

**Authentic Leadership as a determinant of employee silence and voice on moral issues – effects and mechanisms (Dissertation by Dirk Frömmer, Abstract)**

Societies and economies are repeatedly witnesses of chilling examples of corporate and political malfeasance and unethical behavior and irresponsible decision-making in organizations leading to high costs and severe consequences. Therefore, practical questions arise about ways to prevent and work against unethical behavior and how to foster moral behavior and culture in organizations. The behavior of leaders and their influence on the behavior of their employees have been identified as crucial factors in this context. Thus, scholarly attention to different forms of moral leadership that conceptually include a moral component has risen significantly during the last two decades.

Within this realm, this dissertation's focus on the concept of authentic leadership which proponents consider the "root construct" underlying all positive leadership forms. It is associated with positive attributes such as honesty, integrity, openness and high standards of moral conduct. A core aspect of authentic leadership is the emphasis on a leader's self-awareness and self-concordance. As a moral form of leadership, authentic leadership is expected to foster employee moral behavior. However, research so far has predominantly investigated relationships to a range of outcomes of leadership and organizational effectiveness. What is lacking, with some notable exceptions, is a clear focus on the moral domain and more explicit outcomes of moral behavior. To narrow this gap this dissertation investigates the link between authentic leadership and employee moral behavior by using employee moral voice and intentional silence on moral issues as more explicit outcomes of moral behavior. I believe that this is a valuable approach as overcoming silence and speaking up on moral issues are decisive first steps to enable change and promote moral behavior in organizations. Furthermore, intentional silence is considered a widespread phenomenon in organizations, which underlines the practical relevance investigating it. Moreover, previous research proposed a range of potential underlying motives for silence whereas quiescent (driven by fear) and acquiescent silence (driven by resignation) can be considered the most substantiated types.

Thus, this dissertation focuses on these two major forms of silence.

First and foremost, this dissertation looks at the relationship between authentic leadership, representing moral leadership, and employee moral voice and silence on moral issues, representing moral employee behavior. As the relationship can be seen as complex, the dissertation aspires to gain a more comprehensive picture and differentiated perspectives. Therefore, this dissertation consists of three empirical studies that jointly aim to shed light on the link between authentic leadership and employee moral voice and silence by investigating mediating mechanisms on the individual level, the potential role of leadership inconsistency and possible mediating processes on the group level of analysis.

All studies were conceptualized and conducted as part of the FIDES research project (Führung in Organisationen als Determinante des Schweigens von Mitarbeitern zu moralischen Sachverhalten, funded by the German Research Foundation).

The first study postulates and examines a serial mediation model. Authentic leadership theory suggests that modeling self-regulatory processes is a crucial means of influence for authentic leaders. Thus, the study proposes that authentic leadership exerts influence on employee moral voice and silence through a serial mediating process via follower self-leadership and moral efficacy. We tested our model in a cross-sectional study with data from diverse organizations ( $n = 295$ ). Results indicated that authentic leadership positively relates to moral voice and negatively to silence on moral issues. Pertaining to quiescent silence and moral voice, results revealed a serial mediation effect via self-leadership and moral efficacy. Furthermore, we found unique indirect effects for these mediators. We found no mediation effects for the outcome of acquiescent silence. Possible explanations for this unexpected result are discussed.

The first study focused on processes of self-regulation and moral cognition. Study 2 goes beyond that approach by also investigating relational influences and influences of leadership inconsistency reflecting the role of moral consistency. Theoretical research emphasizes the key role of relational aspects as means of influence of authentic leaders as they pursue the enhancement of followers' personal growth. Therefore, the second study looks at both - it integrates moral efficacy,

a mechanism of self-regulatory moral cognition, and leader member exchange, a relational mechanism, as potential mediators. In addition, study 2 puts emphasis on moral consistency, another crucial component of authentic leadership. The basic rationale behind this is that an authentic leader may not always show positive behaviors, but sometimes also negative behaviors. Theoretical work conceptualizes this phenomenon as leadership inconsistency. This marks one of the first studies on authentic leadership that incorporates the possibility of leadership inconsistency. To this end, study 2 integrates abusive supervision as a potential moderator for the (mediated) relationship between authentic leadership and employee moral voice and silence.

Therefore, study 2 postulates and examines a moderated mediation model comprising abusive supervision as a moderator and moral efficacy and leader member exchange as mediators. We tested our model in a cross-sectional study in healthcare and social-service organizations (n = 505). Results, as in study 1, indicate that authentic leadership fosters moral voice and reduces (quiescent and acquiescent) silence on moral issues. These relationships were mediated by employees' moral efficacy and leader member exchange. Study 2 also revealed evidence indicating leadership inconsistency. Specifically, higher levels of abusive supervision seem to lower the strength of the linkage between authentic leadership and silence on moral issues. This was not found for the outcome of moral voice. Furthermore, our study revealed effects of moderated mediation.

Study 3 goes beyond the previous two studies by pursuing a multilevel approach. It further widens the perspective on relational mechanisms that function as potential mediating mechanisms by not only looking at the leader-follower-relationship but additionally at the role of colleagues and communication within a team. Therefore, study 3 examines leader member exchange and psychological safety as potential mediating processes linking authentic leadership to employee quiescent and acquiescent moral silence on moral issues. Using survey data from 357 employees, nested in 55 work groups, we tested a multilevel model of parallel mediation. Results revealed negative within and between effects of authentic leadership on quiescent and acquiescent employee moral silence- Further, a mediating role of both leader member exchange and psychological safety was found at the individual level of analysis. Differentiating effects were found regarding the group-

level of analysis. Team level leader member exchange mediated the relationship with acquiescent silence and team psychological safety functioned as a mediating mechanism regarding quiescent silence.

In the general discussion, the study findings are discussed considering the guiding research questions, limitations and directions for future research. Possible explanations for contradictory and unexpected results are provided. Furthermore, the general discussion will comment on the ongoing debate regarding critical contributions on authentic leadership regarding construct redundancy, measurement quality and theoretical clarity.

In sum, the findings of this dissertation extend the literature on authentic leadership by clearly focusing on the moral domain. The studies provide evidence for the fundamental proposition that authentic leadership positively influences moral employee behavior by focusing specifically on employee moral voice and silence on moral issues. Furthermore, it provides cross-sectional evidence for the mediating roles of self-regulatory processes of moral cognition and relational mechanisms on the individual and group level. Importantly, it also gives first insights into the crucial role of leadership inconsistency pertaining to authentic leadership.

From a practical perspective, this dissertation's findings lend support to the notion that developing authentic leadership in organizations can be a useful strategy to overcome silence and bolster voice on moral issues to build up a constructive feedback culture and a positive moral climate in organizations. Moreover, it offers additional evidence for the usefulness of the DIAF questionnaire (Deutsches Inventar Authentischer Führung), a recently developed German version of the Authentic Leadership Inventory by Neider and Schriesheim (2011).