



Original Article (Quantified)

Modeling the structural relationships between authentic leadership and teachers' social undermining with the mediating role of organizational virtue

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to model the structural relationships between authentic leadership and teachers' social attrition with an emphasis on the mediating role of organizational virtue. The present study is applicable in terms of purpose, and descriptive-correlative in nature, and was conducted using the structural equation modeling method. The statistical population included all elementary school teachers in districts one and four of Tabriz, 1360 in number; and based on the rules of structural equation modeling, the sample size was estimated at 360 people selected using the proportional stratified sampling method. Data collection was based on authentic leadership, organizational virtue, and social attrition questionnaires. Research data analysis was performed using SPSS26 and SMART PLS3 software. The findings indicate that the proposed model has a good fit. The results of structural analysis showed that authentic leadership and organizational virtue were able to significantly and inversely predict teachers' social attrition. Also, the relationship between authentic leadership and social attrition was also significant and inverse, while the relationship between authentic leadership and organizational virtue was assessed as significant and positive.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Human communication is the foundation of social relationships, the key to understanding and empathy, and a tool for conflict resolution and individual and social development. Effective communication shapes healthy and dynamic societies and is essential for survival and progress. Therefore, interpersonal relationships have a significant impact on employee behavior and organizational performance and can have both positive and negative aspects in the workplace. Its positive aspects, such as social support (Tosun et al, 2025), enhance employee morale and performance; and its negative aspects, such as social attrition, can lead to negative behaviors and lead to a decline in the quality of work life, reduced productivity, and weakened interpersonal relationships (Dulfer et al, 2023). This phenomenon is particularly influenced by two key factors, namely supervisors and colleagues. From this perspective, it can be inferred that social attrition is affected by the leadership styles applied in organizations.

In the meantime, authentic leadership plays a fundamental role in the growth and development of organizations (Ling et al, 2017). This style of leadership refers to leaders who act with authenticity and honesty, and are known as trustworthy people (Derakhshan & Zandi, 2016). Proponents of authentic leadership believe that these leaders provide the best conditions for inspiration, loyalty, and strong performance among employees; they are self-aware leaders who are trusted by others due to their values and ethical views and are also proficient in their field of activity. These leaders usually have self-confidence, flexibility, and outstanding moral qualities. On the other hand, another factor affecting social attrition is organizational virtue, which can play an important role in creating a healthy and constructive environment and lead to strengthening interpersonal relationships and reducing social attrition (Cameron et al, 2008). The study by Cameron & Spreitzer (2012) also confirms that organizations with stronger virtues are able to increase teacher satisfaction and commitment and reduce social attrition. However, social attrition, as a fundamental challenge in the education system, can damage teachers' motivation and commitment and bring undesirable consequences such as job stress, decreased perceived self-efficacy, impaired psychological well-being, and increased willingness to leave the service (Tore & Cetin, 2022). It is worth noting that, despite extensive research in this area, identifying factors that reduce the effects of social attrition has been neglected, and few studies have examined the role of authentic leadership and organizational virtue in this relationship. Accordingly, the present study seeks to answer the question: what is the structural relationship model of authentic leadership and social attrition of teachers with the mediating role of organizational virtue?

Theoretical Framework

Social Attrition

The concept of social attrition includes gradual negative behaviors manifested by employees and can reduce the abilities of the individual. In addition to behavioral and emotional dimensions, this phenomenon is one of the negative consequences of social life that carries great costs for organizations and society and can weaken individual capacities, including career success, reputation, and popularity in the organization. (Kafinejad, 2018) Social attrition has two dimensions: coworker attrition and supervisor attrition. Colleague attrition includes behaviors such as gossiping and insults; and supervisor attrition includes all actions that disrupt supervisors' performance. Social attrition can manifest as overt, direct, and covert, verbal, physical, and nonverbal attrition (Duffy et al., 2002).



