

# Chapter 4

## Authentic and Moral Leadership Practices in Schools



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### Introduction

Educational leaders are held responsible for the effectiveness and improvement processes of their schools (Adams et al. 2021; Ng 2015; Dutta and Sahney 2016; Drace 2019; Lynch et al. 2022). In fact, they are also held responsible for the school's change and transformation processes which lead to academic achievement (Duignan 2012). As asserted by Stynes and McNamara (2019), school leaders need to devote their fullest capacities, dedication, and moral commitment to providing leadership even to the detriment of their own work-life balance, health and well-being. Furthermore, as educational leaders, they have to ensure the beliefs, values and norms of their schools are understood and shared among all staff (Adams and Velarde 2021; Bush and Middlewood 2013; Drace 2019).

In discussing these accountabilities, the role of authentic and moral leadership is believed to provide suitable leadership models that can help educational leaders achieve their educational purpose, vision, and goals (Thien et al. 2022). These leadership paradigms, though unique in their focus, share a symbiotic relationship that enriches our understanding of effective leadership. Authentic leadership underscores the importance of genuineness, self-awareness, and transparency in leaders, while moral leadership emphasizes the ethical principles guiding leadership decisions. By comparing these leadership types, this chapter will provide a comprehensive view of how a leader's authenticity enhances the application of moral principles, creating a holistic approach to effective leadership practices (Mooney Simmie and Sheehan 2022). It highlights how a leader's character, values, and ethical decision-making

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navigates complex leadership challenges while staying true to one's authentic self. Thus, the discussions in this chapter are divided into four major sub-sections: the definitions, suitable models and characteristics related to both models of leadership, comparing the authentic with moral leadership, and the final section elaborates on the applicability of both models from an educational perspective.

## Authentic Leadership

In the authentic philosophy, authentic leadership theory was derived from the Greek word '*authentikos*' which possibly arises from an understanding of organisational environments based on a leader's own experiences, beliefs, and truths (Karadag and Oztekin-Bayir 2018). In defining authentic leadership, Yukl (2010) affirmed that such definitions mainly focused on the importance of consistency in words, actions, and values. Thus, authentic leaders are seen as being extremely alert to how they think and perform to demonstrate their own values, perspectives, and strengths to others. Furthermore, through authentic leadership, leaders also exhibit their self-awareness and commitment to their values and goals (Berkovich and Gueta 2022).

Within the school leadership perspective, the study of authentic leadership arose within the educational literature in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Berkovich and Gueta 2022). As with the business sector, an authentic leadership perspective within the conceptualisation of school leadership is defined as educational leaders who strongly emphasise the element of value or value-based leadership (Berkovich and Gueta 2022). This definition was later supported by Duignan (2014) who defined authentic leadership as school leaders who practise authentic leadership and emphasise the elements of integrity, moral purpose and ethical attitudes which positively affect teachers' awareness and commitment. Thus, these leaders need to feel confident, hopeful, optimistic, and resilient whilst demonstrating a high moral personality. Based on this definition, it is assumed that authentic leadership presents a leader's positive values and self-awareness that enable him/her to build positive relationships with their followers (Karadag and Oztekin-Bayir 2018). In addition, Kernis and Goldman (2006) had conceptualised the authentic leadership model from four major standpoints: (a) awareness—depending on an individual's own thoughts, feelings and values; (b) unbiased processing—acknowledging positive and negative aspects without prejudice; (c) behaviour—pleasing others, and (d) relational orientation—being honest in relationships.

