



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

## Human Resource Management Review

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/hrmr](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/hrmr)

## Using theory on authentic leadership to build a strong human resource management system

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## ARTICLE INFO

## Keywords:

Authenticity

Authentic leadership

Human resource management

System strength, alignment, and fit

## ABSTRACT

Prior work has questioned whether human resource management (HRM) lives up to the organizational benefits it espouses. The intentions underlying human resource (HR) practices often differ from how they are implemented by line managers or how they are ultimately perceived by followers, thus undermining the strength of the HR system in influencing organizational outcomes and with them the overall reputation of HRM. We argue that line managers, specifically those who display authentic leadership behaviors, can strengthen an HR system (i.e., aligning intended, actual, and perceived HR policies and practices) by implementing HR practices in a way that they are perceived as distinct, consistent, and reflecting consensus. Authentic leadership theory departs from more traditional, top-down fit perspectives in strategic HRM to consider the dynamic way in which individuals within an organizational context co-create felt and perceived authenticity in interaction with others. In other words, by providing a more dynamic approach to creating alignment in HRM, authentic leadership helps HRM attain more authenticity and credibility in the organization.

Despite extensive efforts over decades, strategic human resource management (SHRM) has received a “failing grade” (e.g., Delbridge & Keenoy, 2010; Kaufman, 2012) with limited acceptance of its role as a strategic partner. Specifically, only 41.1% of companies report that the human resource management function was a “full partner” in strategic decision making in 2001 and this percentage had not changed since 1995 (Lawler & Mohrman, 2003, p. 24). In particular, the HR department has been criticized for not being effective in the implementation of HR practices (e.g., de Gama, McKenna, & Peticca-Harris, 2012; Pfeffer & Sutton, 2013; Piening, Baluch, & Ridder, 2014; Woodrow & Guest, 2014). Despite significant strides and good intentions to have more impact, it has been proposed that “HR’s aspirations do not yet fully align with its ability to deliver” (Boudreau & Ziskin, 2011, p. 255). Until recently there has been a failure of researchers to distinguish between HR practices intended by the organization and those actually implemented (Khilji & Wang, 2006) which are more important to how employees respond to HR policy and practices in terms of satisfaction (Khilji & Wang, 2006) and outcomes (Kehoe & Wright, 2013). This paper thus aligns with prior work that has aimed to shed light on how SHRM may increase the status and credibility of HRM in organizations.

To implement practices effectively, prior theory has suggested that HRM needs to introduce a “strong” SHRM system that provides a clear line of sight from strategy at the top of the organization to behavior throughout the organization; this can be done by ensuring that HR practices are aligned to provide clear messages to employees on what the organization needs from them (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Further, line managers are of critical importance to ensuring intended practices are enacted and perceived by employees

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(Nishii, Khattab, Shemla, and Paluch, *in press*; Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008; Piening et al., 2014; Sikora, Ferris, & Van Iddekinge, 2015). Whilst the status and capability of HR practitioners is important to effective implementation – including their willingness and ability to partner with line managers (Sanders & Frenkel, 2011; Watson, Maxwell, and Farquharson, 2007) – the capability of line managers in terms of their ability and willingness to implement HR practices is a key mediator (Sanders & Frenkel, 2011; Watson, Maxwell, & Farquharson, 2007), and the organization context a moderator (i.e., organizational culture, climate, and politics supportive of HRM; Sikora & Ferris, 2014) in this process. In particular, the interpersonal skills (Cunningham & Hyman, 2006; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Sikora et al., 2015) and the leadership behavior of line managers (i.e., supportive leadership; Sanders & Frenkel, 2011) are important elements of their ability to implement HR practices. In this paper we argue that authentic leadership will create more alignment between how HR practices are intended to function by the HR function, how they are enacted by leaders, and ultimately how they are perceived by followers (Nishii & Wright, 2007). We believe theory on authentic leadership can contribute to SHRM theory in two key ways.

First, authentic leaders have the skill and motivation to work with HR practitioners, other line managers, and subordinates to implement HR practices, not just because they have interpersonal skills, but because they are driven to maintain integrity between intended, espoused, and implemented practices and to ensure that employees perceive integrity in the implementation of HR practices. Authentic leadership is linked to leader integrity (Leroy, Palanski, & Simons, 2012) and follower identification, trust, and the quality of relationship with the leader (Gardner, Coglisier, Davis, & Dickens, 2011). Consequently, it is likely that line managers who are authentic leaders have the personal capabilities to implement intended HR practices effectively. Whereas past literature has acknowledged the important role of line managers as enactors or implementers of HR practices (Den Hartog & Boon, 2013; Gilbert, De Winne, & Sels, 2015; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007) there has been little theorising on how line managers can be most effective in doing so.

Second, line managers operate in a complex system which requires them to juggle the competing demands of various organizational stakeholders (Sanders & Frenkel, 2011; Watson et al., 2007). Such competing pressures may hinder line managers' ability to enact an HR policy the way it was intended or to ensure employees' perceptions are in line with those intentions. Theory and research on authentic leadership sheds more light on these challenges because authentic leadership provides a dynamic view on how the authenticity of the leader and his or her behaviour (including the implementation of certain HR practices) is constructed in interaction with the environment. Further, the HRM implementation process is frequently viewed as a static, top down, and one-way process from the HR department's design of practices to implementation by line managers. However, it is likely that this process is more dynamic than previously theorised, requiring iterative interactions between multiple stakeholders, including the HR department, line managers, and employees. We believe that line managers who are authentic leaders are equipped to operate effectively in such a context and can thus prove useful in solving the problem of a lack of alignment of HR practices (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). This makes a contribution to closing the gap between intended and actual practices but also to how line managers may influence employee's perceptions of HR practices which is an area that has received little attention to date (Kehoe & Wright, 2013).

In contrast to a more static view on person-environment fit that characterizes traditional views of strategic alignment (i.e., where leaders and employees are required to fit a mold imposed by the HR function; Schneider, 1987), authentic leadership suggests that fit is more dynamic and is co-created between leaders and followers (Leroy, Anseel, Gardner, & Sels, 2015), as well as between leaders and HR business partners (Nishii et al., *in press*). Thus we support the notion that the HR process can be viewed as a multi-stage process involving multiple actors (Bondarouk, Trullen, & Valverde, 2016). Authentic leadership allows each party to maintain its unique perspective, while also seeking communality to come to a strong personally endorsed and shared identity (Brewer, 1991; Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005), thus creating more alignment between intended, enacted, and perceived HR practices. Furthermore, we propose that misalignment is reduced because authentic leadership helps to create more consensus in, and distinctiveness and consistency of, the HR system (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). These relationships are summarized in Fig. 1, our proposed theoretical model. Thus we propose that authentic leaders can maintain integrity even in (increasingly common) dynamic contexts that induce complexity that threaten “fit” between intended and enacted practices. We believe that theory on how HRM integrity can be maintained in dynamic contexts is underdeveloped.

In specifying the relationships in Fig. 1, this paper contributes to prior research by clarifying how authentic leadership helps to foster the perceived legitimacy, credibility and authenticity of HR practices in organizations. Line managers can play an important leadership role in restoring faith and credibility back into HRM by fostering a strong, integrated HR system. Interestingly, this theory suggests that the route to a strong, aligned HR system does not reflect the more traditional focus where employees are “forced to fit,” but instead one where fit is a dynamic concept that is constructed and continuously renegotiated in the organization. In allowing room for individual agency, while accounting for the constraints of organizational structure (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Deci & Ryan, 2000), authentic leadership reveals how a strong HR climate can be created.

