

AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOL ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

This research study, descriptive and exploratory in nature, had as objectives to know the perceptions of the teacher/students of a graduation course in Educational Sciences about their leaders, measured and evaluated through the Authentic *Leadership Questionnaire* (ALQ) and to verify if existed differences between the public and private school organizations in the four characteristics defined for the ALQ: a) self-conscious; b) transparency; c) moral/ethics; d) balanced processing. A non-probabilistic sample by convenience consisted of 86 participants from Brazil.

The results of this research study show that the level of authenticity of the leader, in the four characteristics defined for the ALQ, in the perception of the subjects inquired, is above of the moderate level. Having in account the type of school organization (public or private), the differences found in the levels of the four characteristics defined for the ALQ were not statistically significant even though, the leaders of the private schools demonstrated to possess slightly higher values in the four analysed sub areas.

Keywords: Leadership, authentic leadership, authentic leadership questionnaire, teachers, public schools, private schools

Introduction:

Avolio *et al* (2004) define authentic leader as one that is deeply conscientious of the way he thinks and behaves and he is perceived by the others as having this conscience not only of self, but also of the moral values and the personal characteristics of the others. The authentic leader, on one hand, acts in accordance with its deep values and convictions to construct the credibility and to gain the respect and the confidence of its subordinates. On the other hand, he encourages diverse points of view and he creates a relation of collaboration among its subordinates.

He is worried about the well-being of others, for believing that each one has its dignity (Eboli, 2010). For Avolio (2010) the authentic leadership is a form of knowing itself, of being coherent, having a positive orientation and to have strength to follow a direction based on his/her development and the development of the others.

The leaders know and defend their values and take their decisions taking into consideration their values. The led ones identify in its leader a high level of self-conscience concerning the values, beliefs, emotions, self-identity and abilities (Laguerre, 2010). In the opinion of Yuhl (2010) the actions of the authentic leader are strongly determined by its values and its beliefs. Roux (2010) considers that the authentic leaders act in agreement with their deep values and personal convictions to construct the credibility, the respect and the confidence of its followers, stimulating diverse points of view and the construction of networks making that the followers recognize it as an authentic leader. Avolio *et al.* (2007) they consider that the authenticity of a leader can be evaluated through a scale consisting of 16 items in which we can point four basic characteristics:

1) **Self conscience**

The leader has full conscience of its strengths and weaknesses, what in the opinion of Gardner *et al.*, (2005), Avolio *et al.* (2007) and Raham *et al.* (2010) it allows the leader, on one hand, to have conscience of its strong points and limitations, as well as knowing as he/she is seen by the other leaders. Raham *et al.* (2010) argues that to have self-knowledge about its actions are understood by others, help to improve the action and the form of communication of the leader allowing to be more efficient in the construction of a team.

2) **Transparency**

Gardner *et al.* (2005) understands as transparency a coherence between the speech of the leader and its actions. According to Rahman (2010) the transparency in the context of the democratic education is expressed by taking participated decisions, in accordance with clear and ethical rules.

3) **Moral and ethics**

Authentic leaders have standards and moral values that emphasize the collective interests (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner *et al.*, 2005). Their actions and decisions are based on these values and convictions (Shamir & Eilam, 2005, Yukl, 2010).

4) **Balanced processing**

The leaders analyze with great objectivity all the excellent information before taking a decision (Gardner *et al.*, 2005). When a leader takes a decision, has access to different perspectives. However,

the individual prevents the distortion and tries to be objective in the analysis of the information that is available (Kernis, 2003).

Objectives of the study

This study has as its fundamental objective to analyze the authenticity of the leaders in the perspective of led ones, measured through the *Authentic Leadership Questionnaire* (ALQ version 1). Basically, it is intended to quantify the level of authenticity of the leader in four distinct domains, namely, self-conscience, transparency, moral/ethics and balanced processing. With the application of the ALQ to the students who attended a pos-graduate program in the area of sciences of education (school year of 2010-2011) and, who are in the teaching profession, it is intended to respond to the following research questions:

- 1) In the perspective of the led, what is the level of authenticity of the leader of your school organization?
- 2) The level of authenticity of the leader differs either it is a public school or a private school?