Further, Gardner et al. (2005) conceptualised the authentic leadership model as a process that combined the leader's psychological abilities alongside organisational development. Thus, it also considers optimal personal self-esteem as being genuine, true, consistent, and congruent (Kernis 2003). However, George (2003) theorised that authentic leadership as a process for improving their followers' performance helped by a leader using the strengths of his/her leadership approach. In addition, it is also believed that positive change can be implemented through power-sharing based on an individual's qualities of heart, passion (desire) and compassion (George

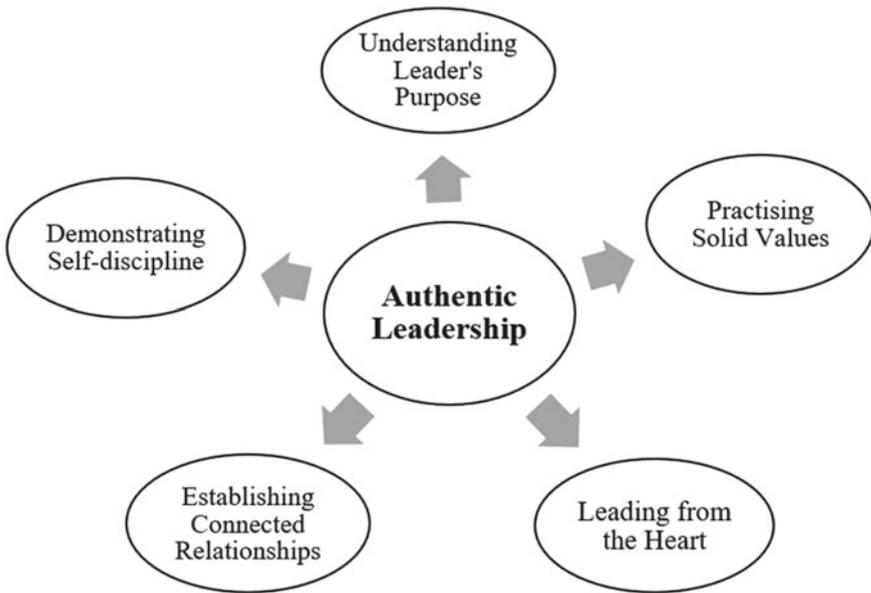


Fig. 4.1 George's (2003) model of authentic leadership

2003). In explaining his model, George (2003) listed five dimensions or qualities that should be practised by leaders. These are: understanding the leader's purpose, practising solid values, leading from the heart, establishing connected relationships and, finally, demonstrating self-discipline. Figure 4.1 depicts these five dimensions of the model of authentic leadership which need to be developed during leaders' leadership journeys in order to transform themselves into authentic leaders.

In the element of *understand their purpose for leading*, leaders must understand their passion to be a leader. Furthermore, as a leader, they must also try to ensure that the organisational environment fits their goals and purposes. This is related with the element of patience when leaders who are interested in what they practise have an intrinsic motivation and care about the tasks that they perform (Northouse 2016). This implies that leaders must be ready to serve their followers with an open mind, sincerity, and a passion for enabling others to develop. Second, the attribute of *practising solid values* emphasises leaders' capacity to define their values and characters which they initially developed through experience and consultation with others. Thus, leaders need to practise integrity such as telling the truth, sharing their values, and acting in accordance with these values.

Third, the attribute of *leading from the heart* signifies that leader must be able to win their followers' hearts and passions through openness and sharing thereby giving them a sense of belonging. In doing so, authentic leaders must be sensitive to the needs of others and be willing to help their followers whilst, at the same time, always thinking about how to reduce the load on their followers. Fourth, the *establishing connected relationships* attribute denotes the practice of engendering a

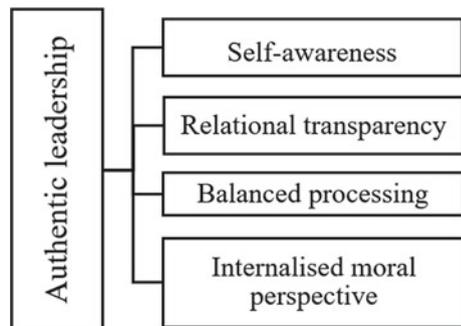
sense of belonging and winning the hearts of their followers by establishing shared positive relationships which will develop the trust element within the context of an organisation. Thus, leaders need to share their experiences and also listen to those of others. The last attribute is *demonstrating self-discipline*. Through self-discipline and in order to gain their followers’ respect, authentic leaders will demonstrate their values through their actions and act in line with the goals they set (Northouse 2016). Leading with purpose, understanding and values helps shape an individual’s leadership approach which later creates organisational effectiveness and acceptance as an authentic leader (George 2003).

