




Authentic leadership and psychological well-being: The role of organisational support



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Orientation: The manufacturing sector in South Africa faces a variety of human resource challenges that necessitate leadership and employee resilience that enables organisation performance despite these circumstances.

Research purpose: This study explored the relationship between authentic leadership (AL) and psychological well-being (PW) in this sector while considering the potential indirect effect of organisational support (OS).

Motivation for the study: The labour intensity of this industry necessitates a leadership style that will create an environment that enhances employee behaviour, experiences and performance during uncertain times. Positive, value-driven leadership styles such as AL can assist in addressing many of these challenges.

Research approach/design and method: A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was utilised, incorporating the AL Inventory and selected items from the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) and Flourishing-at-Work Scales (FAWS).

Main findings: The study revealed that AL was significantly and positively associated with PW both directly and indirectly through OS, with the indirect effect *via* OS being statistically more pronounced than the direct effect on PW.

Practical/managerial implications: Authentic leadership can, directly and indirectly, enhance employees' PW significantly, and the effect is strengthened by OS, notwithstanding challenging work conditions.

Contribution/value-add: By underscoring the facilitative role of OS, the findings enable leaders to enhance employees' PW, ultimately contributing to workforce performance as well as organisational and sector growth.

Keywords: authentic leadership; psychological well-being; organisational support; mediation model; confirmatory factor analysis; manufacturing; South Africa; quantitative research.

Introduction

Orientation

The manufacturing sector is the fourth largest in South Africa, employing around 1.2 million individuals (Statistics South Africa, 2023). It plays a prominent role in contributing to exports and economic growth. However, in recent years this sector has been confronted with various economic and human resource challenges. Economic challenges include slow growth, poor infrastructure, high electricity costs, lack of innovation (Engineering News, 2023a), weak demand and declining sales (Rateweb, 2023). The human resource-related challenges include a shortage of relevantly skilled workers (Engineering News, 2023b), low talent attraction and retention and non-supportive labour regulations (Fortunato, 2022). Furthermore, the manufacturing industry is also facing workforce-related challenges such as high turnover intention, low productivity, job insecurity (JI) and low levels of employee commitment (Paltu & Brouwers, 2020; Potgieter & Mokomane, 2020).

To mitigate the negative effects of these challenges on organisations and employees in manufacturing, more attention could be given to creating a supportive and positive work environment. Given the industry's labour intensity, leadership plays a critical role in shaping employee behaviour, experiences and performance (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2013). Studies suggest that positive, value-driven leadership styles – such as authentic leadership (AL) – can help address organisational challenges (Sidani & Rowe, 2018). Authentic leadership enhances

a range of positive organisational outcomes. These include workplace trust (Chen & Sriphon, 2022), reduced turnover (Arasli et al., 2019), increased creativity (Anwar et al., 2020) and job satisfaction (Wong et al., 2020). It also promotes organisational commitment (Hlongwane & Olivier, 2017), productivity (Obuba, 2023) and both general and psychological well-being (PW) (Yang Ditanggapi, 2021; Zhang et al., 2020).

As illustrated above, AL has been linked to PW and according to previous research, when PW is enhanced, it could impact some of the mentioned challenges faced by manufacturing organisations positively. Moreover, PW was associated positively with reduced turnover intention (Yuniasanti et al., 2019), employee performance (Çankır & Şahin, 2018), employee commitment (Apfiyari et al., 2021) and reduced job insecurity (Saravanan & Vasantha, 2023), among other outcomes. It is thus clear that higher levels of employee PW could be advantageous for employees and their organisations, and that pursuing ways to promote PW would thus be sensible.

As AL is strongly associated with organisational support (OS), this study posits that OS might serve as an underlying mechanism through which the positive effect of AL on PW might be amplified. While previous studies examined AL and PW, none have explored the potential mediating role of OS in this relationship. Moreover, we found that many of the studies were conducted internationally. To this end, the researchers are of the opinion that leadership is context-based and can thus not merely be extrapolated for application within different contexts such as a South African context (Lemoine et al., 2019). Furthermore, while research has been conducted to establish the association of AL with various behavioural outcomes, including the indirect influence of a number of identified outcomes, empirical validation has not been conducted in the South African manufacturing context.

