Personal factor effects on authentic leadership

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This study explored the relationship between authentic leadership and personal factors of emotional intelligence (EI), personality, cognitive abilities and gender. The convenience sample of respondents included 341 employees, and prospective students in an advanced leadership education programme at a South African Business School. The respondents completed measures on authentic leadership, emotional intelligence, personality and cognitive ability. The data were analysed by applying regression analysis to predict self-perceived authentic leadership from EI, personality attributes, cognitive abilities and gender. Findings suggest that one EI dimension (Self-awareness) and four personality attributes, namely, Emotionally Controlled, Evaluative, Independent Minded, and Adaptable predicted authentic leadership. Authentic leadership is associated with individuals who are seen as credible and aware of how they think and behave. Therefore, such individuals have various self-reflective attributes and advanced emotional capabilities.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, personality, cognitive abilities, gender, predictors of authentic leadership

Introduction

Authentic leadership consists of four distinct but related substantive components: self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and an internalised moral perspective (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004; Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005; Gardner, Cogliser, Davis, & Dickens, 2011; Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing & Peterson, 2007). In this model of authentic leadership, *self-awareness* refers to showing an understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses and the multifaceted nature of the self which includes gaining insight into the self through exposure to others and being cognisant of one's impact on others (Kernis, 2003). *Relational transparency* refers to presenting one's authentic self to others and promotes trust through disclosures that involve sharing information openly and expressions of one's true thoughts and feelings, while minimising inappropriate emotional displays (Walumbwa et al., 2007). *Balanced processing* relates to leaders who show that they analyse all relevant data objectively before reaching a decision; they also solicit views that challenge deeply-held assumptions (Walumbwa et al., 2007). Finally, *internalised moral perspective* refers to an internalised and integrated form of self-regulation guided by internal moral standards and values, as opposed to group, organisational and societal pressures. This results in expressed decision-making and behaviour consistent with these internalised values.

Authenticity is a reflection of the leader's inner self (Kiyani, Saher, Saleem, & Iqbal, 2013) and, as a leadership quality, has been linked to other types of leadership, such as servant and spiritual leadership. According to Avolio et al. (2004), authentic leadership differentiates itself from other kinds of leadership in the sense that it is at the core of what constitutes positive leadership in whatever type it exists. Authentic leadership has been linked to personal attributes such as true and stable levels of self-esteem (Kernis, 2003), deep self-knowledge (Walumbwa et al., 2007), high self-concept clarity (Shamir & Eilam, 2005), resilience, hope, optimism, self-confidence, and advanced cognitive development and emotional development (Walumbwa et al., 2007). Many of these positive attributes are rooted in positive psychology and positive organisational behaviour (POB) that, according to Diddams and Chang (2012, p. 594), "underlies much of the theory building around authentic leadership". However, the influence of personal factors such as personality, emotional intelligence, cognitive ability and gender on authentic leadership is relatively understudied, particularly in developing-country settings such as South Africa. The major exceptions to this are studies by those such as Amunkete and Rothmann (2015), Kiyani et al. (2013) and Dzivhani (2016), who conducted research in Namibia, Pakistan and South Africa, respectively. In the South African study, Dzivhani (2016) sampled a group of culturally and ethnically diverse individuals in leadership positions in organisations to determine the relationship between authentic leadership and ethnic identity. The researcher found that leaders who strongly identified with their ethnic grouping perceive themselves to exhibit authentic leadership qualities, irrespective of their gender and ethnicity (Dzivhani, 2016). The Namibian study (Amunkete & Rothmann, 2015) investigated the relationship between authentic leadership and personal factors of employees, while the study in Pakistan (Kiyani et al., 2013) looked at authentic leadership as a mediator in the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and employee outcomes. The results of these studies will be discussed in the section below.

Personal factors in authentic leadership

Personal factors that influence leadership include personality (Antonakis, Day, & Schyns, 2012; Babyak, 2014), cognitive ability (Antonakis, Day, & Schyns, 2012; Judge, Colbert, & Ilies, 2004; Kellet, Humphrey, &

Sleeth*, 2006) and EI (Kiyani et al., 2013). For instance, transformational leadership is associated with personality attributes such as agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience (Farsani, Azadi, Farsani, & Aroufzad, 2013; Rubin, Munz, & Bommer*, 2005; Yahaya et al., 2011) and extraversion (Farsani et al., 2013). Furthermore, certain personality features such as obsessive compulsive personality disorder, anti-social behaviour and narcissism in leaders are associated with a strong task focus, little attention to the development of successful relationships, a lack of empathy and rule-driven and self-serving behaviour, respectively (Beddoes-Jones, 2011). Amunkete and Rothmann (2015) collected data from employees working in state-owned enterprises in Namibia. These researchers found authentic leadership to be positively related to the personal factors of employees. Those employees who perceived their leader to be authentic were more hopeful, optimistic, confident and resilient (Amunkete & Rothmann, 2015).