In the context of school leadership, school principals remain as the school leaders that inspire teachers and students to excellence which improves their performance and later enhances a school’s academic achievements (Duignan 2012). As authentic leaders in schools, principals need to support and inspire their followers by advocating psychological factors such as motivation, trust, hope and resilience.

In this sense, Shamir and Eilam (2005) defined an authentic leader as: (a) an individual who demonstrates honesty and trustworthiness so as not to betray the trust and responsibilities that are given to him/her; (b) has no other interests other than those which benefit his/her organisation for which they will later be accountable; (c) truly capable of leading in the way in which he/she believes and (d) acts in accordance with what he/she has said.

In an effort to understand what constitutes authentic leadership, Walumbwa et al. (2008) provides the conceptual underpinnings for their recent authentic leadership model. First, it builds on social psychology theory which explains how individuals build reciprocation and establish positive relationships based on the element of trust (Farid et al. 2020). The second aspect within this model focuses on the central role of an internalised moral perspective and its development based on leaders’ values and perspectives (George 2003). Working from a developmental perspective, Walumbwa et al. (2008) proposed a model of authentic leadership based on a premise that authentic leadership can be developed over a lifetime. In this sense, they clarify the use of four components in describing authentic leadership: (a) self-awareness, (b) relational transparency, (c) balanced processing and (d) an internalised moral perspective as in Fig. 4.2.

**Fig. 4.2** Walumbwa et al.’s (2008) authentic leadership model



This model emphasises that self-awareness as a leader and a follower includes such values as identity, emotions, goals and motives (Northouse 2016). Moreover, this model also draws attention to the relationship between a follower's trust, engagement, and wellbeing (Walumbwa et al. 2008; Ashbihani 2013). From Walumbwa et al. (2008), the elements or constructs for authentic leadership are listed below:

- Self-awareness—with this, leaders will show how they perceive the world, and their perceptions give meaning which impacts on the way they understand things including their own strengths, weaknesses, and self-limitations. It also encompasses knowledge and belief in a leader's thoughts, feelings, motives, and values in which it is their duty to express to their followers. Thus, decision-making should be based on the leader's own values and the acceptance of responsibility for making mistakes (Walumbwa et al. 2008; Ashbihani 2013).
- Relational transparency—in making a positive relationship with their followers, leaders should be transparent, confident, and direct. Thus, they have to express themselves within the conditions of their environment (Lynch et al. 2022). In this element, leaders should have an open mind and express trust through information-sharing and expression of feelings.
- Balanced processing—authentic leaders are categorised as people capable of giving their opinions and defending them if the decisions have implications for themselves and their followers. In addition, it focuses on sincerity and earnestness in obtaining opinions and ideas (Müceldili et al. 2013; Lynch et al. 2022).
- Internalised moral perspective—authentic leaders are well-behaved individuals and should be able to demonstrate attitudes and behaviours congruent with their beliefs and values. In making decisions, high standards of ethical practice are favoured. Indirectly, leaders will be guided by their internal moral values and behaviours (Srivastava and Dhar 2019; Walumbwa et al. 2008).

Authentic leadership research in schools is limited and understudied (Lynch et al. 2022). This arose from a lack of systematic and meta-analytical reviews of authentic leadership research (Bush et al. 2018). Based on the findings of Lynch et al. (2022), it was asserted that principals are frequently practising authentic leadership after critical evaluation and examination of the issue within their decision-making processes. In addition, principals are seen to practise flexibility as well as open to discussions and opinions from teachers and stakeholders, considering options and evaluating the information before making any decision. Similarly, they were seen as leading with honesty and always made clear their preferences and moral values.

Based on previous perspective, it is stressed that authentic leadership practice is considered as a leadership style or behaviour that advocates positive psychology as well as a healthy organisational environment (Duignan 2014; Berkovich and Gueta 2022). Thus, a leader must be able to influence self-awareness, demonstrate balance in processing information and have an appreciation of moral values and transparency in relationships. This will later encourage a positive process of self-growth among his/her followers. As such, Yukl (2010) asserts that authentic leadership comes from a leader who is self-aware; who follows their beliefs, values and emotions; self-identity

and abilities. In addition, he/she is also open to any ideas and opinions whilst learning from mistakes and feedback.