Despite existing research on AL, this study specifically investigates whether OS amplifies the effect of AL on PW.

The manufacturing industry currently faces high resource demands and significant challenges (Bakker et al., 2023). To understand how job resources may help stabilise the situation, this study used the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) and Conservation of Resources (COR) models as its theoretical framework.

Research purpose and objectives

To address the identified theoretical gaps, the broad aim of this study was to assess the relationship among AL, OS and PW within a manufacturing context in South Africa. Furthermore, the researchers wanted to establish whether OS has an indirect effect on the relationship between AL and PW.

Literature review

Authentic leadership

According to Luthans and Avolio (2003), AL has been the focus of many studies within the positive psychology arena. Authentic leadership within an organisational setting can be defined as:

A process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organisational context, which results in both stronger self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviours on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development. The authentic leader is confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, transparent, moral, ethical future-oriented, and prioritises developing associates into leaders themselves. The authentic leader does not try to coerce or even rationally persuade associates; rather the leader's authentic values, beliefs and behaviours serve to model the development of associates (Luthans & Avolio, 2003, p. 243).

Gardner et al. (2005) maintained that AL consists of the following sub-dimensions: self-awareness, internalised moral perspective, balanced processing and relational transparency. Self-awareness relates to the leader's awareness of his or her strengths and weaknesses and the social impact it has on others (Price Mason, 2021). Internalised moral perspective is associated with the self-regulated decision-making and behaviour of the leader, influenced by internal moral standards and values. Balanced processing refers to the objective processing of related information by obtaining alternative insights to challenge one's own embedded views before reaching a final decision. Lastly, relational transparency involves the open sharing of one's beliefs, feelings and thoughts (Neider & Schriesheim, 2011). Authentic leaders are resilient, and they maintain high moral values while enhancing the well-being of their followers (Braun & Peus, 2018). Rahimnia and Sharifirad (2015) suggested that authentic leaders promote the psychological capital of followers by maintaining transparent, genuine and caring relationships with them. The climate that this type of leadership behaviour creates in the workplace reduces stress and fosters positive employee behaviours and attitudes while contributing to follower well-being and perceptions of organisation support (Braun & Peus, 2018).

When considering previous research studies, the perceived authentic behaviour of leaders is linked to various positive individual and organisation-based outcomes, such as enhanced employee and organisational performance (Hanaysha, 2020), improved work engagement and job satisfaction (Samsudin et al., 2020), higher levels of follower PW (Els & Jacobs, 2023) and value contribution (meaning and purpose) as a domain of flourishing (VanderWeele, 2017).

Psychological well-being

Psychological well-being (PW) forms part of the well-being construct and has been the focus of numerous psychology-related studies. Medvedev and Landhuis (2018) posited that

it is a concept that incorporates social, subjective and psychological aspects, together with health-related behaviours. Trudel-Fitzgerald et al. (2019) stated that PW relates to the level of psychological happiness and health, combined with perceptions of accomplishment and life satisfaction. Burns et al. (2024) described PW as a construct that incorporates both interindividual and intraindividual elements of positive functioning such as relatedness, personal mastery and individual growth. Added to this, PW can be described as the presence of enabling elements such as healthy relationships, positive emotions and high levels of engagement. Psychological well-being is not only the absence of ill-being, represented by anxiety, fear or anger but also entails several constructs that are associated with the concept of happiness (Seligman, 2011).

Psychological well-being is an important workplace-related construct as it has been linked to various positive outcomes such as employee and organisational performance, retention, reduced absenteeism and improved levels of engagement (Rukh et al., 2018).

