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# THE MEDIATING ROLE OF HOTEL EMPLOYEES' JOB SATISFACTION AND PERFORMANCE IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE\*

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## Abstract

*Authentic leadership is a positive leadership theory, conceptualized under the influence of positive psychology and positive organizational behaviour movement. Although it has become a recognized leadership theory, it is still somewhat neglected in the hospitality literature. To address this gap, the paper seeks to develop and test a conceptual model linking authentic leadership to organizational performance in the hospitality context. Hypotheses were tested using hierarchical multiple regression analysis on a sample of 226 employees from 24 hotels in Croatia. The research results confirmed the positive impact of authentic leadership on hotels' operational*

*performance, which was mediated by followers' job satisfaction and performance. There was no empirical support for the hypothesized impact of authentic leadership on hotels' financial performance. The findings suggest that authentic leadership behaviours, together with positive organisational settings, characterized by flexible organizational structure, are more likely to enhance desirable employees' attitudes and behaviours, resulting in improved organizational performance.*

**Keywords:** *authentic leadership, job satisfaction, job performance, organizational performance, hospitality industry*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advances in leadership theory and research over the past two decades have generated new thoughts on the nature and the appropriate mode of studying this multifaceted phenomenon. Namely, while traditional leadership theory has primarily studied the role and the attributes of the

leader, the focus of research has now shifted to followers and contextual factors that influence leadership processes. At the same time, economic and societal changes have energized the need for a new, different form of leadership within organizations. With the advent of terrorism, corporate scandals and management malfeasance at the turn of the

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century, the need arose for “*bona fide leaders who are honest and good*” (Northouse, 2013: 253).

Authentic leadership (AL) is a positive leadership theory conceptualized under the influence of positive psychology and positive organizational behaviour movement (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Considering the positive effects of AL on desirable employees’ outcomes (see meta-analysis by Hoch et al., 2016) and its follower-centric orientation, it seems prudent to test the impact of authentic leadership behaviours in the hospitality business which is heavily dependent upon satisfied and productive work force.

Surprisingly, thus far, the link between AL and job satisfaction has not been investigated in the hospitality context. Also, despite the multilevel conceptualization of authentic leadership, empirical research is predominantly focused on AL’s individual outcomes, with only three studies examining its organizational-level effects (Clapp-Smith et al., 2009; Hsiung, 2012; Musa et al., 2017).

Based on the aforementioned findings, the main aim of this paper is to analyse the relationship between authentic leadership and organizational performance in the hospitality industry, while also taking into account a possible mediating effect of employees’ satisfaction and job performance.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1. Authentic leadership

Authentic leadership is commonly understood as a ‘root construct’, underlying all positive forms of leadership. Namely, the term ‘authentic’ entails the true, genuine elements of positive leadership. Avolio

et al (2004:3) state that authentic leaders are “those individuals who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others’ values/moral perspective, knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and high on moral character”. However, it needs to be emphasized that authentic leadership entails more than just authenticity of the leader. More specifically, AL encompasses the authentic leader-follower relationship which can be described as “*open, transparent, trusting and genuine*” (Avolio & Gardner, 2005: 322). with the aim of followers’ personal and professional development and growth.

The following definitions best illustrate the two different approaches to authentic leadership. In their initial conceptual model, Luthans & Avolio (2003: 243) state that AL must be understood as a “*process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviours on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development*”. As it highlights the role of all leadership variables (the leader, the followers and the organizational context), this perspective reflects the integrative nature of authentic leadership.

Later conceptualizations of authentic leadership emphasized its developmental component, which makes it fragile and open to change and development. More specifically, Walumbwa et al. (2008: 94) define AL as “*a pattern of leader behaviour 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*". The latter conceptualization formed the basis of four AL dimensions: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing and relational transparency. The Walumbwa et al.'s definition (2008) is adopted by most empirical studies on AL.