Some research has shown that high cognitive ability in leaders is associated with higher ratings on task leadership, but not on relations leadership (Kellet et al., 2006). Research done by Tong, Li and Greiff (2015) relating cognitive and non-cognitive abilities to leadership revealed that problem-solving ability was the best cognitive predictor of leadership, while perseverance was the best non-cognitive predictor of leadership. Furthermore, a meta-analysis of studies examining the relationship between intelligence and leadership (Judge, Colbert, & Ilies, 2004) found that perceptual measures of intelligence showed stronger correlations with leadership than did paper-and-pencil measures of intelligence. Therefore, the researchers concluded that the relationship between intelligence and leadership is considerably less prominent than previously thought (Judge, Colbert, & Ilies, 2004).

EI, or the capacity to recognise one's own feelings and those of others and to motivate and manage emotions in oneself and one's relationships (Goleman, 1995), is associated with several leadership qualities such as constructive thinking and decision-making (George, 2000). For example, emotionally intelligent leaders recognise and are aware of how their emotions can lead to errors in decision-making. Changes in moods and emotions influence managers' perceptions of the severity of the problem, as well as alternative solutions to the problems. When an emotion is deemed irrelevant in making a decision, individuals disregard and manage the irrelevant emotion that would have resulted in poor decision-making (George, 2000). Therefore, leaders who are aware of their own emotions and the impact of those emotions on themselves and others tend to be more objective in decision-making. Kiyani et al. (2013) studied the mediating effect of authentic leadership styles in the relationship between EI and employee outcomes in a sample of managers and non-managers in software companies in Pakistan. The results showed that authentic leadership has a mediating effect on the relationship between EI and employee outcomes. As a result, managers who are emotionally intelligent will manage their emotions, as well as their subordinates' emotions, in an authentic manner that will eventually lead to improved

job performance. Furthermore, the authors conclude that EI does not only enhance managers' authentic leadership, but also influences their behaviours and thoughts (Kiyani et al., 2013).

Gender and leadership
Despite the growing interest in authenticity, the question of gender and authenticity remains underexplored. Eagly (2005), and Liu, Cutcher and Grant (2015) assert that most studies treat authenticity as gender neutral (Avolio et al., 2004; Walumbwa, Wang, Wang, Schaubroeck, & Avolio, 2010), assuming a disembodied genderless individual who exhibits a "true", fixed self. The need to explore the role of gender in authentic leadership became apparent as Liu et al. (2015) found that being constructed as authentic depends on being able to perform authenticity consistent with gender norms.

Business leadership in the South African context
Within the South African business context, leaders need to deal with the challenges of globalisation, affirmative action, cultural diversity, broad-based black economic empowerment, and transformation. These challenges require leaders to continuously interact with their employees to ensure the financial viability of their organisation and to make a contribution to their social environment (Baicher, 2005). Therefore, Parker (1998) states that South African organisations need to be soft on people and hard on results. However, Parker (1998) opines that South African business leaders tend to be hard on performance and hard on people. In a study relating to competencies of successful business leaders in South Africa, Baicher (2005) found that in order for leaders to be successful within the South African context, they need to appreciate cultural diversity and build relationships with those whom they lead. As authentic leaders have the ability to restore confidence, hope and optimism by relating to all stakeholders (Avolio & Gardner, 2005), authentic leadership may contribute to overcome the challenges faced by South African business leaders within this context.

In terms of the broader African context, it is believed that individual needs will be met or achieved when decision-making and leadership are viewed collectively (Nwagbara, 2012). Although it is argued that there is both an individualistic and communalistic orientation in postmodernist African management models (Mbigi, 1995; Nwagbara, 2012), Mbigi (1995) maintains that compromise, persuasion, discussion, listening and accommodation are the key elements of the African leadership paradigm. Subsequently, leaders need to develop their EI in order to learn from past experiences and enhance their levels of self-awareness in order to understand their own behaviour, as well as those of others (Baicher, 2005).