## Moral Leadership

As for moral leadership, in explaining the definition of ‘moral’, Rhode (2006) wrote that the word ‘morality’ is derived from the Latin word *mores*—being defined as character, custom or habit. It is assumed that the words ‘ethics’ and ‘moral’ share the same definition or principles referring to prescriptive rules or principles of action (Arar and Saiti 2022). Therefore, moral leadership is concerned with a leader’s embedded actions and activities while leading their institutions while taking into consideration their personal code of ethics and different paradigms (Shapiro and Stefkovich 2016; Mooney Simmie and Sheehan 2022). In education, Brown and Treviño (2006) defined moral leadership as a double process involving personal behaviour and moral influence. Thus, it is essential to know the influence of values, beliefs, and ethics as elements within moral leadership that inform the practice of school leadership, especially in decision-making (Bush 2007; Mooney Simmie and Sheehan 2022). In this sense, moral leadership theory can be studied using the elements of authority and influence which were derived from the basic concept of practising something that is right or good (Leithwood et al. 1999) or linked with an ethical endeavour (Lowery 2020). As for others, the practice of morality is strongly related to judgements, decisions and actions practised by educational leaders (Lowery 2020; Jenlink 2014).

In the context of school leadership, Lowery (2020) asserts that it is quite difficult to separate morality from ethics because school leaders usually embrace a moral framework in making decisions which also involves ethical dimensions or paradigms. Likewise, Greenfield (1985) explained that moral leadership is a positive interaction between leaders and followers which refers to the leaders’ actions, and the congruency between actions and organisational values. In the same way, moral leadership has also been defined as a leadership process in which leaders are able to fulfil their accountabilities by sharing their followers’ aspirations, needs and values (Shapiro and Stefkovich 2016; Owens and Valesky 2011). In addition, Sergiovanni (1992) defined moral leadership as a process by which a school leader is trying to motivate, inspire and stimulate his/her teachers’ potential and finally establish a framework for virtuous school leadership.

The concept of moral leadership was initially explored almost 20 years ago (Greenfield 2004) and has attracted much interest among leadership researchers (Bedi et al. 2016). Hence, in schools, principals who play their role as a moral agency base their actions on two major approaches: (a) their attitudes in decision-making and how they process issues consistent with their professional ethics and (b) how they behave, act, and show interest based on their daily routines and schedules (Cherkowski et al. 2015).

In demonstrating ethical and moral practices, organisational leaders can be seen to be positively following the social values and norms that they advocate so that their behaviour strongly influences that of their followers by encouraging commitment, a sense of belonging and empowerment (Tuan 2018). According to Hanson (2006), it is quite difficult to identify the characteristics of global moral leaders. Thus, he suggested four possible characteristics which can later be used to support future investigations: (a) have a high commitment to establish values that transcend a single culture or nation; (b) emphasise key moral values that can be enacted; (c) be capable of articulating and promoting such values, even when he/she is sick; (d) use their communication and other skills in promoting these values effectively.

In his book, Sergiovanni (1992) believed that the moral element should be the basis for school leadership practice. Thus, in performing their duties, principals need to use morality as the significant basis for carrying out their leadership duties. In addition, moral leadership can also be conceptualised as leaders behaving in ways that share their personal and organizational values with those around them. Moreover, these ideas are derived from a coherent ethical system relevant to schools (Bafadal et al. 2021). To practise moral leadership, there are three major assumptions: (a) schools are treated as professional learning communities, (b) communities are defined by the essentials of shared values, beliefs, and commitments and (c) things and actions that are right and good are considered as important because people are truly motivated as much by their emotions and beliefs as by self-interest with collegiality being seen as a professional virtue. Thus, in practising moral leadership, school leaders can employ leadership strategies such as: (a) identify and make explicit the values and beliefs that define the school as a community; (b) translate them into informal norms which later govern behaviour; (c) promote collegiality as morally-driven interdependence; (d) rely on the ability of the community members to respond to duties and obligations; (e) rely on the community's informal norms to enhance professional and community values.