Organisational support

Organisational support can be described as the extent to which an organisation is perceived to value the contribution of its employees and care about their well-being (Vermeulen & Scheepers, 2020). According to Eisenberger et al. (2020), OS pertains to the perception of team members regarding the level of appreciation the organisation exhibits for their efforts and taking care of their well-being. Organisational support-related appreciation can be demonstrated by the organisation through recognition and benefits, payment of monetary rewards, job enrichment and development opportunities. The organisation can also exhibit its concern for employee well-being by implementing supportive organisation policies and practices that might meet and balance job demands, inside and outside the workplace (Worley et al., 2009). As OS meets the socio-emotional needs of employees, it contributes to the association with the company and affective commitment (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

Moreover, the reciprocity principle, stemming from the social exchange theory, could also explain the positive effect of OS. When employees experience OS, they might demonstrate their appreciation through improved performance, which in turn might raise their expectation to be rewarded for the extra effort (Kurtessis et al., 2017). The converse might also apply, as it is likely that when employees experience a lack of OS or unfavourable treatment it could affect their behaviour and performance negatively (Chen et al., 2020). Research by Kurtessis et al. (2017) suggested that employee perception of OS can be influenced by factors such as leader behaviour, human resource policies and practices, and the relationship an employee has with the organisation.

It could thus be beneficial for an organisation to provide a supportive working environment. Prior research has determined that OS can be associated positively with

follower engagement and well-being (Caesens et al., 2016), enhanced job satisfaction (Sokro et al., 2021), improved job performance (Yücel et al., 2020), organisational citizenship behaviour (Firmansyah et al., 2022) and elevated organisational commitment (Pattnaik et al., 2023), whereas it can also be linked negatively to employee burnout (Abdulmohdi, 2024).

Authentic leadership, organisational support and psychological well-being

This study applied the JD-R and the COR models as theoretical framework.

Bakker and Demerouti (2014) posited that the JD-R theory can be employed to make predictions related to employee performance and well-being by considering job resources, job demands and personal resources. According to the JD-R theory, different processes are facilitated by job resources and job demands. Job resources can be predictors of motivational processes, while job demands can predict health-related impairments such as psychosomatic ailment and physical fatigue (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Furthermore, job resources can reduce the negative impact of job demands during challenging times. Authentic leadership and OS function as crucial job resources that help buffer the impact of job demands, promote motivation and enhance employee well-being. Authentic leaders foster environments of trust, transparency and ethical conduct, which serve as social and psychological resources that facilitate employee engagement and resilience. Similarly, perceived organisational support reflects the extent to which employees feel valued and cared for by the organisation, reinforcing their psychological safety and work commitment.

Hobfoll et al. (2016) stated that according to the COR theory when employees experience the threat of losing resources, it might impact negatively on their well-being. When employing the JD-R model, AL and OS are viewed as job resources (Meng et al., 2023). Both AL and OS contribute to resource gain cycles by providing emotional, social and cognitive resources that employees can draw upon to cope with stress and thrive at work. The absence or depletion of these supports, conversely, can initiate resource loss spirals, increasing vulnerability to stress and reduced well-being.

Both AL and OS function as external resources that not only mitigate strain but also promote flourishing in line with the mechanisms of both the JD-R and COR frameworks.

Authentic leadership and psychological well-being

Walumbwa et al. (2008) described AL as 'a pattern of leader behaviours that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate [...] to foster positive self-development'. This definition highlights the positive impact that AL can have on organisational work climate. Authentic leaders demonstrate qualities such as

confidence, hope, self-development and adaptability (Joo & Jo, 2017), which help foster an environment of trust and support employees' well-being. Employees who feel supported during difficult times may be less likely to experience psychological strain and more likely to benefit emotionally.

Research studies have found that AL is a valuable resource that can influence employee perceptions and behaviour positively (Gardner et al., 2021). Authentic leadership is also linked to a more positive organisational culture and climate, improved attitudes and behaviour, and higher levels of PW and performance (Tefera & Dlamini, 2020). According to Bailey et al. (2017), meaningful work can be described as 'work that is personally enriching and that makes a positive contribution', highlighting the significance of personal realisation and serving a larger purpose. Authentic leaders possess traits such as confidence, hope and adaptability, which enable them to create a work environment that supports employees' well-being (Chaudhary, 2021; Joo & Jo, 2017). Hence, it is likely that AL, because of the positive influence it has on work climate and employees, can be positively associated with employees' PW.