Authentic Leadership

Crawford et al (2020) defines authentic leadership as a model of leadership behavior that utilizes psychological capacities and a positive moral climate, and helps to enhance self-awareness, ethical perspective, balanced information processing, and transparency in communication. By strengthening self-belief and values, authentic leadership increases trust in the organization, reinforces positive employee behaviors, and prevents unethical behaviors (Sendjaya et al, 2016., Kiersch & Peters, 2017). This approach empowers employees, increases a sense of responsibility and job satisfaction, reduces the desire to leave work, and strengthens effective leader-member relationships (Hirst et al, 2016). Authentic leadership includes four main dimensions: Self-awareness, which is related to the leader's recognition of his or her abilities, weaknesses, and the impact of his or her behavior on others. Balanced information processing means critical thinking and non-bias in analyzing information and different opinions, and helps leaders to fairly consider different opinions and make evidence-based decisions. An internalized ethical perspective emphasizes the necessity of a strong value and ethical framework in all decision-making and helps leaders to pursue the goals and values of the organization with determination. Finally, relationship transparency refers to establishing open and honest communication between the leader and followers, which helps to improve the quality of human relationships and build trust (Çevik, 2024; Cottrill et al, 2014; Jiewen et al, 2025.)

Organizational Virtue

Organizational virtue means having a positive approach to virtue in the organization that helps increase the well-being and health of employees and improves the performance of the organization (Hessel, 2013). In fact, virtue in an organization is a symbol of inherent greatness that supports the moral goals of the organization and specifically emphasizes human values (Meyer, 2018). It is an approach in which habits and ideals such as leadership, honesty, forgiveness and trust are promoted and supported at the individual and group levels. Organizational virtue includes the following five dimensions:

A- Organizational optimism: It is a positive and hopeful attitude towards the future, promoted in organizations and encourages members to trust in their abilities and increases their motivation and job loyalty by creating a positive culture.

B- Organizational forgiveness: It is an approach in which organizations, by promoting a culture of forgiveness, create an atmosphere in which unintentional errors are treated with forgiveness and employees accept their mistakes and learn from them.

C- Organizational trust: Organizational trust is the positive individual expectations and perceptions that individuals have about the competence, reliability, and benevolence of managers and other members of the organization and their behaviors.

D- Sympathy: Based on this aspect, individuals in the organization are concerned about each other and feelings of sympathy and care are widely prevalent in the organizational environment.

F- Organizational honesty: It means the prevalence of honesty, confidentiality, trustworthiness, and respect for honor (Rego et al, 2011.)

Research methodology

The present study is applicable in terms of purpose and descriptive-correlative in nature, conducted using the structural equation modeling method. The statistical population of the study includes 1360 elementary school teachers in the first and fourth districts of Tabriz city. Based on the rules of structural equation modeling, the sample size was estimated at 360 and

was selected using the proportional stratified sampling method. To collect data, questionnaires on authentic leadership, organizational virtue, and social attrition were used.

Research findings

To analyze the research data, structural equation modeling was used utilizing SPSS and SmartPLS2 software. The research findings showed that the proposed model has a good fit. It was also found that authentic leadership has a positive relationship with organizational virtue and an inverse relationship with social attrition. In addition, organizational virtue, in turn, has an inverse relationship with social attrition.

Conclusion

The present study was conducted with the aim of modeling the structural relationships between authentic leadership and social attrition of teachers with the mediating role of organizational virtue. The research findings regarding the significant relationships between authentic leadership and organizational virtue are consistent with the findings of Faghernejad & Fatahi (2019), Derakhshan & Zandi (2016), and Rego et al (2015); and the existence of a significant inverse relationship between organizational virtue and social attrition is consistent with the findings of Faghernejad & Fatahi (2019); and the existence of a significant inverse relationship between authentic leadership and social attrition is consistent with the findings of Taherpour et al (2016). In line with the findings, Cameron et al (2004) believe that authentic leadership is effective in reducing social attrition, and organizational virtue can play an important role in reducing social attrition. Also, the findings of Tore & Cetin (2022) have shown that authentic leadership, by emphasizing human values and ethical principles, can help reduce social attrition and strengthen organizational virtue. The study of Cameron & Spreitzer (2012) also confirms the inverse relationship between organizational virtue and social attrition.

Based on the research findings, it is suggested that school principals utilize authentic leadership styles to reduce conflicts and minimize social attrition. Also, given the positive relationship between authentic leadership and organizational virtue, it is expected that school principals will strive to implement the principles of authentic leadership and organizational virtue and its dimensions of justice, fairness, and honesty; and to develop authentic leadership and organizational virtue processes in schools. In addition, strengthening organizational virtue through the development of a culture of participation and cooperation in teams and programs to recognize and appreciate positive teacher behaviors can help improve morale and reduce social attrition. Finally, education administrators should conduct regular assessments of levels of organizational virtue and social attrition and pay more attention to criteria related to authentic leadership and organizational virtue when appointing school principals.