Importance of the study

A study developed by Walumbwa *et al.* (2008), in five samples obtained in China, Quénia and United States, it demonstrated that the level of satisfaction and the performance of the led one is as such higher as higher is the level of authenticity of the leader. World-wide, it is recognized the contribution given by leadership for the attainment of good school results (Horn & Marfán, 2010) and for adoption of strategies that allow a better school (Anderson, 2010). According to Leithwood *et al.* (2004) the leadership is the first factor, after the teacher's work that more contributes for the learning of the student.

The main results of a study conducted by Rahman (2010) evidence the importance of the authentic leadership for development either of authentic followers either for schools where the decisions are participated. Avolio & Walumbwa (2006) argue that the school organizations with authentic leaders supply open environments that allow access to the information, resources, support and equal opportunities so that all can learn. On the other hand, they make possible the development of capacities, either of the leader, either of its followers for the efficient accomplishment of the work. This means that to be efficient the organizational leaders must provide an organizational climate that allows, to the leader and the followers learning and continued growth (Roux, 2010).

In this context and, given the fact that in the last decade has had a great concern in improving the school results, namely, to fight the illiteracy

and the school dropout, to diminish the teacher's dissatisfaction, to diminish the teacher's absenteeism, among others, seems to us pertinent this research, although, exploratory. According to Luthans & Avolio (2003) the positive attitude of the authentic leader foments the positive emotions in the followers, what it is translated into a bigger involvement and compromise with the work and, at the same time resulting in a better performance.

Review of the literature

The authentic leadership, which is a derivation and an improvement of the transformational leadership, has acquired great relevance in the last years due to the unexpected changes that the organizations and the contemporary societies had suffered. For the inspiring authors of this new approach to leadership (Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Avolio & Luthans, 2006) the authentic leader develops a positive climate in its organization generating self confidence in its led ones and focused, essentially, in the transparency, in ethics, in the moral, in the self-conscience and in the cooperation. In this way, the model of authentic leadership is a recent model that has been developed and studied either at the theoretical level either at the empirical level and that, in a certain way, as already affirmed, comes to complement the works elaborated about ethics and transformational leadership (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2010).

Thus, the authentic leadership is a style or a model of leadership in which the leader is true with himself while leads and is seen by the led ones as a sincere, honest and complete person. Luthans & Avolio (2003) had defined the authentic leadership as a process that generate positive psychological capacities and an organizational context highly developed that facilitates the self-knowledge and positive behaviors either in the leader either in the led ones. Still, according to the same authors, Luthans & Avolio (2003), we can recognize an authentic leader if we can detect some important characteristics: a) They know themselves well and they know well what they believe in; b) They show transparency and consistency between their ethical values and their actions; c) They focus in the development of psychological qualities such as, confidence, optimism, hope, and resilience in themselves and in their followers; d) They are known and respected by their integrity. Thus, the credibility that the leader transmits to the led ones passes by speaking its own voice and lining up the actions for the shared values as stated by Kouzes & Posner (2002) in order that the leader shapes the way for the others to follow.

Some authors focused on the importance of the self-knowledge for the authenticity of the leaders either in relation to the values (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999), to the purpose (George, 2003), to the coherence between the words and the actions (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) or to the positive

psychological states (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). The authentic leaders guide themselves by clear and conscientious values and by moral values that they consider of primordial importance for the interests of the groups that they lead and for the organizations that they coordinate. (Howell & Avolio, 1992; Luthans & Avolio, 2003).

In a recent study on the authentic leadership, done by Walumbwa et al. (2010) with 387 employees and its 129 immediate supervisors concluded that the authentic leadership was positively related with the organizational citizenship and the involvement in work.