## 1. The role of line managers in HR practice implementation

Line managers too often play a significant role in the misalignment between intended, actual, and perceived HRM because it is through line managers that HR policy is operationalized (Holt Larsen & Brewster, 2003; Nishii et al., *in press*; Sikora & Ferris, 2014). Managers play an important sensemaking role in translating the HR department's espoused messages for employees (Nishii et al., *in press*). It is the HR practices that line managers enact (Sikora et al., 2015) and employees subsequently experience (Piening et al., 2014; Purcell et al., 2003) and perceive (Nishii et al., 2008), rather than the practices that HR practitioners intend to implement, that influence behavior and outcomes. Prior empirical work highlights a strong relationship between line managers' and employees' perceptions of HR practices (rather than the actual practices) and subsequent performance (Woodrow & Guest, 2014) consistent with

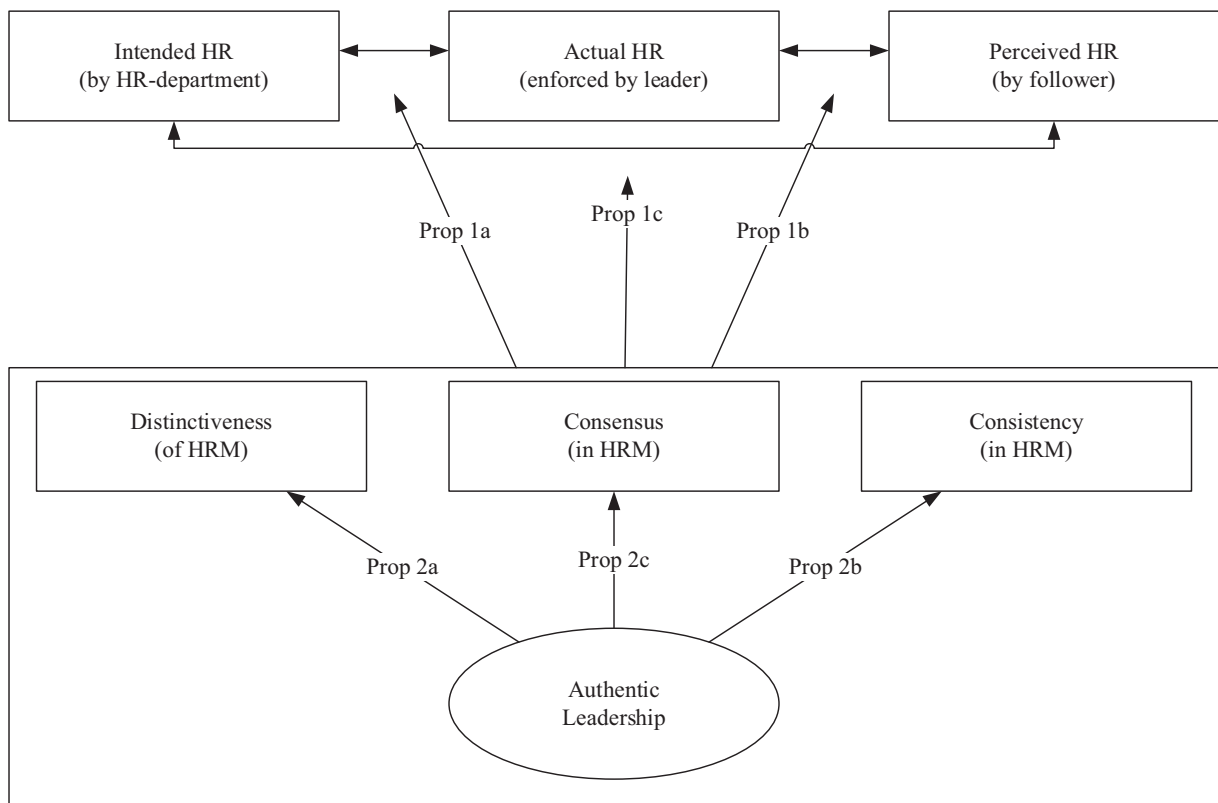


Fig. 1. Theoretical model of the influence of authentic leadership on the alignment of intended, actual, and perceived HR practices.

the notion that line managers are preferred points of credible information for employees (Larkin & Larkin, 1996).

Whilst HR policy may reflect best practices (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006), the quality of implementation may be poor if line managers fail to see the value of a practice (or HRM in general) and this may be further exacerbated if the HR practice appears to be at odds with managers' competing operational agendas or they are not resourced to implement the practice effectively. In other words, line managers must have the opportunity to influence employee outcomes (Sikora et al., 2015) and may not handle HR issues effectively based on a lack of ability or motivation (Holt Larsen & Brewster, 2003). Further, managers may struggle to meet the differential needs of employees through a "one size fits all" practice or struggle to implement HR practices in a dynamic context. Thus, line managers are challenged to align HR practices with individual needs and (changing) contextual demands. Next, we elaborate on the various ways in which leaders may create misalignment.

First, line managers may not be motivated to implement HR practices because such practices may challenge the management prerogative (Briner & Rousseau, 2011) and impede short-term results (Nasar, Solow, Dertouzos, & Lester, 1989) through costly (time consuming) implementation (Pfeffer & Veiga, 1999). In addition, management may be biased towards seeking confirmation for what they want to do (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006), thus making line managers the weak link in the implementation chain (Harris, 2001). This may be one reason that intended HR practices may not become actual practices. Worse still, line managers may espouse HR practices in public whilst undermining them in private; in other cases, they may use rhetoric to disguise the poor implementation of a practice, thus influencing employees' acceptance of a practice or the attributions they make about the intentions of a practice (Argyris & Schon, 1990). As such, employees' perceptions of an HR practice may not align with either the intended or espoused HR practices, or the actual or (poorly) enacted practices.

As one example, whilst HR practitioners may embed diversity objectives into selection criteria or communicate the policy in management meetings, line managers often make final decisions on new hires. Without status or credibility, HR may not have the power to influence line managers to operationalise this policy and line managers may select candidates that they like (i.e., similarity-liking bias; Brewer, 1979) or who will deliver short-term outcomes, but who are not diverse. Further, line managers may not be trusted by their employees. If this is the case, employees may not pay attention to or trust management's intentions in implementing the diversity policy. This will be the case if the manager has engaged in behavior that is inconsistent with the policy – for example, previously sponsored all male events (i.e., golf days or hosting clients in all male venues), made derogatory comments about minorities, or only maintained close relationships with white male colleagues.

Second, individual employees may perceive implemented practices differently based on contextual and individual characteristics (Kuvaas, 2008; Nishii & Wright, 2007). For example, one employee may have family commitments and value flexible work practices, whilst others may not want or need work life balance because of their life/career stage or circumstances and resent any difficulties

that arise from not having their co-worker available in real time. Hence, such differences in contextual or individual circumstances may undermine the implementation of HR practices. Indeed, empirical evidence suggests that manager and peer views influence the adoption of flexible work practices (Almer, Cohen, & Single, 2003). Line managers thus face the challenge of implementing an HR practice in a way that meets the needs of different employees, while managing the perceptions of other employees who may see this differential implementation negatively. Line managers who are unable to accommodate individual needs in the group context may negatively impact employees' perceptions of the value of an HR practice, creating misalignment between employee perceptions and practice implementation.

Third, HR practices may be out of step in dynamic contexts which require agility at different levels in the organization. For example, the work environment may grow increasingly dynamic when: (i) targeted jobs or levels need to be removed in a division; (ii) flexible work hours are adjusted in a single work group because of changing customer demands; or (iii) an employee needs to work evenings because he/she acquires an international client. In such cases, agile responses to internal and external stakeholders will negatively impact the consistent implementation of HR practices. If a line manager is unable to accommodate changing contexts that impact individual employees, misalignment may occur between intended, actual, and perceived HR practices. Line managers thus need to not only align an HR practice with their own values and opinions (challenge 1), and the diverse opinions of their employees (challenge 2), but also with the changing demands of the environment (challenge 3) – all of which influence whether an HR practice is deemed to be valid or appropriate.