Authentic leadership and organisational support

Akhtar et al. (2022) posited that authentic leaders can create a positive atmosphere in the workplace that can result in favourable long-term employee behaviour and accomplishment. Employee perceptions of organisational support (OS) are shaped by how leaders treat them, with both positive and negative behaviours, influencing these perceptions (Eisenberger et al., 2020). Because of its unique characteristics, AL can be deemed an enabler of employee perception of OS within an organisation (Vermeulen & Scheepers, 2020).

Organisational support and psychological well-being

According to Bai et al. (2023), OS can be described as employee belief that their contribution is valued and that their well-being matters to their organisation. Perceived OS demonstrated through organisational appreciation of employee abilities and contribution assists in the development of employee PW (Dhir et al., 2023). When employees feel that their organisation values and respects their contribution, they are more likely to show greater commitment, improved performance and other positive work-related behaviours (Chevalier et al., 2019). Hence, it is possible that employees who experience support from their organisation and leaders are more likely to experience PW.

Influence of organisational support on authentic leadership and psychological well-being

When organisations keep employees informed about important issues and recognise their contributions, it

fosters a sense of self-worth and purpose in the workplace (Zhou et al., 2023). Open and honest communication from management signals appreciation and value, which can increase employees' perceived OS (Yue et al., 2021).

Jun et al. (2025) mentioned that AL behaviour enhances employee perception of OS. When experiencing OS demonstrated by leaders and co-workers through their appreciation of their abilities and contribution, it can assist employees in developing positive feelings and emotions (Cheng et al., 2022). Creating a supportive organisational environment that addresses the emotional and psychological needs of employees can contribute to their PW (Caesens et al., 2017).

Research design

With the information above as reference, the research question investigated in this study is:

What are the relationships between authentic leadership, organisational support and employees' psychological well-being in a South African manufacturing context?

Furthermore, the researchers have formulated the following hypotheses (Figure 1):

- H1:** Authentic leadership has a direct significant and positive relationship with organisational support (1a) and employee psychological well-being (1b).
- H2:** Organisational support is statistically significantly and positively related to employees' psychological well-being.
- H3:** The relationship between authentic leadership and employees' psychological well-being is statistically significantly and positively strengthened by organisational support.

Based on the above, this study tests a simple mediation model (Model 4, Hayes, 2022) as depicted in Figure 1.

Research approach

This study employed a quantitative approach, together with a cross-sectional survey design. As the relations among the variables have not yet been explored in the combination contained in this study, a cross-sectional design was considered suitable (Spector, 2019).

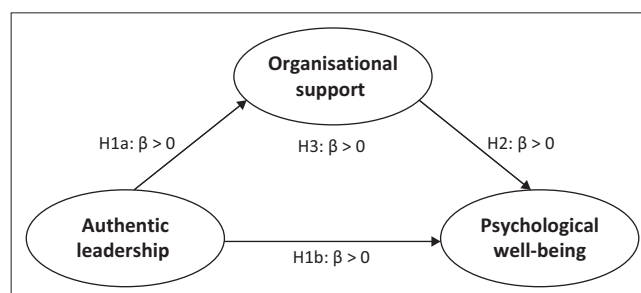


FIGURE 1: The hypothesised research model to investigate the relation between authentic leadership, organisational support, and psychological well-being.

Research method

Research respondents

The study focussed on senior, middle and junior managers working at the respective operating sites of a South African manufacturing organisation. The group consisted of 570 employees, of which 314 completed the questionnaires. This represented a response rate of 55%. Data were collected using stratified random sampling.

Table 1 portrays the respondents' characteristics: 40.1% of the respondents were in the 41–50 years age bracket, 64.7% represented the junior manager level, 33.4% had 21–30 years of service, 24.2% had 11–20 years of experience in their current position, and 51.9% of the respondents were employed at the Vanderbijlpark operating unit in Gauteng.

Measuring instruments

After having completed a biographical questionnaire, consenting respondents were invited to fill in previously-validated instruments measuring AL, OS and PW.