Methodology

Population and sample

The population targeted for this study is constituted by all the students who attended a post-graduate program in Sciences of the Education in the school year of 2010-2011 and that they are teachers in any level of education (Preschool, Elementary Education, Secondary Education, Technical and Higher Education). A non-probabilistic sample for convenience consisting of 86 Teacher-students was selected, of which 62.8% are of feminine gender and 37.2% are of masculine gender that attended, in the school year of 2010-2011, the post-graduate program in the area of Sciences of the Education, in two localities of Brazil, Recife and Fortaleza (Northeast of Brazil).

Table 01 shows the inquired subjects are distributed having into account the region of origin, the gender, and the type of school where they were teaching (public or private). It is verified, looking at the table 01 that 62.8 % of the respondents work in the city of Recife, in public school organizations, teach at the elementary level of education and are in its majority of feminine gender. The time of the leader in the school, where the inquired subject teaches) varies between 1 and 36 years and it is, in average, 7.2 years, having a great spread of the time as a leader in relation to the average (DP=7.5 years).

Table 01 - Distribution of the inquired subjects by region, gender, type of school and type of education

Variable	Absolute frequency (N=86)	Relative frequency (%)
Region		
Fortaleza	32	37,2
Recife	54	62,8
Sex		
Masculine	32	37,2
Feminine	54	62,8
Type of school		
Public	50	58,1
Private	32	37,2
NR	4	4,7

Type of education		
Preschool	11	12,8
Elementary	35	40,7
Medium	27	31,4
Technical	7	8,1
Post-secondary	14	16,3
NR	9	9,3

Instrument

In the collection of data it was utilized the *Authentic Leadership Questionnaire* (ALQ -version 1) an instrument developed for Avolio *et al.* (2007). According to that author, the authenticity of the leader was manifested according to four characteristics, such as already referred to, that resulted of the aggregation of variables as it shows table 02.

Each independent variable has a unit of measure of five points in a *Likert scale* (0 - Never; 1 – Occasionally; 2 - Sometimes; 3 - Many times; and , 4 - Frequently), what means that the average point of interval in each response is equal to 2,0 (moderate).

Table 02 - Aggregation of the statements of the leadership questionnaire in accordance with the leadership practice

1. Transparency
1. My leader says exactly what he/she means
2. My leader admits mistakes when they are made
3. My leader encourages everyone to speak their mind
4. My leader tells the hard truth
5. My leader displays emotions exactly in line with feelings
2. Moral/Ethics
6. My leader demonstrates beliefs that are consistent with actions
7. My leader makes decisions based in his/her core values
8. My leader asks you to take positions that support your core values
9. My leader makes difficult decisions based on high standards of ethical conduct
3. Balanced processing
10. My leader solicits views that challenge his/her deeply held positions
11. My leader analyzes relevant data before coming to a decision
12. My leader listens carefully to different points of view before coming to conclusions
4. Self-conscience
13. My leader seeks feedback to improve interactions with the others
14. My leader accurately describes how others view his/her capacities
15. My leader knows when it is time to reevaluate his/her positions on important issues
16. My leader shows he/she understands how specific actions impact others

Procedures

The collection of data was done in Brazil in December of 2010 in two different localities, Fortaleza and Recife. The questionnaire was self-

administered in context of classroom under the supervision of a professor/researcher, who was available to clarify any doubt. Before the fulfillment of the questionnaire the subjects were informed that the fulfillment of the questionnaire was voluntary, confidential and anonymous. The total time of fulfillment of the questionnaire was of about 15 minutes.

The program used to edit and treat the data it was PASW (*Predicted Analytics Software*). It was used: a) the descriptive statistics to characterize the sample; b) analysis of the validity of the questionnaire to analyze the consistency of the answers. c) application of the statistical test *t-Student* to compare the frequency of the use of leadership practices between the two independent groups (Type of school: Private and Public). Before the use of the parametric tests it was tested the normality of the data and the homogeneity of the variances through the tests of *Kolmogorov-Smirnov* and *Levene*, respectively. For all the tests was considered the level of significance of 5%.