Based on the arguments above, individual needs and dynamic contexts may create misalignments at different levels within the organization (i.e., individual, group, divisional). For example, the organization's diversity policy may be derailed because some departments may have minorities who do not wish to progress up the organizational hierarchy and resent being pressured to do so (e.g., by being asked to apply for positions). Others may perceive current initiatives as not addressing their specific needs because HR practices are not horizontally aligned (e.g., an employee may need flexible work practices to apply for a promotion). Thus, there may be low consistency in the way a practice is implemented which may result in employee dissatisfaction. This may produce low employee consensus regarding an HR policy and practice because of the way it is implemented and/or experienced by individual employees. Thus, line managers who cannot integrate HR practices across organization levels (i.e., by communicating with peer managers), may fail to align intended, actual, and perceived HR practices. Next, we discuss how authentic leadership addresses these challenges.

## 2. Authentic leadership and the dynamic construction of alignment

Authenticity has been defined as the *felt* alignment between internal states (e.g., thoughts, emotions) and outward displays (e.g., words, behaviors) (Harter, 2002). A simplistic understanding of authenticity may lead to a popular notion that leaders who are “true to themselves” or follow their “true north” (George & Sims, 2007) are more effective. However, these views on authenticity may fail to understand that authenticity is attributed by others and that control over the expression of the authentic self is required (Goffee & Jones, 2005). For example, authentic individuals may assert personal views that are damaging (i.e., be an “authentic jerk”; Ladkin & Spiller, 2013) or that undermine organizational values (see recent press on Google's termination of an employee who expressed his authentic views on diversity; ABC, 2017). The conclusion that self-referential authenticity produces more effective leaders is inconsistent with decades of research indicating that self-monitoring and impression management lead to more relational success (Bedeian & Day, 2004).

Further, authenticity is often conceptualised as a static rather than dynamic construct. For example, Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, and Joseph's (2008) conception and measure of authenticity identifies acceptance of external influence as being contrary to the authentic personality. However, such notions of authenticity may prevent adaption and personal development. Ibarra (2015, p. 54) argues that ‘a too-rigid definition of authenticity can get in the way of effective leadership’ and limit the capacity of leaders to evolve and transform. There may be multiple selves an actor can “stay true to” as one grows and develops, indicating that staying “true to oneself” is a complex phenomenon (Goffee & Jones, 2005; Ibarra, 2015). In conclusion, static and self-referential notions of authenticity may not benefit others who experience the negative effects of the uncensored and unadaptable self or the leader who fails to adjust and evolve.

An alternative view of authenticity that addresses these concerns was first introduced by Kernis (2003) in his concept of authentic functioning which most recently has been described as an open and non-defensive way of interacting with oneself and others (Leroy et al., 2015). This construct was later adapted by authentic leadership scholars (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Four subcomponents were identified as part of a higher-order structure of authentic functioning in general, and authentic leadership in particular. Individuals who function more authentically are more aware of themselves and their impact on others (self-awareness); they openly share information and express their genuine selves to others (relational transparency); they objectively analyze relevant data while minimizing bias arising from ego-defensiveness before making decisions (balanced processing); and they are guided by internal moral values and align their behaviour with these values (internalized moral perspective) (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008).

Together these components offer a dynamic view of authenticity<sup>1</sup> – of individuals who are willing to express their “true self” in an

<sup>1</sup> With the increasing popularity of the concept of authenticity in organization science, the number of conceptualizations has also increased (e.g., Cooper, Scandura, & Schriesheim, 2005; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Authenticity has been interpreted as aligning internal states with outward behavior (Harter, 2002); opposing external demands (Wood et al., 2008); and walking one's talk (Simons, 2002). In this study, we interpret authenticity with the more active and dynamic conceptualization of

open way through their words (relational transparency) and deeds (internalized moral perspective), but who are also willing to adapt to relational demands by staying open to input (balanced processing) and seeking feedback (self-awareness) (Kernis, 2003; Kernis & Goldman, 2006). This results in a dynamic process where an individual's authenticity is co-constructed in relationships and through interactions with one's external environment. Consistent with the core tenets of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), authentic individuals do not oppose demands from the external environment, but instead seek to integrate external demands into an already existing self. This conceptualization of authenticity is thus more dynamic than more insular notions focused on a constant "true self" that opposes external demands (e.g., Wood et al., 2008). Hence, recent critiques of authenticity conceptions that fail to acknowledge that the "true self" is constantly changing and developing with constancy derived from responsiveness in relationship to others (Algera & Lips-Wiersma, 2012; Ibarra, 2015; Sparrowe, 2005) do not apply to this dynamic perspective on authenticity. We believe this theory on authenticity when applied to leaders is most valuable to our purpose of enacting intended HR practices even in dynamic contexts.

Authentic leadership describes the relationship of a leader with others in the work environment and a mode of influence in a form of leadership. A key feature of authentic leadership is that it challenges traditional views of leadership as a top-down process of influence where followers align with and enact the vision of the leader (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al., 2005). Instead, authentic leadership banks on notions of empowerment and, more specifically, suggests that the influence of leaders may occur by making room for the authenticity of other parties (e.g., followers, HR business partners, higher management). Allowing for these alternative "truths" is important because doing so aids authentic leaders in co-constructing a vision of what is viewed as real in the organization (and thus a sense of shared identity). This dynamic process of influence thus challenges traditional notions of strategic alignment where followers and leaders are forced to fit with, and implement, the strategic goals of the HR department or top management.<sup>2</sup>

Although externally imposed strategic goals will always be present, the authentic leader – as described above – will seek to internalize those goals (Deci & Ryan, 2000) through a dynamic process. He or she may challenge a certain HR practice (e.g., forced distribution in terms of bonus allocation) in an open and transparent way, but equally shows him/herself to be open to external input (self-awareness) and personal feedback (balanced processing) on his or her expressed views. Through such processes, the leader comes to a nuanced understanding that guides behavior (internalized moral perspective). The net result is neither a blind acceptance nor rejection of the HR practice, but a careful process of consideration and ultimately internalization of the practice to the extent that the leader remains comfortable. Indeed, the process may also result in the authentic leader rejecting a policy because he or she does not see it as being compatible with other demands. However, such a decision will not be taken lightly (i.e., it will be the result of a careful process of calibration); to the contrary, when the implementation of an unwanted practice is ultimately communicated, it will not be done in an outright defensive or (passive) aggressive manner.

In Table 1 we apply the theory of authentic leadership to the leader's role in implementing HR policies and practices. In the first column, we list the intended HR practice; in the second column, we show how less authentic leaders may implement the practice; and in the third column, we indicate how more authentic leaders are likely to implement the practice, thus indicating how intended practices may or may not transfer to actual practices and resulting employee perceptions of a practice. For the sake of parsimony, we do not include practices in this table that are discussed in the text. For instance, a study by Cable, Gino, and Staats (2013) is relevant to our discussion of the relationship between authentic leadership and dynamic fit in this section and we present this here rather than in Table 1. Cable et al. (2013) found that organizational socialization (that ultimately aims to achieve more person-organization fit for newcomers) was more likely to improve fit when employees were able to voice their own authentic values rather than having organization values imposed on them. Interestingly, this is a counter intuitive notion in that employees are more likely to internalize new values through a dynamic and interactive process whereby they express their own values (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kernis & Goldman, 2006). In a similar way, authentic leaders seek and draw out followers' authentic values in an attempt to achieve more alignment of perspectives, including a potential adjustment of their own.

