed that “through increased self-awareness, self-regulation, and positive modeling, authentic leaders foster the development of authenticity in followers” (p. 317).

A few years after the validation of the ALQ, Neider and Schriesheim (2011) developed and validated a new measure of authentic leadership, the Authentic Leadership Inventory (ALI). The items of the ALI were built around the same four dimensions as the ALQ. The authors claimed their instrument was built on the strengths of the ALQ. However, they argued confirmatory factor analyses did not support treating authentic leadership as a universally global constructs and that future research would be better served by using separate authentic leadership dimensions

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