

THE EFFECT OF AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP ON WORK ENGAGEMENT IN MEXICO

O EFEITO DA LIDERANÇA AUTÊNTICA NO ENGAJAMENTO NO TRABALHO NO MÉXICO

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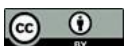
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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between authentic leadership (AL) and work engagement (WE) in the Mexican context, addressing the growing demand for ethical and value-driven leadership within organizations. Employing a quantitative research design, the study investigates whether authentic leadership positively influences work engagement among two distinct populations: undergraduate students engaged in student leadership roles at the University of Monterrey and employees of a major cement company in Monterrey, Mexico. Data was collected using the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), with a combined total of 418 responses. Findings from Pearson correlation and hierarchical regression analyses reveal statistically significant and moderately strong positive relationships between AL and WE in both samples (students: $r = .51$, $p < .001$; employees: $r = .515$, $p < .001$). The results suggest that authentic leadership substantially enhances individuals' levels of vigor, dedication, and absorption in their work and organizational roles. This study contributes to the limited empirical literature on AL in Latin American settings and highlights the practical implications for leadership development and

Resumo

Este artigo examina a relação entre liderança autêntica (LA) e engajamento no trabalho (ET) no contexto mexicano, abordando a crescente demanda por liderança ética e orientada por valores dentro das organizações. Empregando um delineamento de pesquisa quantitativa, o estudo investiga se a liderança autêntica influencia positivamente o engajamento no trabalho entre duas populações distintas: estudantes de graduação engajados em funções de liderança estudantil na Universidade de Monterrey e funcionários de uma grande empresa de cimento em Monterrey, México. Os dados foram coletados por meio do Questionário de Liderança Autêntica (ALQ) e da Escala de Engajamento no Trabalho de Utrecht (UWES), com um total combinado de 418 respostas. Os resultados das análises de correlação de Pearson e regressão hierárquica revelam relações positivas estatisticamente significativas e moderadamente fortes entre LA e ET em ambas as amostras (estudantes: $r = 0,51$, $p < 0,001$; funcionários: $r = 0,515$, $p < 0,001$). Os resultados sugerem que a liderança autêntica aumenta substancialmente os níveis de vigor, dedicação e absorção dos indivíduos em seu trabalho e em suas funções organizacionais. Este estudo contribui para a limitada literatura empírica sobre LA em contextos latino-



organizational effectiveness in culturally diverse environments.

Keywords: Leadership. Authentic Leadership. Work Engagement. Mexico.

americanos e destaca as implicações práticas para o desenvolvimento da liderança e a eficácia organizacional em ambientes culturalmente diversos.

Palavras-chave: Liderança. Liderança Autêntica. Engajamento no Trabalho. México.

1 INTRODUCTION

For generations, leadership has captivated scholars and practitioners alike. Over the decades, extensive interest and countless studies have sought to uncover the principles and practices that enable leaders to lead effectively. Even today, researchers continue striving to decode the mystery of what makes a truly effective leader, and how such leaders should think, act, and behave (Gandolfi & Stone, 2016). However, the topic of leadership is elusive, and despite numerous studies conducted, it remains a complex concept to understand. According to Burns (1978), leadership has been vastly misunderstood. To this, we must add that the ongoing crises in our Latin American countries, like Mexico, continue to reveal that all those decades of studies and research on leadership have not even resulted in good leadership practices. The need for credible and ethical leadership, that is, for good leaders, remains evident (Almutairi, Timmins, Wise, Stokes, & Alharbi, 2025; Baquero, 2023). According to George (2003), these times require "leaders who lead with purpose, values, and integrity; leaders who build enduring organizations, motivate their employees to provide superior customer service, and create long-term value for shareholders" (p. 9).

In recent years, it appears that the authentic leadership approach, which "focuses on whether leadership is genuine and real" (Northouse, 2022, p. 205), has been adopted. There is a growing need for research that explores authentic leadership across diverse cultural contexts, including Mexico. Authentic leadership is a new approach in the Mexican culture. Mexican companies are requiring authentic leaders who lead with values to address increasingly complex challenges in managing, influencing, motivating, and guiding teams to achieve organizational goals (Salcedo, Garza, Gandolfi, Gutierrez, & Treviño, 2025, p. 1321). Among the most pressing challenges for authentic leaders is fostering unwavering employee engagement at work. Both authentic leadership (AL) and

work engagement (WE) are essential for effectively navigating the challenges and opportunities that emerge in the workplace.