In sum, authentic leadership theory tackles some of the core and traditional road blocks in the implementation of intended HR practices. In the next sections, we will further use the key tenets of authentic leadership to elaborate on how authentic leadership helps to create HR alignment in the organization. Based on our theoretical model displayed in Fig. 1, we first argue and describe how authentic leadership helps to reduce discrepancies between intended, actual, and perceived HRM. Next, we specify how the perceptions of distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus mediate those effects.

### 3. The role of authentic leadership in creating strategic HR alignment

In this section, we specify how authentic leadership, as displayed by line managers, can help to reduce discrepancies between intended, actual, and perceived HRM. First, we show how authentic leadership can reduce discrepancies between how HR practices

(footnote continued)

authentic functioning and in doing so respond to many critiques of a static and insular notion of authenticity (e.g., Ibarra, 2015; Sparrowe, 2005). A keyword here is "functioning", suggesting that individual authenticity is not static, but that it dynamically evolves over time (Ibarra, 2015). Contrary to popular notions of authenticity and inaccurate notions of the relationship between authenticity and effectiveness, authentic functioning draws on relational authenticity where the "self" expands to fit changing contextual needs.

<sup>2</sup> We acknowledge that leadership extends beyond the occupation of formal organizational positions (i.e., line managers) through collective and shared forms of leadership (Hannah, Avolio, Chan, & Walumbwa, 2012). However, in this paper we focus on the authentic leadership of line managers whilst accepting that these arguments may well apply to any employee who engages in authentic functioning and therefore is in a position to positively influence others.



**Table 1**  
Different approaches to implementing intended HR practices by less and more authentic leaders.

Intended HR practice	Actual Practice – less authentic leaders	Actual practice – more authentic leaders
Recruitment	The leader sticks rigidly to the job description to focus on exact fit with short-term job requirements. She/he may fail to ask candidates about their needs or values and/or dismisses them if they are not relevant to the job fit they seek to achieve. The leader's demeanour and lack of sharing means the job candidate feels insecure and fails to share his or her needs with the leader. When the candidate's needs are voiced the leader's response prohibits further sharing. Thus, a fit is not created between the organization and the candidate and candidates with authentic functioning do not accept job offers. Existing employees viewing the leader's inauthenticity will see a discrepancy between intended and actual HR practices.	The leader conducts a two-way conversation with the job candidate and is genuinely interested in what the candidate has to say. The leader transparently shares his or her views and is open to candidate perspectives and needs (balanced processing). When a candidate's needs are voiced the leader considers how current circumstances may accommodate and adapt for a win/win solution. Where adaption is not possible, the leader transparently says so (ethical/moral). As a result candidates with authentic functioning are more likely to accept job offers because fit is perceived by the job candidate and a message is sent that the organization has an authentic culture that will accommodate their needs. The leader will be self-aware of their potential biases and their internalized moral perspective will drive them to ensure they engage in an ethical process.
Selection	The leader selects candidates based on their short-term skill needs and ignores HR policy directives (i.e., diversity or organizational fit). When candidates have a need for flexibility the leader dismisses the candidate as unsuitable. If they do consider values, they select based on the compatibility of the candidate's values with their own values and are unlikely to accommodate differences.	The leader is self-aware of his/her own prejudices and biases and because of their internalized moral perspective, endeavours to make an unbiased decision. The leader assesses the candidate's fit based on HR criteria, carefully considering diversity directives and legislative requirements. Further, the leader considers how they can achieve complimentary fit between the candidate's needs and multi-level needs of the organization. If the short-term needs of the leader's work group clash with organization needs, the leader will communicate their concerns with HR and endeavour to find a win-win collaborative solution. They will treat successful and unsuccessful job applicants with respect (e.g., ensuring the job applicant is personally contacted and satisfactorily debriefed on the reasons they didn't get the role.)
Training & Development	The leader will focus on short term operational needs and fail to integrate the employee's needs into decision making. She/he will not consult with the employee to determine training or training transfer. She/he will unfairly and secretly allocate training budgets based on subjective criteria, thus violating the employee's sense of distributive, procedural and interpersonal justice (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001).	The leader transparently allocates and communicates training budgets by balancing organizational, operational, and individual needs, adapting training decisions as required by the changing internal and external context. When training budgets are allocated differentially to employees the leader will transparently explain this and why the money has been spent in this way and in doing so will listen to employees' concerns.
Performance management	The leader may not implement the process with integrity and will perhaps have a short meeting with an employee where they give them a rating based on their opinion without justification. If the leader can avoid a performance management meeting, they will do so or they will tell their employees it is "an HR thing" that they have to do but don't have to take seriously. The leader is unaware of their cognitive biases and makes no attempt to shield employees from their own subjectivity. They give employees a rating without listening to their perspective or seeking objective data. When in a normalization round table, they will sacrifice employees for their own personal gain.	The leader aims to deliver an objective assessment of the candidate. She/he is self-aware of their biases and counters these biases by seeking the opinion of the employee and others who have worked with the employee, diligently collecting data to form an unbiased opinion. They will transparently communicate with the employee and defend their employee to upper management and HR in any normalization process, rather than playing politics. In this way, the authentic leader will accommodate the diverse (and possibly changing) needs of employees whilst maintaining the integrity of HR policy and practices.
Promotion	The leader will promote employees based on subjective criteria ignoring HR's competency criteria and diversity policies. The leader will not promote employees they need (e.g., an engineer who has skills that are in short supply). The leader will not groom employees for their own role because they wish to be indispensable. Further, they will not know or consider employees' preferences when developing them for future roles in the organization.	The leader will develop employees based on the employee's individual preferences, balanced against the needs of the organization and ensure that there are enough successors for their position. They will find a way to balance employees' work/life balance needs in promoting them. They will also ensure that employees are not overlooked for suitable positions and fight for employees where necessary. They will follow HR's diversity policies.
Outplacement	The leader will seek to transfer or dismiss employees who do not agree with them or who have different values. The leader will fail to communicate with other employees the reasons why one of their team members was removed, elevating concerns that idiosyncratic decisions have been made and that managers may also remove them at their discretion rather than based on due process.	The leader will diligently counsel employees who are not an optimum fit with their work group and only when fit cannot be accommodated will the leader transparently discuss an alternative with the employee with HR present. Other employees will be discretely and fairly counselled on why their co-worker has been removed using clear criteria set out in the HR policy.
Flexible work practices	The leader may implement the process inconsistently with different employees, without transparently communicating the reasons for such differentiation. In response, employees may react badly to the implementation of the system. At best, employees will be unmotivated by the HR practice and at worst employees will actively resist and grow cynical and dissatisfied	The leader will openly share the HR policy with employees and embed it in other HR practices, such as recruitment and performance reviews. Further the leader will accommodate employees who adopt flexible work practices in their daily activities so these employees are not disadvantaged (i.e., they may wait to make important decisions until the employee is

(continued on next page)

Table 1 (continued)

Intended HR practice	Actual Practice – less authentic leaders	Actual practice – more authentic leaders
	with the system and the organization. In addition, such implementation may motivate employees to “game” the system or promote rigidity which is at odds with the organization's intent.	present). They will facilitate group level discussions on how flexible work practices may be accommodated and agree norms that will be adopted so that flexible work practices may be embedded without a negative impact on co-workers or clients.

are intended by the HR department and how the same practices are enacted by the leader. Of central importance to understanding this relationship is the knowledge that authentic leaders are known to be autonomously motivated in their activities, engaging mostly in behaviors that they would willingly self-endorse (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gardner et al., 2005). This personal endorsement by the leader is important to make sure that the leader implements the practice in the way that it was intended. Coming to such personal self-endorsement by the leader of an externally imposed HR practice requires authentic functioning on behalf of the leader, instigating a process of internalization.