Follower perception of leader AL characteristics was measured by employing the Authentic Leadership Inventory (ALI) (Neider & Schriesheim, 2011). The ALI comprises four dimensions (self-awareness, internal moral perspective, balanced processing and relational transparency), and is measured using 14 items. Example items are: 'My leader openly shares information with others' and 'My leader clearly states what he or she means'. Items were rated *via* a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The ALI demonstrates good internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.74 to 0.90, and construct validity (Men & Stacks, 2014).

TABLE 1: Characteristics of respondents ($N = 314$).

Item	Category	Frequency	%
Age group (years)	20–30	7	2.2
	31–40	39	12.4
	41–50	126	40.1
	51–60	131	41.7
	≥ 61	11	3.5
Job category	Senior manager	41	13.0
	Manager	70	22.2
	Junior manager	203	64.7
Experience (years of service)	0–10	39	12.4
	11–20	60	19.1
	21–30	105	33.4
	31–40	96	30.5
	41–45	14	4.5
Years in current position	0–10	199	63.3
	11–20	76	24.2
	21–30	27	8.6
	31–40	10	3.1
	41–45	2	0.6
Operating area	Vanderbijlpark works	163	51.9
	Newcastle works	56	17.8
	Gauteng operations	26	8.3
	Corporate services	69	22.0

A subscale of the Job Demands-Resources Scale (JDERS), as developed by Jackson and Rothmann (2005), was applied to measure OS. This instrument consists of seven items. An example item is 'Do you have influence in the planning of your work activities'. The items were assessed using a scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*always*). The JDERS subscales show acceptable reliability ($\alpha > 0.70$) and construct validity confirmed *via* factor analysis in South African occupational contexts.

Employees' PW was measured by a subscale (nine items) of the Flourishing-at-Work Scale (FAWS-SF; Rautenbach & Rothmann, 2017). Item examples are: 'How often did you feel your work is meaningful' and 'How often did you feel that the work you do serves a greater purpose'. To assess these items, a six-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*every day*) was employed. The FAWS-SF subscale has shown strong internal consistency ($\alpha \geq 0.85$) and convergent validity with related well-being constructs.

Research procedure

This study formed part of a larger research study. An information brochure containing the purpose of the study and ethical considerations was provided to prospective contributors by an independent body. Respondents who voluntarily decided to be part of the study provided written informed consent prior to completion of the questionnaire.

Statistical analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis using the *Mplus* Version 8.11 statistical software program (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2022) was employed to assess the psychometric properties for the measurement and structural models. The SPSS macro syntax PROCESS for IBM SPSS Statistics (v.30) was used to examine the hypothesised indirect effect *via* OS using bootstrapping (5000 samples), which is a procedure commonly used to assess the stability of statistical estimates that makes no normality assumption and provides stronger accuracy in confidence intervals (Hayes, 2022). The indirect effect is significant if the range between the upper-level and lower-level confidence intervals does not include zero.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the North-West University Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (NWU-00609-20-A4). This study formed part of a bigger research study. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Chief Executive Officer of the participating manufacturing company. An information brochure containing the study's purpose and ethical considerations was provided to prospective contributors by an independent body. Respondents who voluntarily decided to be part of the study provided written informed consent before completion of the questionnaire. Confidentiality of data was ensured through password-protected storage of the database and other records.

Results

Confirmatory factor analysis

The measurement model, which was constructed according to what theory proposes, achieved a good fit to the data: AL was measured as second-order construct consisting of five latent first-order sub-dimensions (14 items in total), while organisational support (7 items) and PW (9 items) were measured as one-dimensional first-order latent constructs. The Chi-square test suggested that a perfect fit was not attainable ($\chi^2 = 669760$, degrees of freedom [df] = 398, $p < 0.01$); however, inspection of several fit indices in combination indicated an acceptable fit to the data: Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.92, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.92 and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) = 0.05, with Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.049, $p > 0.05$. All items loaded statistically significantly onto their respective factors with values ranging from 0.398 (lowest) to 0.822 (highest).

This aligns with Luthans and Avolio's (2003) conceptualisation of AL as a multidimensional process grounded in positive psychological capacities that promote both self-development and employee growth.

The reliable unidimensional structures of OS and PW also support Eisenberger et al. (1986) and Medvedev and Landhuis (2018), respectively, in situating these as well-delineated constructs.