This article shows a quantitative study that aimed to measure AL in Mexico. Additionally, this study further sought to correlate the relationship between the AL among undergraduate students and employees of a cement company, and their WE. The objective is to understand whether the presence of AL in undergraduate students and employees of a cement company positively contributes to their WE. Thus, the research question is:

RQ: "Is there a positive relationship between authentic leadership demonstrated by leaders and work engagement that undergraduate students and employees exhibit?"

The study collected data through surveys to explore the relationship between the AL of undergraduate students and employees, as well as their perception of WE. The results of this study provide valuable insights for organizations seeking evidence regarding AL and its effects on WE.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Authentic leadership, as a construct, has long captured researchers' attention. It has positioned itself in leadership studies because there is a need for more authentic leaders in these challenging times (Baquero, 2023; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Seligman, 2002). Authentic leaders exercise their natural talents or abilities, but acknowledge their weaknesses, in order to lead with purpose, meaning, and values (Salcedo, Gandolfi, & Garza, 2023; Leavy, 2023; George, Sims, McLean, & Mayer, 2007; Giallonardo, Wong, & Iwasiw, 2010; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008). Authentic leaders exemplify four components: self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective (Giallonardo *et al.*, 2010; Walumbwa *et al.*, 2008). Authentic leadership's predictive capacity is in the developmental and discovery phase in Mexico. In Mexico, empirical studies on authentic leadership are still in their infancy, with less than a decade of research to date and much yet to be uncovered.

3 AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

Based on an exhaustive review of leadership studies, George, Sims, *et al.* (2007) argued that during the last 50 years, scholars have tried to determine the characteristics

or the personality traits of great people who have impacted their organizations. None of these studies has produced a unique profile of the ideal leader or member, because organizations around the globe have required different types of people to meet their needs and challenges (George, Sims, *et al.*, 2007). That is why our organizations need authentic leaders: "Authentic leaders demonstrate a passion for their purpose, practice their values consistently, and lead with their hearts as well as their heads. Authentic leaders act on that awareness by practicing their values and principles, sometimes at substantial risk to themselves. They are careful to balance their motivations, so that they are driven by these inner values as much as by a desire for external rewards or recognition. Authentic leaders also keep a strong support team around them." (George, Sims, *et al.*, 2007, p. 132)

In addition, George (2003; George & Sims, 2007) argued that authentic people demonstrate five qualities. First, they must find and understand their purpose; this involves understanding themselves, their passion, and their motivation. To understand their purpose, people need to ask and answer the question: What is the purpose of my leadership? To answer this question, George (2003) said that leaders first need to understand themselves and the motivations that influence their actions. Second, authentic people practice solid values; they have a sense of what is right and wrong. This is shaped by people's beliefs, introspection, and experience. Authentic people are defined by their values and principles (Leavy, 2023). People's values are based on their beliefs, which are a product of a process of self-awareness and experience. Integrity is a critical value in authentic members of the group (Baquero, 2023; George, 2003). Third, authentic leaders lead with the heart; they are open and willing to share themselves, and they are genuinely interested in people. Authentic people lead with the heart when they are open, and they communicate openly with others because they have a genuine interest in others. Fourth, they establish enduring relationships; "authentic people establish trusting relationships with people throughout the organization, as well as in their personal lives" (George, 2003, p. 34). Finally, authentic leaders demonstrate self-discipline; they behave consistently and possess a high level of self-control. Authentic individuals possess self-discipline, enabling them to transform their values into actions, behaviors, and tangible achievements.

Authentic leadership emerged as a distinct construct in June 2004 at the Gallup Leadership Institute Summit in Omaha, Nebraska, following dialogue among scholars and leaders from diverse fields. Authentic leadership was defined as "a pattern of the

leader's behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency" (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2008, p. 94). The new construct included four dimensions: (a) self-awareness, which refers to how leaders understand their strengths and weaknesses and the motives they exposure to others; (b) balance processing, which refers to how leaders analyze all relevant data before coming to a decision; (c) internalized moral perspective, which refers to how leaders make decisions based on values and high internal ethical standards; and (d) relational transparency, which refers to how leaders are open in presenting one's true self to others (Almutairi, Timmins, Wise, Stokes, & Alharbi, 2025; Walumbwa *et al.*, 2008).