Authentic leaders are unlikely to blindly accept or reject an external HR policy, but through their qualities they are likely to engage in a constructive two-way dialogue which facilitates their internalization of intended HR practices. In particular, the authentic leaders' self-awareness and balanced processing makes them more open to alternative views and willing to adjust their perspective. Second, their relational transparency and internalized moral perspective will ensure that they express their own views. Thus it is likely that authentic leaders will actively seek feedback from the HR department on proposed policies and practices when their intent is unclear or when they do not align with their values. For example, when a new and controversial talent program is announced in a management meeting (Pfeffer, 2001), authentic leaders will seek to clarify what talent means to the organization and how it will be implemented through HR practices such as recruitment, training and development, and promotion. Such clarity will allow them to identify inconsistencies between their values and the policy or practice. For example, if the HR department espouses a policy on talent management without intending to implement the policy through actual HR practices, authentic leaders will experience internal tension. Further, authentic leaders will consider whether the new talent management policy can be enacted with the strategies that are being proposed by the HR department based on their considerable knowledge of employees' probable reactions to the policy and its implementation.

When authentic leaders disagree with a policy, they will vocalize this with HR practitioners and their peer managers to close the gap between intended and actual practices prior to implementation. For example, they will respectfully say why they think the talent management policy may not be optimised in practice or how the implementation may lack consistency across practices or may clash with different departmental contexts. Further, they will suggest constructive ways to move forward with a plan that will address these issues. Throughout their interactions with HR and peer managers, authentic line managers will ensure the policy and associated implementation of HR practices is consistent with their core values and internalized moral perspective.

The result of this extensive process of personal elaboration in interaction with relevant others is that gradually the leader will come to self-endorse and internalize the intended HR practice (rather than just rejecting it outright or blindly accepting it). Even when the authentic leader doesn't fully agree with the policy, the elaboration process aids the leader in recognizing its potential importance to the larger organization. This self-endorsement is important because the practice now becomes part of the leader's value-set (i.e., his or her internalized moral perspective). Such internalization, in turn, is important because it ensures that the leader enacts the policy across time and across contexts. Consider for instance an HR policy that suggests that leaders focus on employee talents and strengths rather than employee deficits (van Woerkom, Bakker, & Nishii, 2016; Veestraeten, 2016). If the leader blindly accepts this policy or rejects it, the enactment of this policy will likely be superficial. For instance, the leader may highlight the follower's strengths in a specific training workshop, but when performance evaluations and bonus allocations are due, the inauthentic leader may revert back to a deficit-thinking approach with regards to the follower. In contrast, the authentic leader will consistently apply this policy because it has now become a part of her internal values and mindset through authentic dialogue with HR practitioners. This creates a strong situation which influences employee responsiveness to the HR practice. The line manager's authentic functioning in this regard means he/she is perceived by employees as “owning” the HR practice which personalizes the relationship between the employee and the organization, increasing alignment and subsequent effectiveness of HR practices (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Thus we propose:

**Prop 1a.** *Authentic leadership promotes alignment between intended and actual HR practices.*

In addition to aligning intended and actual or enacted HR practices, we believe authentic leaders can play an important role in making sure enacted practices are perceived by followers (e.g., employees, other line managers, and HR practitioners) as they are intended. Because of individual differences between followers, they may not always agree with the leaders' actions nor will they be influenced in the same way (Kuvaas, 2008; Meindl, 1990; Shamir, 2007). Prior work has suggested (Gardner et al., 2005) and empirically confirmed (Leroy et al., 2015) that authentic leaders allow room for these unique, differing perspectives, while creating a new and shared reality that most (if not all) followers can agree with. They do so by engaging in an open, mutually respectful dialogue with followers (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2016) in a way that makes HR policies relevant and accessible to employees (Khilji & Wang, 2006; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). More specifically, by attempting to increase self-awareness (e.g., through feedback seeking) and balanced processing of self-relevant information (e.g., by accepting feedback), authentic leaders invite alternative views from followers while also advocating their own (e.g., relational transparency). Through this two-way dialogue, followers may

gradually understand the leaders' perspective and take one step closer towards acceptance of an HR practice (even if they do not endorse it). Further through dialogue authentic leaders may come to understand others and be able to adjust practices to suit a work group or specific individual by placing more emphasis on HR practices (or aspects of a practice) that are most relevant to them. Second, based on social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976), we propose that when leaders listen and are responsive to their followers they are more likely to reciprocate by accepting new practices and alternative perspectives. Third, because of the inherent attractiveness of authentic leaders (derived from their self-awareness, balanced processing, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective), followers are more likely to identify with their ideas and vision, willingly endorsing the perspective of the leader (Gardner et al., 2005; Gardner et al., 2011). This personal identification with the authentic leaders and their ideas helps close the gap between intended, actual, and perceived HR practices. It is important to note that authentic leaders are likely to have a strong motive towards self-verification (Cable & Kay, 2012; Swann, 1987) – they want others (i.e., followers) to see them as they see themselves. So, when authentic leaders self-endorse an HR practice, they will be concerned when followers hold a different view of their intentions and behavior and will actively attempt to rectify the situation. Follower perceptions of HR and leader intentions or underlying motivation are important because they are the biggest driver of employee acceptance of HR practices (McGovern, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, Stiles, & Truss, 1997; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Authentic leaders are both motivated (through self-verification striving) and capable (through balanced processing of self-relevant information and self-awareness) to align their actions with how others see them. They will do this by engaging in a two-way dialogue through which the leader will either explain the basis for his or her behavior, or adjust it, to make sure it is uniformly perceived (Leroy et al., 2012; Nishii et al., in press; Simons, 2002). The leader may also come to appreciate the follower's perspective and move towards it in the implementation of the HR policy or practice. In all of these scenarios the views of the leader and follower become aligned. For example, if followers attend a training program and disagree with the content espoused in that program, they will be prepared to voice this to their authentic leader and even express how the leader's behavior in other HR practices (i.e., the performance review), and in general, is not aligned with that espoused in the training. The followers voice their views because of the authentic functioning of the leader, the climate of authentic functioning that has developed as a result (Gill & Caza, 2015; Wong, Laschinger, & Cummings, 2010), and the authentic followership they have developed (Leroy et al., 2015). More specifically, the leader will listen to their views and express her own and in doing so the perceptions of both leader and employee will become aligned. If appropriate, the leader will come to understand that her implementation of these practices needs to change and will be willing to change whilst maintaining dialogue with her followers, thus maintaining alignment between actual and perceived HR through multi-directional dialogue.

**Prop 1b.** *Authentic leadership promotes alignment between actual HR and perceived HR practices.*

Finally, we also suggest that authentic leadership can reduce discrepancies between intended and perceived HR. This proposition is partially an extension of the logical build-up over the previous two propositions. If leaders enact an HR practice the way it was intended (prop 1a) and monitor the sensemaking process of followers to make sure it is also perceived that way (prop 1b), then it follows that intended HR practices will also translate into aligned perceptions of HR practices. Nevertheless, there may be instances where the leader is not the principal enactor of the HR policy but is – as much as the follower – a recipient of the HR practice. For instance, both leader and follower may be subject to the same retirement or health insurance plan in the organization and the leader has little or no control over that practice. While leaders and followers may share in their complaint over the practice, authentic leaders are unlikely to directly oppose the organization. Instead they are more likely to explain why the practice is in place or how they have taken action to initiate changes to the practice by communicating with senior managers and the HR department.