## 2.2. Organizational performance

Similar to the concept of authentic leadership, there is no generally accepted definition of organizational performance (Neely, 2005; 2009). In the existing literature, the question of the definition of organizational performance was predominantly related to the conceptualization of the organization itself, that is, to the chosen approach of organizational analysis. Consequently, different models of organizational performance are largely based on the concept of organizational effectiveness (Venkatraman & Ramanujam, 1986). However, according to a more recent conceptualization, organizational performance is one of the many indicators of organizational effectiveness, and encompasses the following three aspects of organizational outcomes: "(1) *financial performance (profits, return on assets, return on investment)*; (2) *product market performance (sales, market share)*; (3) *shareholder return (total shareholder return, economic value added)*" (Richard et al., 2009: 722).

Research on organizational performance predominantly revolves around identifying adequate measures and determinants of organizational success. Up until the early 21st century, or the advent of "*performance measurement revolution*" (Neely, 1999), hotel organizations predominantly used financial performance indicators. Today,

most hotel businesses implement contemporary performance measurement systems consisting of both financial and operational indicators.

From the perspective of strategic leadership, leaders influence organizational performance by making decisions about human resources, competitive strategy, as well as management programs, systems, and structures (Yukl, 2013: 277). The present study explores authentic leadership's relationship to organizational performance through its effect on employees' attitudes and behaviours.

## 2.3. Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is a well-researched construct in management studies, and is commonly viewed as "*a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job*" (Locke, 1976: 1304). The importance of this job-related attitude arises primarily from its long-assumed role in predicting individual work performance (the 'holy grail' of management research) (Wright, 2006). Numerous studies on the subject have been summarized in several most relevant narrative reviews and meta-analysis (see Grudić Kvasić, 2018: 89). In addition, recent empirical work has also found positive correlations between employee satisfaction and organizational success (Harter et al., 2002).

## 2.4. Research hypotheses and model

Although the initial AL model posits that authentic leadership develops under "*a highly developed organizational context*" (Luthans & Avolio, 2003: 243), empirical work detailing this notion is still scarce. Leroy et al. (2012) confirmed the positive link between ethical organizational climate and authentic leadership, while Azanza et

al. (2013) find a strong link between flexible organizational culture and authentic leadership. Examining the most frequently studied organizational variables in the hospitality literature, the following organizational characteristics were deemed suitable for exploring the link between organizational context and authentic leadership: hotel's category, ownership status, and organizational structure. Namely, previous empirical studies have demonstrated a correlation between hotel categorization and hotel manager's attributes (Taviteyaman et al., 2014), as well as hotel ownership status and leadership style (Antonakis, 2003; Quintana et al., 2015). Thus, the following hypotheses propose that organizational attributes are significantly related to the perception of authentic leadership:

*H1a: Hotel's category is related to authentic leadership.*

*H1b: Hotel's organizational structure is related to authentic leadership.*

*H1c: Hotel's ownership status is related to authentic leadership.*

Avolio et al. (2004) developed a theoretical model that links authentic leadership to numerous individual outcomes through positive constructs of trust, positive emotions, optimism, hope and identification processes. The work by Gardner et al. (2005) emphasizes the development of authentic followers resulting in veritable and sustainable followers' attitudes and job performance. Confirming these theoretical assumptions, a positive relationship between authentic leadership and employee job satisfaction

has been widely documented (see Grudić Kvasić, 2018: 53). However, the relationship has not been tested in the hospitality settings. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

*H2: Authentic leadership is positively related to employees' job satisfaction.*

Organizational performance in the service sector is mostly explored under the umbrella of 'Service-Profit-Chain Framework' (Heskett et al., 1997), which implies that satisfied and productive employees lead to satisfied and loyal customers, resulting in increased growth and profitability of the organization. The link between individual attitudes and behaviours and organizational performance has been examined in different organizational settings: financial sector (Gelade & Young, 2005), manufacturing (Hatane, 2015), service industry (Koys, 2001) and hospitality (Chi & Gursoy, 2009). Thus, based on theory and research, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H3: Employees' job satisfaction is positively related to employees' job performance.*

*H4a: Employees' job performance is positively related to hotels' financial performance.*

*H4b: Employees' job performance is positively related to hotels' operational performance.*

By adopting the integrative and strategic leadership perspective, the theoretical model (Figure 1) addresses the identified gaps in current leadership research.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual model

**Source:** Authors' research

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Sample and procedures

The sample consisted of 226 hotel employees from 24 hotels in Croatia. The respondents were predominately female (59.30 percent) and with secondary education (58.40 percent). On average, the respondents were 36.5 years old with 8.9 years of organizational experience. Comparable to similar research, hotel employees rated their leader's AL and hotel's organizational structure. Job satisfaction and job performance were also measured through employees' self-report. The managers, on the other hand, provided data regarding the hotel category, ownership status and organizational performance.