4 WORK ENGAGEMENT

According to Schaufeli and Bakker (2010; 2004), work engagement is a construct characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption in one's work. Vigor reflects the readiness to devote effort to one's work, an exhibition of high levels of energy while working, and the tendency to remain resolute in the face of task difficulty or failure. Dedication refers to a strong identification with one's work and encompasses feelings of enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge (Arzuaga, Gandolfi, & Johnston, 2023). Finally, absorption refers to being fully concentrated in one's work and having difficulty detaching oneself from it.

Giallonardo *et al.* (2010) demonstrated a relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement: "New graduate nurses' perceptions of managers' authentic leadership, positively predicts work engagement" (p. 996). Giallonardo *et al.* used a sample of 170 nurses. The authors demonstrated that authentic leadership is positively related to work engagement ($r = .21$, $\beta = .21$, $p = .01$). Giallonardo *et al.*'s investigation is one of the first studies to relate authentic leadership to work engagement.

Wong, Laschinger, *et al.* (2010) investigated the indirect relationship between authentic leadership, trust, and work engagement. For Wong, Laschinger, *et al.*, authentic leadership has a significant and positive influence on employees' trust in the leader and work engagement. A non-experimental and predictive survey was used in a sample of 280 nurses working in hospitals in Ontario, Canada. The results of this study suggest that

authentic leadership, mediated by trust in the leader, plays a significant role in fostering work engagement ($r = .28$, $\beta = .22$, $p = .01$). Wong, Laschinger, *et al.* confirmed the relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement.

Alok and Israel (2012) investigated whether authentic leadership is associated with work engagement and psychological ownership, and whether psychological ownership moderates the relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement. "Authentic leadership is gaining ground amidst the growing global concerns regarding rising social costs of business and the resultant demands for authenticity" (Alok & Israel, 2012, p. 498). Likewise, for Alok and Israel, the authentic leadership of supervisors develops organizational contexts that promote positive attitudes and behaviors, and authentic leadership will significantly predict followers' work engagement. Alok and Israel used a sample of 117 working professionals in India. The authors demonstrated that authentic leadership positively affects work engagement ($r = 0.47$, $\beta = 0.56$, $p = 0.01$). Alok and Israel's investigation is relevant to this study, as it identifies how authentic leadership can predict work engagement in an international context, not just in the United States.

Bamford *et al.* (2013) examined the relationship between nurses' perceptions and managers' authentic leadership, overall person–job match in six areas of work life, and their work engagement. For Bamford *et al.*, "Work engagement is viewed as an important positive consequence of authentic leadership" (p. 532). Bamford *et al.* surveyed 280 nurses and showed that years of nursing experience ($\beta = .20$, $p = .01$) and authentic leadership ($r=.28$, $\beta = .26$, $p = .01$) were related to work engagement. Bamford *et al.*'s study is relevant because it demonstrates that the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) subscales correlate positively with work engagement, suggesting that "all four components that characterize an authentic leader are important in influencing nurses' work engagement" (p. 536).

Oh, Cho & Hun-Lim (2018) investigated the mediating effect of practicing core values on the relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement in a Korean corporate environment. The data were obtained from 281 employees of three Korean corporations. One of the research questions in the study was how authentic leadership affected employees' work engagement in a corporate setting. The study revealed that authentic leadership has an influential relationship with work engagement ($r .46$, $\beta = .33$,

$p = .01$). Oh, Cho, and Hun-Lim's investigation is relevant because it identified how authentic leadership can predict work engagement in the Korean context.

Assi, Rayan, Eshah, Albashtawy, and Al-Ghabeesh (2024) examined the relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement among Jordanian nurses. According to the authors, "authentic leadership could address employee work engagement in healthcare organizations" (p. 2). The researchers surveyed a sample of 238 registered nurses employed at a public hospital in Jordan. Data were collected using the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). The results are relevant because they revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between authentic leadership and work engagement ($r = 0.37$, $\beta = .34$, $p = .001$).

The present study examined the following research hypothesis:

H1: There is a positive relationship between authentic leadership behaviors of the leader and members' work engagement in two Mexican samples.

5 METHOD

To test the hypothesis, participants answered and completed two previously validated instruments: The Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ; Walumbwa *et al.*, 2008) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The two instruments were incorporated in a questionnaire hosted by SurveyMonkey.com and distributed by email. Each potential participant received a link to the web address of the questionnaire. All participants were informed about the research procedure and that they might decline the invitation to participate in the research. All participants retained the right to confidentiality for the information they voluntarily shared with the researcher. (Winston *et al.*, 2010). Once the data collection period ended, the data were imported into SPSS Statistics to make the appropriate statistical analysis.