Then a correlation matrix along with descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients were generated. As is evident from Table 2, all relations were statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) and all composite reliability values (ρ) were above 0.70, indicating acceptable to excellent internal consistency.

Authentic leadership had moderate positive associations with OS and with PW, indicating that leadership might play a role in fostering support and well-being in manufacturing organisations. Organisational support as an external factor had a strong positive relationship with perceived PW.

Testing of hypothesised direct and indirect effects

Indirect effect assessment involved Model 4 of the PROCESS macro for SPSS as proposed by Hayes (2022) to test the influence of AL (predictive variable) on PW (dependent variable) *via* OS (mediation variable).

Table 3 presents the results for **Hypotheses 1–3**. Supporting **Hypothesis 1a**, AL was positively associated with OS, as indicated by a significant unstandardised regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.293$; $p < 0.001$). This finding is consistent with the notion that leadership behaviours influence how employees interpret OS (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003; Vermeulen & Scheepers, 2020).

TABLE 2: Correlation matrix including means, standard deviations and reliabilities.

Variable	M	SD	ρ	1	2	3	4
1. AL (5-point scale)	3.61 3.96	0.65 0.71	0.98 -	1 -	- -	- -	- -
2. OS (4-point scale)	3.14 -	0.48 -	0.79 -	0.452†*** 0.40**	1 -	- -	- -
3. PW (6-point scale)	4.85 -	0.73 -	0.90 -	0.347†*** 0.334**	0.730‡*** 0.636**	- -1	1 -

Note: Correlation coefficients (r).

AL, authentic leadership; OS, organisational support; PW, psychological well-being; M, mean; SD, standard deviation; ρ , composite reliability coefficient.

**, $p < 0.01$.

†, $r > 0.30$; ‡, $r > 0.50$.

TABLE 3: Research model: mediation results.

Model 4	β	SE	t	p	95% CI (lower)	95% CI (upper)
AL-OS (a)	0.293	0.039	7.597	0.000**	0.217	0.369
OS-PW (b)	0.910	0.072	12.614	0.000**	0.768	1.052
AL-PW (c')	0.111	0.054	2.083	0.038*	0.006	0.217
Indirect effect						
ab	0.267	0.044	-	-	0.186	0.359

AL, authentic leadership; OS, organisational support; PW, psychological well-being; β , unstandardised beta coefficient; SE, standard error; CI, confidence interval.

*, $p < 0.05$; **, $p < 0.001$.

Authentic leadership also had a statistically significant direct positive association with PW ($\beta = 0.111$; $p < 0.05$). **Hypothesis 1b** is therefore accepted. This aligns with literature highlighting the positive role of AL in fostering trust, personal development and meaning in work (Chaudhary, 2021; Joo & Jo, 2017; Walumbwa et al., 2008).

Organisational support was statistically significant and positively related to employee PW ($\beta = 0.910$; $p < 0.001$); **Hypothesis 2** is also accepted. This aligns with previous findings that support from the organisation contributes to feelings of purpose, engagement and emotional health (Caesens et al., 2016; Dhir et al., 2023).

Authentic leadership had a positive indirect effect on PW ($\beta = 0.267$; $p < 0.05$) as we hypothesised (**Hypothesis 3**). This supports theoretical models, where leadership behaviours shape the broader psychosocial climate, which in turn influences individual outcomes (Cheng et al., 2022; Jun et al., 2025). The true indirect effect of AL on PW *via* OS based on 5000 bootstrap samples with 95% confidence interval is estimated to lie between 0.186 and 0.359.

Discussion

Outline of the results

This study aimed to examine the relationship among AL, OS and PW. All the variables used in the model showed a statistical fit and the variables and model are conceptually sound, with the items having strong and significant correlations with their constructs.

The results that indicate acceptance of the three hypotheses in this study support findings in other studies (Hlongwane & Olivier, 2017; Maximo et al., 2019; Olckers et al., 2020; Townsen et al., 2020) that reported significant positive

associations between AL and organisational variables related to OS and PW.