## Comparing Authentic and Moral Leadership

In this section, the characteristics of the two major leadership models—authentic leadership and moral leadership—are compared. In determining the similarities, the comparison will focus on the intersecting features and characteristics of the two models. The differences, characteristics and facets which are not similar are also examined. Examining the intersecting and non-overlapping elements of the two leadership models are extricate from the references of the previous literature by Brown and Treviño (2006), Avolio and Gardner (2005) and Walumbwa et al. (2008). The comparison between authentic leadership and moral leadership is presented in Table 4.1.

In general, both models highlight and emphasise the values and norms shared by leaders and followers, which indicates that these shared values and norms must be well accepted by the followers. Second, both models are highly concerned with

**Table 4.1** Similarities and differences between authentic leadership and moral leadership

Similarities	Differences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both models emphasise organisational leaders sharing norms and values with their followers</li> <li>• Both models are concerned with their followers (altruism)</li> <li>• Both models focus on internalised moral perspectives</li> <li>• Decisions are made based on ethical considerations, which benefits the organisation, followers, and leaders</li> <li>• Both emphasise the element of integrity</li> <li>• Leaders are role models of positive behaviours to their followers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moral leadership emphasises the importance of an organisational leader having high ethical and moral standards such as honesty, integrity, and openness</li> <li>• Authentic leadership focuses on how leaders should practise what seems best to them</li> <li>• Moral leadership is part of a leadership agenda by communicating leaders' values and modelling ethical/moral behaviours</li> <li>• The four elements of authentic leadership: self-awareness, relational transparency, internalised moral perspective, and balanced processing are not facets within the constructs of moral/ethical leadership</li> </ul>

the element of altruism. Third, both models stress the importance of practising the element of internalised morality (Lynch et al. 2022). Fourth, all decisions should be made based on moral perspectives, which later benefits all organisational members (Mooney Simmie and Sheehan 2022). Fifth, integrity is the foremost aspect of both models and, lastly, school leaders are positive role models for their followers (Hanson 2006).

In assessing differences, moral leadership strongly focuses on the importance of demonstrating high levels of morality such as honesty, integrity, and openness (Sergiovanni 1992) while authentic leadership focuses on how leaders should put into practice what seems best to them. Second, moral leadership is part of an agenda-based leader's values and models their ethical/moral behaviours (Mooney Simmie and Sheehan 2022) As for authentic leadership—self-awareness, relational transparency, internalised moral perspective and balanced processing—are not facets within the constructs of moral/ethical leadership (Walumbwa et al. 2008).

## Studies on Authentic Leadership

Some notable studies examining school leaders' authentic leadership practices have been published. This has happened because they have a similar effect to ethical leadership practices or behaviours (Lowery 2020). In fact, authentic leadership has also been employed as an antecedent for psychological variables such as job satisfaction, commitment, and school culture. In terms of popularity, authentic leadership models have received wide attention and study in various educational systems such as Turkey (Karadag and Oztekin-Bayir 2018), Ghana and New Zealand (Owusu-Bempah et al. 2014), and Malaysia (Saffardin and Mydin 2019).

In Turkey, Karadag and Oztekin-Bayir (2018) studied school principals' authentic leadership practices. Using the Walumbwa et al. (2008) model (self-awareness, transparency in relations, balanced processing, and internalised moral perspective), it was found that authentic leadership by school principals had a significant impact on school culture. Similarly, a quantitative study conducted by Owusu-Bempah et al. (2014) disclosed that principals' authentic leadership practices had a positive effect and strong influence on school culture according to teachers from Ghana and New Zealand schools.