6 SAMPLE POPULATION AND DATA COLLECTION

The selection of survey participants was aligned with the research objective. The study targeted two samples: undergraduate students from the University of Monterrey in Mexico who are actively involved in student groups or university organizations, and

employees from a cement company in Monterrey, representing a diverse range of departments within the organization. The first sample consisted of 203 undergraduate students, aged between 18 and 28 years. The second sample included 215 employees from the cement company, with ages ranging from 20 to 60 years. Participants were selected through a random sampling process to ensure representativeness. This approach aimed to capture diverse perspectives from both the student population at the University of Monterrey and employees of the cement company, both of which are located in Mexico. All potential participants were invited via email to anonymously take part in the study, which aimed to assess if AL has a positive effect on WE. Participants were fully informed about the survey process and were given the option to decline participation at their own discretion. They were also assured of the confidentiality of any information provided. To maintain a level of randomness in the population, the voluntary participation of the undergraduate students was sought (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). All participants added evidence and new knowledge about the relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement.

7 DATA ANALYSIS

Once sufficient responses were gathered and the data collection period ended, all data from the sample were imported, using dummy codes, into SPSS Statistics for analysis. The following steps were used to analyze the data:

1. The demographic variables in the survey were reported.
2. The number of members who did not answer the survey were reported.
3. A descriptive analysis was reported, so the results were graphed into tables that show the frequencies, percentages, and averages.
4. The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha scores) of the two scales used in both samples was reported.
5. The variables authentic leadership (IV) with work engagement (DV) were related using the Pearson product-moment correlation to identify if there was a small, medium, or strong correlation among the variables.
6. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was run to test the effect of the control variables (first model). Then, the variable of authentic leadership (IV) was added in the second model to understand if the authentic leadership behaviors

displayed by the team leader (IV) had a strong influence and can explain and predict members' work engagement (DV).

7. Interpretations of the data were exposed, how the results supported or did not support the hypothesis of this study.

8. Finally, possible implications of the results for practical considerations and for future research were discussed and explained.

8 RESULTS

8.1 First sample: undergraduate students

A total of 259 surveys were collected, of which 56 were excluded due to incomplete responses, resulting in a final sample of 203 completed surveys. The sample consisted of 143 female participants (70.4%) and 60 male participants (29.6%). In terms of age, 86.7% of participants (176 cases) were between 18 and 21 years old, 11.8% (24 cases) were between 22 and 25, and only 1.5% (3 cases) were 26 years old or older. Table 1 presents a breakdown of participants' gender, as well as participants' age distribution.

Table 1

Gender and Age of Participants (N = 203)

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Female	143	70.4
Male	60	29.6
Age		
18–21 years	176	86.7
22–25 years	24	11.8
26 years or older	3	1.5

Note. Percentages are based on the valid sample of 203 participants.

The university students who participated in the study were distributed across three distinct stages of their academic programs. Specifically, 33 students (16.3%) were in their first or second semester, 84 students (41.4%) were in their third or fourth semester, 67 students (33.0%) were in their fifth or sixth semester, and 19 students (9.4%) were in their seventh semester or beyond.

Table 2*Academic Stage of Participants' University Careers (N = 203)*

Variable	n	%
First to second semester	33	16.3
Third to fourth semester	84	41.4
Fifth to sixth semester	67	33.0
Seventh semester or beyond	19	9.4

Note. Percentages are based on the valid sample of 203 participants.

The study included participants from various student organizations. Two participants (1%) reported being part of the career committee, 51 participants (25.1%) indicated they were part of the student society, 2 participants (1%) belonged to a club, 122 participants (60.1%) were part of the student association, 11 participants (5.4%) were affiliated with the SGA, 3 participants (1.5%) were part of the electoral committee, 10 participants (4.9%) were members of the student senate, 1 participant (0.5%) was involved in cultural groups, and 1 participant (0.5%) was part of the sport team.

Table 3*Type of Group/Organization (N = 203)*

Variable	n	%
Career Committee	2	1.0
Student Society	51	25.1
Club	2	1.0
Student Association	122	60.1
SGA	11	5.4
Electoral Committee	3	1.5
Student Senate	10	4.9
Cultural Groups	1	0.5
Sport Team	1	0.5

Note. Percentages are based on the valid sample of 203 participants.