The association between AL and PW was found to be stronger when mediated by OS, indicating that higher levels of AL were associated with increased perceptions of PW, with this relationship being more substantial when OS was included as a mediating factor. This confirms literature that indicates that AL may serve as a valuable resource associated with positive employee perceptions and behaviour (Vermeulen & Scheepers, 2020) and further indicates that the relationship between AL and PW is most pronounced in contexts where OS is perceived to be high. This supports the value of OS found in previous studies (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010; Stander et al., 2015).

Practical implications

In this study, AL was indicated as a predictor of PW, with OS further strengthening the relationship.

This could indicate that leaders in uncertain job environments such as the South African manufacturing industry can focus their leadership efforts on using the AL style by (for instance) focusing on consistent and transparent communication between managers and their employees, in order to build resilience and potentially increase their employees' psychological resilience and create systemic organisational support by putting in place supportive human resource practices and policies (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Increasing the quality of the employee-organisation relationship through both AL and OS seems to be indicated as being most effective in positively influencing employees' PW, which in turn should lead to better work engagement and performance.

This could also imply that leaders who lead by applying AL characteristics and principles might be more sensitive to and can possibly understand the spirit and needs of the people and the organisation better (De Wet et al., 2024), thereby being more inclined to provide enabling elements through a variety of organisational support mechanisms, which could magnify the effect and return on effort for both the organisation and its employees.

Creating a supportive organisational culture and implementing workplace interventions to increase organisational support can also involve applying these leadership characteristics to optimise policies to create an environment in which employees can be engaged and developed through opportunities that enable them to make use of the opportunities sustainably and achieve employment activities and outcomes that are important to them (Abma et al., 2016; Van der Klink et al., 2016), allowing for (for instance) flexible work arrangements or providing more work autonomy and options to choose from.

This aligns with and is supported by previous research, such as the principles of the practice of presence (Timmerman & Baart, 2022), task-enabling leadership (Haber & Carmeli, 2022) and the creation of a learning organisational environment (Alomar et al., 2022), that all contain and confirm the value of elements found in AL and OS as potential mechanisms to improve employee PW in times and contexts of uncertainty such as those found in the South African labour market, thereby increasing the potential of the organisation to weather these uncertain times in a resilient manner by potentially mitigating the effects of job insecurity, shortage of skills and other human resource challenges found in the manufacturing industry.

Limitations and recommendations

This was a once-off study that was undertaken on a limited population within a specific industry and context in South Africa. Only managers were included in the sample, therefore limiting the generalisability of the findings to managers in this specific industry. Temporal changes in the organisation or industry might influence the reported outcomes. Differences can also be found between different industries such as between traditional financial for-profit and non-profit organisations or between public and private sector organisations. Weaker item loadings were also found in some of the items on the ALI – a revision of these items would increase the power of the instrument.

Future research can include longitudinal and qualitative studies to assess causality (which could not be inferred from the cross-sectional data) and may include comparisons between the different sectors and organisational models, and can also potentially focus on understanding what the long-term effects are of AL and OS on PW. Lastly, more in-depth qualitative follow-up research can be conducted to identify the specific elements of AL that impact OS to, in turn, increase PW, with a view to guide the effective application of AL energy and OS resources.

Conclusion

This study highlights significant associations among AL, OS and PW. The preferred measurement model shows a positive relationship between AL and OS, aligning with prior research suggesting that leaders who exhibit authentic behaviours are more likely to be perceived as supportive. Although the direct association between AL and PW was statistically significant but modest, the relationship was stronger when OS was included as a mediating factor. These findings suggest that fostering a work environment where authentic leadership (AL) and organisational support (OS) are present may be associated with more favourable psychological well-being (PW) outcomes for employees.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

D.J.K. served as the first author. M.M.H. and T.D.W. made contributions towards the conceptualisation, review and editing of the research article. M.M.H. performed the statistical analysis. T.D.W. provided interpretation based on the data and literature. The submitted version of this article was developed, refined and approved for submission by all the authors.

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Data availability

The authors confirm that the supporting and the raw data are available from the corresponding author, T.D.W., upon reasonable request.

Disclaimer

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