Research goal
The objective of this study was to determine the extent to which the factors of personality, cognitive ability, emotional intelligence and gender predict authentic

leadership in the South African business sector. The study addressed the following questions:

1. Which personality attributes explain a significant proportion of variance in authentic leadership?
2. Does cognitive ability explain a significant proportion of the variance in authentic leadership?
3. Which components of emotional intelligence predict a significant proportion of variance in authentic leadership?
4. Does gender influence authentic leadership?

Method

Participants and setting

A convenience sample of 341 aspiring business school students in full-time employment participated in the study (females = 39.6%; black/African language group = 60.1%) (see Table 1 below for more demographic details). In terms of age, the majority ranged from 31 to 35 years (25.5%), 22.9% were between 26 and 30 years, 22.0% from 36 to 40 years, 15.0% from 41 to 45 years, 8.8% from 46 to 50 years, 4.7% from 21 to 25 years and 1.2% were over 50 years old.

Measuring instruments

Authentic leadership was measured using the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) (Walumbwa et al., 2007). The ALQ consists of 16 items and measures four dimensions: self-awareness, relational transparency, internalised moral perspective, and balanced processing. Acceptable goodness-of-fit statistics for the Authentic Leadership construct were found: S-B X^2 = 265.14, *df* = 98, RMSEA = 0.071, CFI = 0.95 and SRMR = 0.082. However, previous research (Nel, 2013) has suggested that it is advisable to conceptualise Authentic Leadership as a general factor and that a total score should be calculated (consisting of all 16 items). The current study found an acceptable reliability of 0.84 for the total scale.

Emotional intelligence was measured using the Rahim Emotional Quotient Index (REQI) (Self-rating) (Abas, 2010; Afzalur Rahim et al., 2002). This self-rating instrument requires respondents to provide their opinions on the way they perceive themselves in relation to Self-awareness, Self-regulation, Motivation, Empathy and Social Skills. The following goodness-of-fit statistics associated with the REQI were observed in the results from the current study: S-B X^2 = 556.07, *df* = 395, RMSEA = 0.036, CFI = 0.99 and SRMR = 0.037. These indices indicate that the model is well suited. The reliability estimates found by the current study are deemed acceptable for the five dimensions: Self-awareness (six items; α = 0.91), Self-regulation (six items; α = 0.91), Motivation (six items; α = 0.93), Empathy (six items; α = 0.90) and Social Skills (six items; α = 0.91).

Personality traits were measured by the Occupational Personality Questionnaire 32r (OPQ32r) (Joubert & Venter, 2013). The OPQ32r is a forced-choice measure of three domains, namely Relationships with People, Thinking Style, and Feelings and Emotions (see also Bartram, Brown, Fleck, Inceoglu, & Ward, 2006). The results for the acceptable goodness-of-fit associated with the OPQ 32r: are S-B X^2 = 753.87, *df* = 496, RMSEA =

0.035, CFI = 0.97 and SRMR = 0.054 (Joubert, Inceoglu, Bartram, Dowdeswell, & Lin, 2015). Internal consistency reliabilities between 0.8 and 0.91 for scores from the OPQ32 have been found previously in research on a South African sample (Joubert & Venter, 2013).

Cognitive ability was measured by means of the Verify Verbal Reasoning and Numerical Reasoning ability tests (Saville and Holdsworth Limited [SHL], 2014). The Verbal Reasoning Test assesses candidates applying for jobs at all levels that require verbal reasoning ability. The Numerical Reasoning Test assesses candidates applying for jobs at all levels that require numerical reasoning ability. Previous studies reported internal consistency reliabilities of between 0.78 and 0.81 on the Verbal Reasoning Test, and for numerical ability the reliabilities range from 0.83 to 0.84 for scores on the Numerical Reasoning Test (SHL, 2014).

Research procedure and ethical clearance

Permission for the study was granted by the University Research Committee of the Faculty, the Director of the Business School and the Vice-Rector. Research participants were asked to sign a consent form relating to their participation in the research. The form included the assurance of anonymity and that no individual results would be reported in any publications. Only aggregated data relating to the total group would be reported and discussed.

Data analysis

The current study employed LISREL 8.80 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2006) to estimate the goodness-of-fit associated with the constructs trait-EI and authentic leadership. Several fit indices were used including the Satorra-Bentler Scaled Chi-square, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Standardised Root-Mean Square Residual (SRMR), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI). Values close to 0.95 for GFI and CFI are considered indicative of a good model fit. Values close to 0.06 indicate an acceptable fit for RMSEA, while values smaller than 0.08 are acceptable for SRMR (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Stepwise multiple regression was applied to predict authentic leadership from personality, cognitive ability, EI and gender (Field, 2005).