#### 3.2. Measures

The Authentic Leadership Inventory (Neider & Schriesheim, 2011), consisting of 16 items, measured hotel employees' perception of their manager's *authentic leadership behaviour (ALB)*. A sample ALB item is: "My leader shows consistency between his/her beliefs and actions". The Job Diagnostic Scale (Hackman & Oldham, 1980), consisting of three items, measured employees' job *satisfaction*. A sample of general satisfaction item is: "I

often think of quitting this job" (reversed). Job performance is assessed using a 6-item scale (Befort & Hattrup, 2003). A sample item of measured task performance is: "I proficiently complete all duties central to the job". Organizational performance was measured using one operational and one financial performance indicator: occupancy and net profit rate. The organizational characteristics are operationalized in the following way: hotels are *categorized* into 4 groups (2-5 stars); the *ownership status* distinguishes between independent and chain hotels, while formalization, as a key dimension of *organizational structure* (the degree to which decision making and work behaviour are determined by rules, policies, and procedures), is measured with a 3-item instrument (Olson et al., 2005). A sample item is: "There is little action taken unless the decision fits standard operating procedures." Respondents (where applicable) used a 5-point Likert scale of agreement.

#### 3.3. Data analysis

In addition to descriptive statistics, reliability and correlation analysis, the hypotheses were tested using hierarchical multiple regression analysis in conjunction with the standard mediation testing procedures (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The level of analysis is the individual employee.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Descriptive statistics

The descriptive results for main study variables (Table 1) revealed a relatively high level of perceived authentic leadership ( $M = 3.84$ ), job satisfaction ( $M = 3.82$ ) and job performance ( $M = 4.06$ ). The average hotel occupancy rate is 49.85%, while the average net profit rate is 12.14%. Using Cohen's (1988) effect size criterion, small correlations were found between: job satisfaction and profit ( $r = .203$ ,  $p < .01$ ), job satisfaction and occupancy rate ( $r = .213$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and job performance and occupancy rate ( $r = .274$ ,  $p < .01$ ); while medium

correlations were established between: mechanistic organizational structure and job satisfaction ( $r = -.319$ ,  $p < .01$ ), mechanistic organizational structure and authentic leadership ( $r = -.335$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and job satisfaction and performance ( $r = .409$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Large effect size was only observed in the relationship between authentic leadership and employee job satisfaction ( $r = .516$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Cronbach alphas for AL, job satisfaction and job performance measures were above the benchmark of .70 (Nunnally, 1978). Although the organizational structure scale (.631) did not reach the generally acceptable level of internal consistency, it can still be considered as a marginally acceptable reliability (Hair et al., 2010).

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics and correlations

Variables	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Category	3.35(.73)								
2. Ownership	0.75(.43)	<b>-.256**</b>							
3. OS	3.14 (.87)	.078	-.004	.631					
4. Net profit	12.14 (6.29)	-.093	-.061	-.035					
5. Occupancy	49.85 (4.66)	.146*	.022	-.047	.136*				
6. AL	3.82 (.52)	.057	.052	<b>-.335**</b>	.069	.102	.992		
7. JS	3.84 (.50)	.044	.010	<b>-.319**</b>	<b>.203**</b>	<b>.213**</b>	<b>.516**</b>	.896	
8. JP	4.06 (.45)	.108	-.028	<b>-.147*</b>	.081	<b>.274**</b>	<b>.234**</b>	<b>.409**</b>	.756

**Note:** OS = organizational structure, AL = authentic leadership, JS = job satisfaction, JP = job performance. Scale reliabilities appear in bold.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

### 4.2. Hypotheses testing

*Direct effects.* The first three hypotheses, predicting a direct impact of organizational characteristics on perceived authentic leadership, were tested using hierarchical multiple regression analysis where the covariates of employees' gender, age, tenure and education were entered into Step 1 and the following organizational characteristics into Step 2: hotel category, ownership status and organizational structure. As evidenced in Table 2, entering organizational characteristics

in Step 2 predicted significant variance beyond the covariates. More specifically, the  $R^2$  change associated with mechanistic organizational structure is significant ( $\beta = -.333$ ,  $p < .01$ ), showing support for Hypothesis 1b, which predicts that organizational structure is related to authentic leadership. In contrast, Hypothesis 1a, which presumes a positive relationship between hotel category and perceived authentic leadership, as well as the Hypothesis 1c, which posits that hotel ownership status is positively related to authentic leadership, were not supported.