Because the leader listens to her followers, she can advise the HR department on how to present their health insurance plan, or how to communicate it, perhaps making the health insurance plan more “user-friendly” (Khilji & Wang, 2006; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Also because of the leader's transparency regarding HR practices and her partnership with the HR department, her followers may come to trust the HR department and HR practices which may better align intended and follower perceived HR practices. This may translate into followers' increased interaction with the HR department because it is seen as accessible and responsive. The effective implementation of intended HR practices is the biggest driver of employee satisfaction with HRM (Khilji & Wang, 2006) and satisfaction with HRM influences the success of HR practices. In this way the HR department and line managers develop a symbiotic relationship where HR practices need effective line manager activity and line managers need HR practices to be effective (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Such a relationship influences employees' perceptions of the practice and their attributions towards the line manager, the organization, the HR department, and the HR practice. In this way complaints will be transformed into understanding and employees will no longer believe the organization is untrustworthy, thus aligning intended and perceived HR practices.

Authentic leaders are not just authentic to their own opinions and personality, they also try to be authentic to their role as a leader (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). This is a key difference between the authenticity of the leader as a person (Wood et al., 2008) and authentic leadership as a mode of influence (Gardner et al., 2005). As good agents to the larger organization, authentic leaders are likely to seek to understand the concerns of the follower as well as the reasons why the organization is implementing this practice – thus attempting to bridge differences between the two parties. Through components like self-awareness and balanced processing, authentic leaders are likely to avoid making quick judgements on the practice based on personal opinions; instead they seek to understand the different perspectives (including formulating their own) to come to a nuanced understanding of the importance and relevance of the practice to the larger organization. Note that while this process may also result in leaders pro-actively seeking a change in the practice, the leaders' reactions will not be impulsive and defensive. We thus propose:

**Prop 1c.** *Authentic leadership promotes the alignment between intended and perceived HR practices.*



#### 4. The mediating role of consistency, consensus, and distinctiveness

Whereas the previous section looks at how authentic leadership helps to “bridge” various perceptions of HRM (intended, actual, and perceived), in this section we elaborate on those arguments by highlighting the key and distinguishing features of authentic leadership that help build a strong and integrated HR system. A useful perspective here is the theoretical framework of [Bowen and Ostroff \(2004\)](#) who build on [Kelly's \(1967\)](#) covariation theory of attributions to suggest that a strong HR system can be recognized by three overarching characteristics reflecting the extent to which it is perceived as having distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus, respectively. From the perspective of employees, an HR practice has *distinctiveness* when it stands out in one way or another and as a result captures their attention and interest. Second, employees perceive *consistency* when an HR practice is consistently espoused and enacted. Third, employees perceive *consensus* when all see the HR practice in the same way. When an HR system is high in these characteristics it enhances clarity of interpretation which allows similar cognitive maps to develop amongst employees and creates an influence situation that causes employees to understand and yield to messages regarding appropriate behavior.

These three characteristics help elucidate why authentic leadership of the line manager can help create strong situations ([Bowen & Ostroff, 2004](#)) and thus alignment of intended, actual and perceived HR practices. In particular, they address the typical problems that leaders encounter when implementing HR practices that were discussed earlier in this article. For example, consider the organization's performance review practice that requires employees to establish specific goals each year. This practice may not be consistently applied because some departments may have administrative roles that do not change from year to year or have a mix of roles that make this practice relevant to some employees but irrelevant to others. The resulting differential implementation across managers and employees is likely to reduce the distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus of the practice across the organization, weakening the message that the organization sends to employees. Specifically, practices may lack distinctiveness because they are not implemented diligently and they may lack consistency and consensus because HR practitioners and line managers have different views of the practice and the ways in which it should manifest in day to day decisions. Thus, line managers may play a particularly important role if they can maintain a dynamic balance between intended and actual practices when the former are no longer a fit with emerging conditions.

We believe that these three characteristics (distinctiveness, consensus, and consistency) reflect key features of authentic leadership and thus serve as mediators between authentic leadership and a well-aligned HR system. Whilst we develop our propositions regarding distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus independently in the arguments that follow, we acknowledge that they are likely to have independent and synergistic effects. In particular, when leaders achieve consensus regarding a practice they will implement it consistently and it will become distinctive in the eyes of employees, thus all three independently and together foster employee consensus about the practice.

We elaborate on each of these mediators in the next paragraphs, starting with distinctiveness. First, authentic leaders are known for staying “true to self”; that is, they are unique and distinct from others. For example, authentic individuals are known to be passionate and intrinsically motivated in their activities and have been found to express more creative ideas that are an extension of their unique self ([Amabile, 1988](#); [Amabile & Pratt, 2016](#); [Averill, 1999](#)). Furthermore, their strong drive towards self-verification ([Swann, 1987](#)) ensures that others see this innovative self through their efforts to convey their unique perspectives and make sure that they are understandable to others. They test their unique views within the larger social environment (through explication, clarification, and adjustment), such that their perspective gains legitimacy and relevance within the broader environment.

The preceding discussion suggests that the HR practices that authentic leaders implement are likely to be highly visible, attract attention, and arouse interest. This is important as literature in marketing suggests that perceived authenticity and distinctiveness (i.e., whether products/ideas/individuals are seen as genuine and stand out) are important features that foster intrigue and attraction ([Jones, Anand, & Alvarez, 2005](#)).

Further, because authentic leaders are open to input from their followers (balanced processing), they understand what is relevant to followers and are motivated to ensure HR practices are communicated and implemented in a way that is relevant. As relevance is one of the sub-features of distinctiveness ([Bowen & Ostroff, 2004](#)) the authentic leader will promote HR practice distinctiveness. For example, when an authentic leader implements flexible work programs employees will pay attention to that practice and therefore will be more likely to accept the practice and change their behavior to accommodate implementation. We thus propose:

**Prop 2a.** *Authentic leadership promotes alignment between perceived, actual, and intended HR practices by promoting their distinctiveness.*

Second, we suggest that authentic leadership will also produce higher levels of perceived consistency regarding the HR system. As discussed earlier, if authentic leaders espouse an HR policy, they have an internal drive to consistently enact that policy in all HR practices they implement in an attempt to reduce cognitive dissonance ([Festinger, 1962](#); [Hinojosa, Gardner, Walker, Coglisier, & Gullifor, 2017](#)) which internally motivates authentic leaders to align their attitudes and behavior. To be more exact, the internalized moral perspective of authentic leaders encourages them to consistently align their behavior with an internal (moral) compass ([George, Sims, McLean, & Mayer, 2007](#)) such that others perceive them to walk their talk ([Leroy et al., 2012](#)). While this consistency may not be absolute ([Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997](#)), authentic leaders will strive to maintain coherence in their various identities and associated outward messages in everything they do. Such coherence may be maintained even with the differential implementation of HR practices, because authentic leaders are credible communicators and driven by their internalized moral perspective to ensure there is equity in implementation and that others perceive this equity. If there are reasons for differential implementation of a practice, authentic leaders will transparently explain the reasons for the individualized implementation of practices (e.g., flexible work programs) based on employee needs, thus helping maintain perceptions of consistency and dispelling notions of idiosyncratic implementation of practices. The authentic leaders' balanced processing means that followers know that the

leaders' suggestions or decisions have their best interests at heart and were the result of their feedback combined with the leaders' intensive reflection. Whilst absolute consistency may not be possible (Kinnie, Hutchinson, Purcell, Rayton, & Swart, 2005) authentic leaders promote symmetrical two-way dialogue (Men & Stacks, 2014) where the concerns and opinions of employees are heard and taken into account (i.e., employee voice; Burris, 2012). This also means that leaders may be particularly challenged in their authenticity as they need to reconcile sometimes seemingly opposing demands from higher management, colleagues, and followers. Their challenge is a never-ending quest to align their own selves with those of others. Because of this they are able to balance fit and flexibility (Wright & Snell, 1998) in the implementation of HR practices which is likely to elicit perceived consistency, or stability and coherence, in the HR system.