Results

Table 1 presents the correlations between the individual variables and authentic leadership, while Tables 2 and 3 present the results of the stepwise multiple regression analysis with personality traits, EI components, cognitive abilities and gender as authentic leadership predictors.

From Table 1 it is evident that there are statistically significant relationships between authentic leadership and 18 of the 32 OPQ personality traits, as well as all five EI components.

Personal factors as predictors of authentic leadership

Table 2 presents the data on the results as related to the four research questions. The significant predictors with a positive relationship to authentic leadership are EI-Empathy and EI-Motivation, and the Evaluative

Table 1. Correlations between authentic leadership and gender, cognitive abilities, personality traits and EI components

Individual variables	Authentic leadership (Total score)
Gender	0.07
Numerical reasoning	0.01
Verbal reasoning	0.01
Persuasive	0.13**
Controlling	0.16**
Outspoken	0.13**
Independent minded	-0.09*
Outgoing	0.02
Affiliative	0.03
Socially confident	0.13**
Modest	-0.14**
Democratic	0.77
Caring	0.11*
Data rational	0.77
Evaluative	0.20**
Behavioural	0.02
Conventional	0.05
Conceptual	0.12**
Innovative	0.20**
Variety seeking	-0.01
Adaptable	-0.17**
Forward thinking	0.19**
Conscientious	0.11*
Rule following	-0.12*
Relaxed	-0.02
Worrying	-0.19**
Tough minded	0.06
Optimism	0.15**
Trusting	0.05
Emotionally controlled	-0.23**
Vigorous	0.00
Competitive	-0.02
Achieving	0.20**
Decisive	0.04
EI Self-awareness	0.26**
EI Self-regulation	0.25**
EI Motivation	0.18**
EI Empathy	0.28**
EI Social Skills	0.26**

personality attribute. The significant predictors having a negative relationship with authentic leadership were the personality attributes of Emotionally Controlled, Adaptable and Independent Minded.

The removal of the two EI components (Empathy and Motivation), due to multicollinearity, resulted in a second regression model with no evidence of multicollinearity. The results of the multiple regression identified five statistically significant predictors of authentic leadership (see Table 3). The majority of these predictors represent personality traits, namely Emotionally Controlled, Adaptable, Evaluative, and Independent Minded, while Self-awareness represents an EI component. Together, these five variables explain 14% of the variance in authentic leadership, which is statistically significant ($F = 10.94$; $p = 0.000$).

Discussion
The relationship between authentic leadership and the Evaluative personality trait was positive. This indicates that participants in this study who regard themselves as authentic leaders are individuals who: (a) prefer to openly express their feelings and display their emotions clearly (lower on Emotionally Controlled) (Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2007); (b) behave more consistently across situations and are unlikely to behave differently with different people or to adapt their behaviour to suit the situation (lower on Adaptable) (Diddams & Chang, 2012); (c) are more prepared to follow the consensus approach to decision-making and accept the majority decision, rather than following their own approach (lower on Independent Minded); and (d) are inclined to critically evaluate information and look for potential limitations or errors (higher on Evaluative) (Walumbwa et al., 2007). Furthermore, the positive relationship between EI Self-awareness and authentic leadership indicates that those who perceive themselves as authentic leaders also tend to show higher levels of self-awareness (see also Avolio et al., 2004; Gardner et al., 2005; Gardner et al., 2011).

Participants who perceive themselves as authentic leaders also measure lower on the Emotionally Controlled trait, meaning they share and display their emotions

Table 2. Stepwise multiple regression of personal factors on authentic leadership (Model 1)

Variable	β	Standard Error	t	p	Cumulative R-square	Tolerance	VIF
Empathy	0.387	0.098	3.964	0.000	0.061	0.243	4.112
Emotionally controlled	-0.532	0.196	-2.715	0.007	0.093	0.934	1.071
Adaptable	-0.672	0.212	-3.166	0.002	0.118	0.943	1.060
Evaluative	0.526	0.201	2.611	0.009	0.135	0.954	1.049
Motivation	0.240	0.094	2.552	0.011	0.152	0.247	4.047
Independent minded	-0.405	0.192	-2.111	0.036	0.162	0.974	1.027

Table 3. Stepwise multiple regression of personal factors on authentic leadership (Model 2)