8.2 Reliability analysis

To assess the reliability and internal consistency of the two instruments employed with the undergraduate students' sample, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated. The results indicated acceptable levels of internal consistency, with an alpha of .92 for the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ; Walumbwa *et al.*, 2008), and a .89 for the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). These findings suggest that the instruments demonstrated satisfactory reliability for research purposes, particularly the UWES, which showed strong internal consistency.

8.3 Descriptive statistics and correlations

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlation analyses were conducted to examine the relationships among the two variables of the study: AL and WE. Pearson's correlation coefficient was utilized to assess the strength and direction of the associations. The analysis revealed a statistically significant and moderately strong positive correlation between AL and WE ($r = .51$, $p < .001$, $n = 203$), suggesting that higher levels of AL are associated with greater employee engagement.

8.4 Hierarchical multiple regression analysis

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted. In the initial model, six control variables were entered and collectively accounted for a modest 5% of the variance in work engagement ($R^2 = .05$, $F = 1.71$, $p = .120$), indicating a non-significant effect. In the second model, the inclusion of authentic leadership as a predictor—alongside the control variables—substantially increased the explained variance to 28% ($R^2 = .28$, $F = 62.26$, $p < .001$). This significant improvement underscores the meaningful role of authentic leadership in predicting employee engagement beyond demographic and contextual factors.

Table 4

Correlations and Hierarchical Multiple Regression for Authentic Leadership Predicting Work Engagement

Predictor	r	β	R Square	p
Model 1			0.05	0.12
Model 2	0.51	0.498	0.28	0.000

Note. r = Pearson correlation coefficient; β = standardized regression coefficient. Model 1 includes six control variables. Model 2 includes authentic leadership added to Model 1.

8.5 Second sample: cement company's employees

A total of 226 surveys were collected, of which 11 were discarded due to being incomplete, leaving 215 valid surveys for inclusion in the study. The sample consisted of 108 women (50.23%) and 107 men (49.77%). Participants' ages ranged as follows: 20 to 30 years (48.37%, 104 individuals), 30 to 40 years (39.53%, 85 individuals), 41 to 50 years (8.84%, 19 individuals), and 51 years or older (3.26%, 7 individuals). Table 5 provides further details regarding the gender and age distribution of the cement company's respondents.

Table 5

Gender and Age of Participants (N = 215)

Variable	n	%
Gender		
Female	108	50.23%
Male	107	49.77%
Age		
20-30 years	104	48.37%
31-40 years	85	39.53%
41-50 years	19	8.84%
51 years or older	7	3.26%

Note. Percentages are based on the valid sample of 215 participants.

The cement company's employees who participated represent a diverse range of departments within the company. Specifically, 58 participants (26.98%) are from Human

Resources, 27 participants (12.56%) are from Commercial Development, 16 participants (7.44%) are from Supply Chain, 10 participants (4.65%) are from the Legal department, 6 participants (2.79%) are from Marketing, 21 participants (9.77%) are from Maintenance, and 77 participants (35.81%) are from other departments. A detailed breakdown of these departmental distributions is provided in Table 6.

Table 6

Department of Employment for Survey Respondents (N = 215)

Variable	n	%
Department		
Commercial Development	27	12.56%
Human Resources	58	26.98%
Supply Chain	16	7.44%
Legal	10	4.65%
Marketing	6	2.79%
Maintenance	21	9.77%
Other	77	35.81%

Note. Percentages are based on the valid sample of 215 participants.

With respect to tenure at the company, 86 participants (40%) have been with the organization for 0 to 2 years, 61 participants (28.37%) have between 2 and 4 years of service, 44 participants (20.47%) have between 4 and 6 years, and 24 participants (11.16%) have been employed for 6 years or more at the cement company. A detailed distribution of participants' tenure is presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Tenure in Position (N = 215)

Variable	n	%
Tenure		
0-2 years	86	40.00%
2-4 years	61	28.37%
4-6 years	44	20.47%
6 years or more	24	11.16%

Note. Percentages are based on the valid sample of 215 participants.

8.6 Reliability Analysis

To assess the reliability and internal consistency of the two instruments employed with the cement company's employees, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated. For the AQL (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2008), an alpha of .90 was found; for the UWES (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003), an alpha of .91 was recorded.