We further argue that this process of striving for internal alignment between the leaders' values and behaviors, will result in perceptions of alignment in the overall HR system. As primary enactor of HR policies, the consistency and coherence of the authentic leaders' values and behaviors will ultimately result in consistent messages across domains. For instance, if work-life balance is a guiding value, the authentic leader will use this as a guiding principle when designing jobs and during performance management, rather than cherry-picking when to promote this practice (Paustian-Underdahl & Halbesleben, 2014).

**Prop 2b.** *Authentic leadership promotes the alignment between perceived, actual, and intended HR practices by fostering consistency.*

Third, it is likely that employees perceive consensus when HR practitioners and line managers see the HR practice in the same way (i.e., they achieve consensus). As discussed earlier, authentic leaders are likely to build consensus with HR practitioners and other managers on HR policy and practices by elaborating their own views in mutually respectful conversations and interactions with others. When they do not understand or agree, they will effectively communicate this and seek understanding and collaborative solutions. Authentic leaders are most likely to do this when they feel that intended practices cannot be translated into actual practices, or when they feel employees will not perceive the practice in the way that it is intended. This process develops shared perceptions of the HR policy and practices with HR practitioners and other managers.

Such consensus is possible because the relational transparency dimension lies at the core of authentic leadership (Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008) allowing the leader to establish strong and meaningful connections with others, facilitating trust in what the leader communicates. This relational capability enables the authentic leader to serve as a bridge between various departments and with higher management who determine HR strategy with HR practitioners. This may occur when the practice is first implemented and continuously through the life of the HR practice, as dynamism in the internal and external context requires adaption. Although leaders are not the only figures who can span boundaries (Harvey, Peterson, & Anand, 2014), their structural position in the organization allows them to make more potential bridges than others. Thus the leader can foster and maintain continuous consensus between stakeholders on an HR policy or practice. In addition, this relational capability means the leader is transparent and careful in her communication, therefore increasing the probability of a good reception from peer managers and employees to her messages. This is confirmed by Men and Stacks (2014) who demonstrate the positive effects of authentic leadership's symmetrical and transparent two-way dialogue on organizational communication. Also, because authentic leadership is contagious (Leroy et al., 2012) employees will become more self-aware, request feedback, and ask questions, which creates opportunities for the authentic leader to clarify HR policy and practices and ensure consensus. Thus, we propose:

**Prop 2c.** *Authentic leadership promotes alignment between perceived, actual, and intended HR practices by fostering consensus.*

## 5. Limitations

In this article we have endeavoured to present a more nuanced and adaptable version of authenticity where the self is shaped in continuous interaction with the environment. Nevertheless, we do not want to suggest that achieving this is without difficulty. In particular, authentic leaders need to be able to balance the self with multiple forces within the organization. Individuals and organizations have multiple and fluid identities and organizations have many stakeholders with disparate values. Such a plethora of information may be difficult to process without the benefit of hindsight. It is also possible that in satisfying one stakeholder the leader may alienate another. Such political realities may present difficulties in developing authentic leadership in all line managers. Some managers may be unwilling or unable to develop authentic leadership or may engage in pseudo development where they believe they are an authentic leader. Such differential authentic leadership in organizations may undermine the processes we have discussed in this article.

More specifically, self-awareness may be a moving target for an individual as the self may be in a constant state of flux – one's true north (George & Sims, 2007) may not be a fixed position. Transparency can be over or underdone and leaders may lose credibility and effectiveness if they disclose everything they think and feel. Transparency may also undermine an organization when there is a values clash if leaders are transparent about their contrary (and evolving) views. Balanced processing may be an ideal rather than a reality as leaders are not always positioned to see the big picture or information may be weighted by the access the leaders have to stakeholders. Further, stakeholders may not be transparent or may seek to manipulate through withholding or distorting information. Finally, an internalized moral perspective may be normative and whilst the leader may see him/herself as walking their talk others may see inconsistency – perceptions of integrity are most likely in the eye of the beholder rather than the leader. Consequently, being an effective authentic leader requires extensive skill and judgement beyond that which may initially be envisioned – knowing when and how to communicate and adapt, requires extensive processing which may not be easily acquired. Further, such development must occur in the real-time organizational arena where mistakes may not be tolerated.

Thus person-environment (PE fit; Kristof, 1996) may be an important boundary condition to create alignment between line

managers with authentic leadership and HRM. If a leader holds views that are not aligned with the organization, it may be difficult for her to provide a clear line of sight for employees thus presenting the leader and the organization with a dilemma. Whilst one solution may be for organizations to hire authentic leaders whose values are aligned with the organizations, this may prevent necessary adaption. Future research is required to resolve these dilemmas and it may be that qualitative research in the first instance may be able to investigate how effective authentic leaders manage these organizational constraints and the conditions under which authentic leadership can thrive.

## 6. Discussion

In this article we have proposed that authentic leaders may play a significant role in the alignment between intended, actual, and perceived HR practices. They do this through intrapersonal qualities that provide an internal drive to implement HR practices consistently, and through interpersonal qualities that enable them to build bridges with HR practitioners, senior managers, and their peer managers. This in turn fosters consensus leading to consistent HR practice implementation across the organization, and distinctive practices which send clear messages to employees on what the organization values and rewards. Further, consensus between employees on these messages builds shared perceptions and behavior, which delivers collective and coordinated effort. Such a “strong” HR system enables the enactment of organizational goals across levels to align employee behavior at both individual and group levels.

The propositions we advanced make multiple contributions to the SHRM literature. First, we align several recent strands of research in SHRM by linking recent work on the role of line managers in the SHRM system (e.g., [Holt Larsen & Brewster, 2003](#); [Nishii et al., in press](#); [Sikora & Ferris, 2014](#)) with: a) [Nishii and Wright's \(2007\)](#) work on intended, actual, and perceived HRM; and b) [Bowen and Ostroff's \(2004\)](#) work on strong SHRM systems that incorporate distinctiveness, consistency, consensus. In this way, we make a significant theoretical contribution to SHRM theory development by weaving together theoretical and empirical contributions from the SHRM literature.

While the importance of line managers to HRM implementation has been identified (e.g., [Holt Larsen & Brewster, 2003](#); [Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007](#); [Sikora et al., 2015](#); [Sikora & Ferris, 2014](#)), the mechanisms whereby line managers and HR practitioners may work together has received limited consideration. Despite the importance of line managers to the effective implementation of HR policy and practices, the research focus to date has been on how the HR department aligns practices with business strategy, responds to the needs of line managers, and effectively implements these practices ([Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005](#); [Ulrich, Brockbank, Johnson, & Younger, 2007](#); [Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich, 2013](#)). There has been little attention on the partnership role between the HR department and line managers and the capacity of line managers to implement HR practices. By further articulating the role of line managers in the implementation of HR practices, we respond to the call to consider non-strategic determinants of HR practices, such as the political context within which HR decisions and behavior occur ([Sikora & Ferris, 2014](#)).