Results

The internal consistency of the questionnaire is 0.966 (having in account the 16 items). For the authenticity of characteristics, as it can be seen on table 03, the *Alpha Cronbach* varies between 0,855 and 0.944. The internal consistency and the standard deviation of each one of the leadership practices prove the reasonable level of reliability and the validity of the data.

Question 1: In the perspective of the led what is the level of authenticity of the leader of its school organization?

With the first question of this research it is intended to know the level of authenticity of the leader, in the perspective of the led, in the four characteristics defined by the ALQ.

Having in account the characteristics associated with the authenticity of the leader, we can see by reading the table 03 that the characteristic that is more distinguished is the moral and the ethics (media=2.61), followed by the transparency (media=2.45), of balanced processing (media=2.3) and, finally, the self-conscience (media=2.2). One can say that in the opinion of the subjects inquired, these characteristics are found in its leader, are developed above the moderate level and are frequently practiced.

Table 03 – Measures of central tendency, dispersion and *Alpha Cronbach* of the characteristics of the authentic leader

Characteristics	Average	Standard deviation	<i>Alpha Cronbach</i>
Transparency	2.45	1.05	0.855
Moral/Ethics	2.61	1.03	0.855
Balanced processing	2.30	1.26	0.916

Self-conscience	2.22	1.11	0.944
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Question 2: The level of authenticity of the leader of the public school is different of the level of authenticity of the leader of the private school?

In relation to the second question of this research it was used the test *t Student* to verify if differences in the levels of authenticity of the leader existed, in the four characteristics defined in the ALQ, in two independent groups (public school and private school). As table 04 shows despite the authenticity level in the four characteristics being slightly higher in the private schools, these differences are not statistically significant. This means that, in statistical terms, the level of authenticity of the leader is equal in the four characteristics defined in the ALQ, independently, of the organization being public or private.

Table 04 Level of authenticity of the leader in the four characteristics defined for the ALQ, by type of school

Properties	n	Average		Standard deviation		t-Student		
	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	Test	p
Self-conscience	50	36	2.10	2.40	1.13	0.93	1.34	0.186
Transparency	50	36	2.30	2.62	1,10	0.91	1.12	0.268
Moral/Éthics	50	36	2.50	2.80	1.34	1.16	0.85	0.400
Balanced processing	50	36	2.19	2.43	1.20	0.99	1.20	0.236

Analysis and conclusions

This research study had as its primordial objective to analyze the authenticity of the leaders of public schools and private schools (on the perspective of led), measured by the level of authenticity through the *Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ version 1)*. We intended to quantify the level of authenticity of the leaders in four distinct domains, namely, self-conscience, transparency, moral/ethics and balanced processing. The sample of this study consisted of 86 teachers of several different public and private schools in the northeast of Brazil. The central research questions of this study were the following: 1) To determine the level of authentic leadership of school leaders; and, b) To evaluate the existing differences at the level of authentic leadership between the leaders of the public schools and the private schools.

The results of this study show that the level of authenticity of the leader, in the four characteristics defined by the ALQ (perception of the led ones), is above of the moderate level. On the other hand, and taking into consideration the type of school organization, were not found significant

differences in the levels of the four characteristics defined for the ALQ although we observed that the leaders of the private schools had demonstrated slightly higher values in the four analyzed domains as it is confirmed with the following averages: 1) **Self-conscience**: Public School – 2.10; and Private School – 2.40; 2) **Transparency**: Public School: 2.30; and, Private School 2.62; 3) **Moral/Ethics**: Public School: 2.50; and, Private School 2.80; and, 4) **Balanced Processing**: Public School: 2.19; and, Private School: 2.43.

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