**Table 2.** The direct effects of organizational characteristics on authentic leadership

	Authentic leadership	
	Step 1	Step 2
	$\beta$	$\beta$
<b>Gender</b>	-,004	,031
<b>Age</b>	-,029	-,022
<b>Tenure</b>	-,099	-,060
<b>High school vs. Bachelor</b>	,053	,051
<b>High school vs. Master</b>	,049	,018
<b>Ownership status</b>		,056
<b>Organizational structure</b>		-,333**
<b>3* vs. 2*</b>		-,091
<b>3* vs. 4*</b>		,066
<b>3* vs. 5*</b>		,019
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	,016	,150
<b><math>\Delta R^2</math></b>	,016	,134
<b><math>\Delta F</math></b>	,700	4,770**

**Note:** Standardized coefficients reported: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

*Mediating effects.* The next four hypotheses, which indicate an indirect impact of authentic leadership on organizational performance through employees' job satisfaction and performance, were tested using Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure for determining mediating effect: "(1) the independent variable relates to the mediating

variable, (2) the independent variable is related to the dependent variable, (3) the mediating variable relates to the dependent variable, (4) the relationship of the independent with the dependent variable is weaker (partial mediation) or non-significant (full mediation) when the mediator is added to the model" (see Jiang et al., 2017).



**Table 3.** The mediating effect of job satisfaction in the relationship between authentic leadership and job performance

	Job satisfaction		Job performance		
	Model 1		Model 2		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$
<b>Gender</b>	-.020	-.014	-.054	-.051	-.046
<b>Age</b>	-.072	-.064	-.084	-.081	-.056
<b>Tenure</b>	-.076	-.025	-.055	-.032	-.023
<b>High school vs. Bachelor</b>	.061	.034	.019	.007	-.006
<b>High school vs. Master</b>	.068	.036	.054	.039	.026
<b>Authentic leadership</b>		.507**		.224**	.030
<b>Job satisfaction</b>					.384**
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	.020	.274	.019	.068	.175
<b><math>\Delta R^2</math></b>	.020	.253	.019	.050	.107
<b><math>\Delta F</math></b>	.920	76.362**	.847	11.639**	28.300**

**Note:** Standardized coefficients reported: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

As all four conditions have been met, we found support for a full mediation of job satisfaction and, consequently, for Hypothesis 2 which predicted a positive relationship between authentic leadership and employees' job satisfaction ( $\beta = .507$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

The results of the second mediation analysis are mixed (Table 4). Namely, when organizational performance was measured by occupancy rate, all 4 mediation preconditions have been met (Model 1 and Model 3), thus lending support for Hypothesis 3, which defined a positive link between job satisfaction and job performance ( $\beta = .399$ ,  $p < .01$ ), as well as Hypothesis 4b which posited that employees' job performance is positively related to hotel's operational

performance ( $\beta = .222$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In fact, since the relationship of job satisfaction with operational performance is non-significant when the variable of job performance is added (Model 3) job performance was found to fully mediate the said relationship (Step 3).

In contrast, when organizational performance was measured by net profit margin (Model 2), the third precondition of mediation has not been met (Step 3). Consequently, there was no empirical proof to support the Hypothesis 4a, which predicted a positive relationship between hotel employees' job performance and organization's financial performance ( $\beta = -.002$ ,  $p = .977$ ).