Second, we show how authentic leaders may create fit amidst complexity in ways that SHRM theory has not fully addressed in its top-down orientation that assumes fit is both desirable and possible with line management cooperation. We suggest that such fit is difficult without line managers who are authentic leaders and who serve as vertical and horizontal conduits for HR policy and practices, particularly in complex and dynamic contexts. So far, HRM has just begun to explore the need for an alternative HRM that accounts for a more dynamic view of human beings in organizations. While there have been some attempts to address this concern in specific HR practices such as “job crafting” which enables job incumbents to determine how, when, and with whom employees interact in the execution of their jobs ([Berg, Wrzesniewski, & Dutton, 2010](#); [Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001](#)), a whole system approach to this issue has been lacking. Thus, we join other management disciplines in paying attention to the need to balance centralized and decentralized activities to better explore and exploit environmental changes (e.g., strategy; [Burgelman & Grove, 2007](#) and operations research; [Sigelkow & Levinthal, 2003](#)).

As mentioned earlier, our conception of authenticity is dynamic, which contrasts with more static perspectives. Because authentic leaders are capable of integrating self and context, they are able and willing to synthesize different perspectives into the implementation of HR practices and build bridges with HR and peer line managers to maintain consistency despite differential implementation. Further, this alignment may be maintained even when the organization operates in a dynamic context because authentic leaders are able to recalibrate the way they and others implement HR practices. Paradoxically, this dynamism produces greater consistency and consensus in the HR system. By adopting this more dynamic perspective, we respond to criticisms of static notions of authenticity that do not consider the need to present one's authenticity effectively to others or build one's authenticity over time by accepting external influence. Finally, we make a multi-level contribution by showing how leaders may influence an HR system at organizational, group, and individual levels and how these different levels may be connected in the implementation of an HR system. In this way, the HR department can come to reflect greater authenticity by aligning its espoused goals and values throughout the organization. This process will also develop perceived authenticity of the HR system as line managers and employees perceive this alignment. Thus, we make a contribution to the authentic leadership field by building theory on authenticity. Further, we examine authentic leadership at the organization level of analysis that has received limited attention to date ([Cho & Dansereau, 2010](#); [Yammarino, Dionne, Schriesheim, & Dansereau, 2008](#)). We show how authentic leadership at the individual and group levels influences organizational level outcomes. Much of the attention in this field has focussed on the impact that authentic leaders have on followers at dyadic and group levels rather than on organization systems ([Gardner et al., 2011](#)), and thus this paper extends understanding of the impact of authentic leadership.

There are future research implications of our work. First, we have advanced propositions which should be tested in future empirical research. Second, recent research has indicated some conceptual overlap between authentic and transformational

leadership theory (Banks, McCauley, Gardner, & Guler, 2016).<sup>3</sup> Consequently, it is possible that other forms of positive leadership may also have a positive impact on the implementation of HR practices and this may be investigated in future theorising and research. Third, there may be boundary conditions that will enhance or limit the influence of authentic leadership on HR practices, such as the country context (i.e., individualism versus collectivism; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004) and organizational climate (i.e., benevolent versus instrumental ethical work climates; Victor & Cullen, 1988). Given that authentic leadership increases individual fit with context, and HR practices in particular, a diary study (Bryman & Bell, 2014) may be of value in future research. Finally, a social networks approach (Scott & Carrington, 2011) may be of value in examining the authentic leader's bridging role in SHRM. There also may be opportunities to explore authentic leadership by HR managers and practitioners which may enhance their capacity to implement intended HR policy and practice through their interactions with senior leaders and line managers. This could build on the work of Avolio and Walumbwa (2006) and Ulrich et al. (2007).

There are several methods that could be used to test our propositions. Qualitative research would be of value to investigate the way in which authentic leaders interact with their employees, peers, senior managers, and HR practitioners to implement intended HR practices. This approach would be most valuable to examine what these leaders do when faced with conundrums, such as non-authentic peer line managers or extreme dynamism that requires vertical alignment from the bottom to the top of the organization. Interviews with actors from each stakeholder group would provide holistic insight into how all the parties interact to deliver HR outcomes. Quantitative research could also test our propositions in a more linear way. Authentic leadership measures are available (Neider & Schriesheim, 2011; Walumbwa et al., 2008) and a number of mediators (see Gardner et al., 2011 for a review) have been empirically tested providing a foundation for research in this area. Further, diary studies could be valuable to examine the development of authentic functioning in a dynamic way.

There are some practical implications of our theorising that can help to close the gap between HR's aspirations and its ability to deliver (Boudreau & Ziskin, 2011). HR practitioners can moderate the relationship between intended and actual practices by selecting, training, and incentivising managers to implement intended HR practices. The competencies of authentic leaders in relationship to specific HR practices have been illustrated throughout the arguments in this manuscript (cfr. Table 1) and these can be embedded in all HR practices. Related to this, the roll out of specific HR practices may be an opportunity to introduce, develop, and reinforce authentic leadership.

Regarding recruitment, selection, and induction, HR practitioners can attract (new) line managers high in authentic leadership skills/capabilities. Research finds that candidates high in moral perspective will be attracted to those jobs that reflect moral concerns (Reynolds, Leavitt, & DeCelles, 2010). HR practitioners may embed "cues" that signal the presence of moral perspective (and, more generally, authentic leadership) in, for example, vacancy texts, or during job interviews. Following this, HR practitioners can select and hire line managers high in authentic leadership by explicitly looking for displays/reflections of authentic leadership in the candidate's answers during the interview or include a questionnaire measuring authentic leadership (Walumbwa et al., 2008) or authentic functioning (Kernis & Goldman, 2006) in the selection process to assess a candidate's authentic leadership. New managers may also be inducted into the organization with authentic leadership norms in mind.

Regarding development, HR practitioners can develop the authentic leadership of existing line managers. Research on how to develop authentic leaders has recently progressed, focussing on developing leader self-awareness to identify the true self and self-regulation to align behavior with this true self (Leroy, Anseel, Dimitrova, & Sels, 2013). This will promote the four dimensions of authentic functioning in leaders through mindful awareness of one's self and one's behavior and its impact on others. Such development may involve 360 degree feedback and coaching to help managers develop a "reflective mind-set" which has important implications for the management of self (McDonald & Tang, 2014). This may require a transition from class room training that oversimplifies the demands placed on modern managers to learning from ongoing work experience that requires management to recognize paradox and value pluralism through the integration of multiple perspectives (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2003).

Authentic leadership of line managers can be further reinforced through the HR practices of performance management and promotion. When the focus of the performance management practice is on the *process* of attaining results, rather than on the *outcome* (i.e., the results themselves), line managers displaying authentic leadership behaviors will likely be rewarded by a positive evaluation, or possibly by being chosen for a promotion. The latter not only affirms the behavior of the line manager him/herself, but also signals the importance of authentic leadership to the rest of the organization. Finally, letting go of those line managers that – despite training and coaching efforts – fail to show authentic leadership behaviors, also signals the importance of authentic leadership to the rest of the organization, besides its direct effect.

In conclusion, our article has examined the important issue of embedding HR practices in organization behavior to deliver outcomes for all stakeholders by: (i) increasing HR department satisfaction through building their status, credibility, and meaningful integration in the organization; (ii) increasing employee satisfaction through the integration of self within the organization context; and (iii) increasing shareholder satisfaction through the achievement of organization goals. We propose that authentic functioning in line managers is a key means whereby these outcomes may be delivered.

<sup>3</sup> Banks et al. (2016) conducted a meta-analytic review of authentic and transformational leadership. They found that there was a relationship between these two popular constructs of leadership and redundancy between the constructs. Further, whilst transformational leadership had a higher relative weight for predicting follower satisfaction, follower satisfaction with leadership, task performance, and leadership effectiveness, authentic leadership was dominant when predicting group performance and organizational citizenship. It may also be probable that authentic leadership is differentiated from transformational leadership with regards to ethical constructs.



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