8.7 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlation procedures were carried out for the variables of the study: authentic leadership with work engagement. Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted. The results showed a significant positive correlation that supports our hypothesis: Authentic leadership as exhibited by the leader has a positive correlation with work engagement as reported by employees ($r = .515$, $\beta = .485$, $p < .000$). Table 8 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations for variables in the study.

Table 8:

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (r)

Variable	Work Engagement
Authentic Leadership	0.515

Note. Percentages are based on the valid sample of 215 participants.

8.8 Hierarchical multiple regression

A multiple regression analysis was conducted, considering two variables (authentic leadership and work engagement). The result of the multiple regression analysis revealed that work engagement, as perceived by employees, was positively and significantly affected by leaders' authentic leadership ($\beta = 0.485$, $r^2 = .26$, $p < .000$). Table 9 presents the hierarchical multiple regression.

Table 9:

<i>Hierarchical</i>	<i>Multiple</i>			<i>Regression</i>
<i>Authentic Leadership and Work Engagement</i>				
Predictor	r	β	R²	p
Model 1			0.039	0.088
Model 2	0.515	0.485	0.265	0.000

Note. Percentages are based on the valid sample of 215 participants.

9 DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm the hypothesis that authentic leadership (AL) is positively and significantly related to work engagement (WE) in two distinct Mexican samples: undergraduate student leaders and employees of a cement company. The results are consistent with prior international research that has identified AL as a predictor of WE in organizational contexts (e.g., Giallonardo *et al.*, 2010; Wong *et al.*, 2010; Alok & Israel, 2012; Bamford *et al.*, 2013; Oh *et al.*, 2018; Assi *et al.*, 2024). By demonstrating this relationship in Mexico, this current study contributes to expanding the empirical evidence of AL in under-researched Latin American contexts, where leadership practices have historically been marked by hierarchical and paternalistic models.

A key contribution of this study lies in its cross-population approach. The presence of similar correlation strengths in both undergraduate students ($r = .51$) and corporate employees ($r = .515$) suggests that the positive effect of authentic leadership transcends professional maturity, organizational role, and sectoral context. This finding reinforces the theoretical argument that AL, with its emphasis on self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2008), has universal applicability in promoting engagement, even in cultures characterized by power distance and collectivist tendencies such as Mexico.

The results of this study indicate that authentic leadership accounted for 28% of the variance in student work engagement and 26.5% in employee work engagement. These moderately strong predictive values highlight AL as a substantive determinant of vigor, dedication, and absorption. Importantly, the results suggest that the behaviors of leaders, whether in student associations or in corporate departments, can significantly shape how followers experience meaning and energy in their roles. This aligns with

previous findings that authentic leaders foster climates of trust, empowerment, and purpose, thereby enhancing engagement (Wong *et al.*, 2010; Oh *et al.*, 2018).

From a practical perspective, these results underscore the value of developing authentic leadership as a strategic resource in Mexican organizations. In the corporate sector, cultivating authentic leaders could enhance employee engagement, which has been linked to increased productivity, lower turnover, and greater organizational resilience. Similarly, in higher education, fostering authentic leadership in student associations can promote civic-mindedness and prepare young leaders for ethical and engaged professional trajectories.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be noted. First, the study employed a cross-sectional design, which restricts causal inference. Longitudinal or experimental designs would be necessary to confirm the directional impact of AL on WE. Second, the study relied on self-reported data, which may introduce social desirability or standard method bias. Future research could incorporate multi-source assessments or qualitative methods to validate perceptions. Third, the study was conducted in a single geographic location, Monterrey, which limits the generalizability of the results across Mexico and other Latin American contexts. Comparative studies across regions or industries could enrich understanding of cultural moderators in the AL–WE relationship.

Future research should also explore potential mediating and moderating variables. Prior studies have shown that trust (Wong *et al.*, 2010), psychological ownership (Alok & Israel, 2012), and value alignment (Oh *et al.*, 2018) may shape the strength of the AL and WE relationship. Testing these mechanisms in the Mexican context would advance theoretical refinement and practical application. Additionally, given Mexico's collectivist orientation, cultural dimensions such as familism or respeto could be examined as moderators that either amplify or constrain the impact of AL.

In conclusion, this study provides empirical evidence that authentic leadership has a significant impact on WE in Mexico. By confirming the relevance of AL across both student and employee populations, the research underscores its potential as a universal and culturally adaptable leadership approach. These findings contribute to the growing international discourse on AL and provide actionable insights for organizations and educational institutions seeking to cultivate engaged, ethical, and purpose-driven members.

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