**Table 4.** The mediating effect of job performance in the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational performance

	Job performance		Net profit			Occupancy		
	Model 1		Model 2			Model 3		
	Step1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$
Gender	-.054	-.046						
Age	-.084	-.056						
Tenure	-.055	-.024						
High school vs. Bachelor	.019	-.005						
High school vs. Master	.054	.026						
Location 1 vs. 2			.004	.011	.011	-.147	-.140	-.124
Location 1 vs. 3			-.038	-.030	-.030	-.015	-.008	.007
Job satisfaction		.399**		.203**	.203**		.211**	.121
Job performance					-.002			.222**
R <sup>2</sup>	.019	.175	.002	.043	.043	.019	.063	.104
$\Delta R^2$	.019	.156	.002	.041	.000	.019	.045	.041
$\Delta F$	.847	41.378**	.191	9.464**	.001	2.115	10.569**	10.100**

Note: Standardized coefficients reported: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of multiple regression analysis have partly given evidence to the hypothesized indirect impact of authentic leadership on organizational performance. Namely, job satisfaction and performance were found to fully mediate the relationship between authentic leadership and hotels' operational performance. In contrast, there was no empirical proof in defense of the hypothesized mediating effect of employees' job satisfaction and performance in the relationship between authentic leadership and hotels' financial performance. Research has also demonstrated that, among the observed organizational characteristics (category, organizational structure and ownership status), only the organic organizational

structure is positively linked to authentic leadership behaviour.

The findings of this study point to two key *practical implications* for managers. Firstly, since authentic leadership is a behaviour that can be developed through the education and training of positive leadership, the organizations cannot only benefit by more efficient leaders, but also by more satisfied and productive employees, who, in turn, results in improved organizational performance. Secondly, by implementing an organic organizational structure that promotes flexible structures, decentralization, empowerment, and provides open access to information and resources, organization sustains authentic leadership development, and thus contributes to desirable work attitudes and behaviours.

The paper has several methodological *limitations* that need to be addressed. As expected and due to the cross-sectional design of the empirical research, no causal conclusions can be drawn. A second limitation concerns the ‘common-source bias’ (Podsakoff et al., 2003) as all data regarding authentic leadership, organizational structure, followers’ job satisfaction and performance were obtained from the same source (employees). The final limitation is related to the sample size and generalizability of the findings.

The study contributes to the existing knowledge in several ways. First, the study replicates previous research by confirming the positive influence of authentic leadership on employees’ individual outcomes. Secondly, the study expands research on authentic leadership by proposing and testing a model that examines the organizational-level outcome of authentic leadership. Finally, the study enables a better understanding of the organizational factors that influence authentic leadership development in the hospitality industry context.

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# MEDIJACIJSKA ULOGA ZADOVOLJSTVA POSLOM I PERFORMANSI HOTELSKIH ZAPOSLENIKA U ODNOSU IZMEĐU AUTENTIČNOG LIDERSTVA I ORGANIZACIJSKIH PERFORMANSI

### Sažetak

*Autentično liderstvo je pozitivna teorija liderstva, konceptualizirana pod utjecajem pozitivne psihologije i pokreta pozitivnog organizacijskog ponašanja. Iako je prepoznata kao relevantna teorija vođenja, ona je još uvijek donekle zanemarena u literaturi iz područja ugostiteljstva. Kako bi se umanjio ovaj nedostatak, u radu se razvija i testira konceptualni model, koji povezuje autentično liderstvo i organizacijske performanse u kontekstu ugostiteljstva. Hipoteze su testirane korištenjem hijerarhijske multiple regresije, na uzorku 226 zaposlenih u 24 hrvatska hotela. Rezultati istraživanja su potvrdili pozitivan utjecaj autentičnog liderstva na operacijske performanse hotela, pri čemu su zadovoljstvo*

*poslom i performanse sljedbenika imali medijacijsku ulogu. Hipoteza o utjecaju autentičnog liderstva na financijske performanse hotela nije empirijski dokazana. Rezultati ukazuju na doprinos ponašanja unutar autentičnog liderstva, zajedno s pozitivnim organizacijskim okruženjem, kojeg karakterizira fleksibilna organizacijska struktura, poboljšanje stavova i ponašanja zaposlenika, a što sve rezultira unapređenjem organizacijskih performansi.*

**Ključne riječi:** *autentično liderstvo, zadovoljstvo poslom, performanse zaposlenika, organizacijske performanse, hotelijerska i ugostiteljska industrija*