In examining teachers' authentic leadership practice, Berkovich and Gueta (2022) disclosed that teachers are capable of practising authentic leadership with their students which leads to good and effective teaching based on teachers' authenticity and self-awareness. In addition, teachers' authentic leadership also emphasised that the elements of integrity, moral purpose and ethical conduct have positive influences on students which enable their human spirit to soar within a climate that satisfies their psychological needs. In Malaysia, Saffardin and Mydin (2019) examined authentic leadership practices among private pre-school education centre leaders. Based on the perspectives of 200 teachers, self-awareness was named as the most practised aspect of authentic leadership. Earlier, Ashbihani (2013) had conducted a study that linked principals' authentic leadership with teachers' commitment in a secondary school context. Based on perceptions from 156 teachers, it was revealed that secondary principals had frequently practised the element of self-awareness which significantly influenced the commitment of secondary teachers.

## Studies on Moral Leadership

The literature review suggests that there are few studies conducted on moral leadership especially within the local Malaysian context of education compared to studies cited from abroad. However, there are studies listed that explore the practice of moral leadership from an education leadership perspective.

In Irish primary education, Mooney Simmie and Sheehan (2022) asserted that primary principals had emphasised a servant-leadership style or moral leadership preferences which were commensurate with the ethos of their communitarian Catholic schools, and with no preference expressed for any business-like, scientific, or instrumental construct. As moral leaders, principals strongly emphasised a self-sacrificing, altruistic, and humble-servant leadership style. At the same time, principals were also trying their best to avoid conflict and emphasised a positive relationship with their teachers.

In Canada, Cherkowski et al. (2015) conducted a descriptive study on the roles of 17 principals as a moral agency in schools. The study was conducted based on an ethical responsibility framework which depicts the school principal's role as a moral agent. Findings showed that principals had significant roles as a moral agent to encourage others, especially the school staff, to work for the benefit of the students. Second, principals highlighted that they had faced the reality that only the school

principal could absorb the cost of a decision. Third, moral agents need to be vigilant about the ethical challenges and issues within their daily routines.

Likewise, Lowery (2020) explored moral leadership and literacy among principals in the Appalachian region of Southern Ohio based on their definitions and employed moral literacy in making school decisions related to ethical issues. Based on the findings, it was disclosed that principals defined ethical leadership as a way to bring them together with their followers and how principals understand moral literacy within the context of their own schools. In Malaysia, Ghani et al. (2015) compared the principals' moral leadership practices within the high-performing boarding schools with the MARA Junior Science Colleges (MRSM). Results had indicated a strong correlation or influence between a principal's moral leadership practices and teachers' job satisfaction based on evaluations provided by the selected MRSM teachers.

## **Barriers in Practicing Moral and Authentic Leadership**

Evidently, school leaders' practicing authentic and moral leadership in schools are not without any challenges and barriers. In putting this matter into perspective, Lynch et al. (2022) disclosed two major barriers:

- (a) Policy and procedures: Sometimes, conflicting personal values and morals among school leaders may result in misalignment. Thus, there needs to be strategic policies and procedures in place.
- (b) School culture: School leaders are expected to work based on the culture and values within their schools. However, there are cases where school leaders' social and cultural dynamics are not aligned with the schools' culture. This is common among newly appointed school leaders. Thus, Mercader et al. (2021) strongly suggested that school leaders must clearly communicate their values and morals to all staffs in facilitating a shared set of values and goals within the organisational culture.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed and discussed the definitions and perspectives of two major leadership models within the context of educational leadership. Thus, we put forth two suggestions: first, we suggest and call for more studies to examine both authentic and moral leadership models within the context of educational leadership in order to provide more evidence of the suitability of these models within local contexts. In addition, to ensure the effectiveness of both models of leadership, it would be better to have more in-depth studies that investigate the effects of both models on followers' (teachers) job satisfaction, commitment, and trust.

Second, Avolio and Gardner's (2005) suggestion that the authentic leadership model should be examined in-depth using moderating effects, such as an organisation's culture and climate on followers' performance should be pursued. They also suggested that future research would be needed to assess leaders' positive psychological traits such as their resilience and optimism about the performance of their followers. To conclude, it is believed that further studies and research are needed in order to provide in-depth explanations of the effects of moral and authentic leadership practices on teachers' psychological needs which lead to their growth and development.

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