Variable	β	Standard Error	t	p	Cumulative R-square	Tolerance	VIF
Self-awareness	0.158	0.049	3.216	0.001	0.055	0.95	1.053
Emotionally controlled	-0.585	0.197	-2.970	0.003	0.090	0.945	1.059
Adaptable	-0.624	0.214	-2.913	0.004	0.114	0.945	1.058
Evaluative	0.527	0.204	2.588	0.010	0.130	0.953	1.050
Independent minded	-0.407	0.194	-2.100	0.036	0.142	0.977	1.024

more openly. This finding seems to be in keeping with theoretical models and arguments surrounding authentic leadership, as conceptualised by Avolio and colleagues (2004). Authentic leaders are described as individuals who present their authentic self to others by expressing their true self in daily life (Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005), while openly sharing expressions of their true thoughts and feelings (Walumbwa et al., 2007). Moreover, Diddams and Chang (2012) state that a deep self-knowledge of strengths and weaknesses creates non-defensiveness that allows authentic leaders to behave consistently across situations and to be transparent with their followers regarding the reasons for their actions.

Participants who measure higher on authentic leadership also measure lower on Adaptability, indicating that they behave in a consistent manner without adapting their approach to different people or situations. This is in contrast to previous research relating adaptability to leadership in which positive correlations between adaptability and transformational leadership were found (Pillay, Viviers, & Mayer, 2013). Therefore, the results of the current study may indicate that the adaptation of behaviour to situations can be regarded as inauthentic leadership behaviour, perhaps within certain contexts.

Furthermore, the results on Balanced Processing, a component of authentic leadership (Walumbwa et al., 2007), indicate that authentic leaders tend to analyse all relevant data objectively before coming to a decision, which is in line with the results of the current study. These results indicate that those who perceive themselves as authentic leaders also measure higher on Evaluative, meaning they prefer to critically evaluate information and look for potential limitations and errors. The results also reveal that participants who regard themselves as authentic leaders are more prepared to follow a consensus approach to decision-making and accept the majority decision. Gardiner (2015) suggests that context not be overlooked in authentic leadership scholarship. Each individual has a unique way of perceiving the world that is relational and embodied; therefore, our actions are mediated by our relationships, as well as the social environment.

The positive relationship between EI Self-awareness and authentic leadership in the current study is not surprising. Various authors (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Dasborough, Todorova, & Qu, 2014; Gardner et al., 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2007) have emphasised the importance of self-awareness in authentic leadership. Barnard and Simbhoo (2014) conclude that built into the ideal of authentic living is the idea that a unique self is distinguished by the individual's thoughts, feelings, needs, desires, capacities, aptitudes, beliefs and preferences, and that self-knowledge, self-awareness and self-understanding precede the ability to live and act according to the unique self.

Despite previous research finding a relationship between cognitive ability and leadership, the current research results show no statistically significant relationship between abilities and self-perceived authentic leadership. Taking into consideration the high premium authentic leadership places on relationship behaviour, this may be in line with a study by Kellett, Humphrey

and Sleeth (2006) which shows that cognitive abilities earn participants higher ratings on task leadership, but not on relations leadership. With regard to gender, the lack of a relationship between gender and authentic leadership may be due to the way that authentic leadership has been constructed, defined and measured by Avolio and colleagues (Avolio et al., 2004; Walumbwa et al., 2010), which does not include the role of gender in the construction of authentic leadership (Eagly, 2005; Liu et al., 2015).

Limitations of the study

The results presented in this article should be understood within the context of the limitations of the study. Common method bias poses a potential problem in this study since all variables are based on self-assessment. However, since this study was largely concerned with self-perceptions, the use of such self-reports is not unreasonable (Schmitt, 1994). In future studies, it may be productive to complement the findings with additional data from different sources (i.e. the perceptions of followers). Since authentic leadership may not manifest itself identically in different contexts, it is further suggested that studies on the various antecedents of authentic leadership be conducted in organisations in different African countries.

Conclusion

The results of the current study suggest that authentic leaders are true to themselves – both in terms of emotions and behaviours. Authentic leaders understand their emotions and have certain personality characteristics that facilitate decision-making. As self-aware individuals, they understand their own strengths and weaknesses. They are aware of their emotions and how such emotions may influence behaviour. Their understanding of their emotions manifests as better emotional control. This enables them to understand and gain insight into how their emotions might influence those they work with. Being authentic may require them to behave more consistently across situations and they are therefore unlikely to behave differently with different people or to adapt their behaviour to suit the situation. Authentic leaders also critically evaluate relevant information before making a decision, which is indicative of balanced information processing. Being an authentic leader may therefore require both emotional intelligence and an authentic personality.

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