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Authentic leadership, career self-efficacy and career success: a cross-sectional study

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the effects of authentic leadership on employees' objective (hierarchical status) and subjective (career satisfaction) career success. In addition, this paper attempts to examine the mediating role of career self-efficacy in these relationships.

Design/methodology/approach – The sample for this cross-sectional study comprised of 162 Pakistani employees drawn from a leading food and beverage company. Structural equation modelling and the bootstrapping procedure were used to test the research hypotheses.

Findings – Results showed that career self-efficacy fully mediated the relationship between authentic leadership and hierarchical status, while it partially mediated the effects of authentic leadership on career satisfaction.

Practical implications – The findings of this study indicate that authentic leadership behaviours can have a positive impact on employees' career success. Thus, in order to ensure that employees accomplish their career goals and realise their full potential, it is vital that organisations devise strategies, which are geared towards promoting authentic leadership.

Originality/value – This paper provides a first examination of the relationship between authentic leadership and two indicators of career success: hierarchical status and career satisfaction. In addition, it identifies one possible pathway in the form of career self-efficacy through which authentic leadership relates to employees' career success.

Keywords Careers, Leadership, Organizational behaviour

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The recent wave of high profile corporate scandals has generated a significant amount of interest in positive leadership emphasising ethical and moral leader behaviour (Hoch *et al.*, 2018). One such type of leadership, which has attracted the attention of both academics and practitioners, is authentic leadership (Dinh *et al.*, 2014). Authentic leaders are seen as people who are hopeful, optimistic, resilient and transparent (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). Such leaders "act in accordance with deep personal values and convictions, to build credibility and win the respect and trust of followers" (Avolio *et al.*, 2004, p. 806) and possess a strong desire to serve others through their leadership (George, 2003).

Prior research has revealed that authentic leaders can positively influence the attitudes and behaviours of their followers by interacting with them in an open and transparent manner (Hoch *et al.*, 2018) and by demonstrating integrity and fairness in their decision making (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). Numerous studies have shown that authentic leadership is positively related to important follower outcomes such as work engagement (e.g. Wong *et al.*, 2010), organisational commitment (e.g. Walumbwa *et al.*, 2008), creativity (e.g. Rego *et al.*, 2014), organisational citizenship behaviour (e.g. Banks *et al.*, 2016), health and well-being (e.g. Laschinger *et al.*, 2012), job performance (e.g. Clapp-Smith *et al.*, 2009) and satisfaction with the supervisor (e.g. Peus *et al.*, 2012).

As noted above, previous research has linked authentic leadership to several valued work-related outcomes. However, no study to date has empirically investigated the effects of this leadership style on employees' career success. This is somewhat surprising because past studies have shown that authentic leadership behaviours such as developing employees (Gardner *et al.*, 2005), providing support and encouragement (Avolio and Gardner, 2005) and enhancing employees' sense of self-determination (Ilies *et al.*, 2005) can

play a key role in facilitating employees to attain their career goals (Vincent-Höper *et al.*, 2012; Kraimer *et al.*, 2015).

The present study, therefore, contributes to the authentic leadership literature by developing and testing an integrated model that connects authentic leadership to employees' career outcomes. This study has both theoretical and practical significance. From a theoretical view point, the present research is important because it integrates the elements of authentic leadership and career literatures for the first time and as a consequence provides new insights into these significant areas. Furthermore, this study is also useful from a practical perspective because it identifies a new avenue in the form of authentic leadership through which organisations can help employees to grow and realise their full potential.

To further unravel the authentic leadership–career success relationship, this study also endeavoured to identify the underlying process through which authentic leaders might influence the career success of their subordinates. Specifically, this paper proposes that career self-efficacy will act as a mediator in the relationship between authentic leadership and career success. Previous research has shown that authentic leaders' emphasis on empowering, developing and guiding their followers has the potential to enhance followers' self-efficacy (Gardner *et al.*, 2005). In addition, it has been found that when followers feel efficacious they are more likely to accomplish their career goals (Valcour and Ladge, 2008; Higgins *et al.*, 2008). In light of this evidence, it is reasonable to assume that career self-efficacy will play a critical role in linking authentic leadership to employees' career outcomes.

Literature review and hypotheses development

The concept of authentic leadership

Authentic leadership is considered a "root construct" because it incorporates all other forms of positive leadership models such as transformational leadership, charismatic leadership, ethical leadership and servant leadership (Avolio *et al.*, 2004; Avolio and Gardner, 2005). Specifically, authentic leadership refers to "a pattern of leader behaviour that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development" (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2008, p. 94). Leaders, who engage in balanced processing, objectively analyse both positive and negative information before making a decision (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2010). Relational transparency refers to being open with others, sharing thoughts and feelings and inspiring others to share their ideas and opinions (Avolio *et al.*, 2009). Internalised moral perspective implies that the leader is guided by an internal set of values and acts according to these, even against peer, organisational or societal pressures (Peus *et al.*, 2012). Finally, self-awareness refers to the extent leaders understand their own strengths and weaknesses and how their leadership impacts others (Avolio and Gardner, 2005).

In sum, authentic leaders express their true feelings and emotions and act in accordance with their deeply held values, even under pressure. They are fully aware of their strengths and weaknesses and have a deep understanding about how their leadership affects their followers as well as the society.

Career success

Career success is defined as the "positive psychological or work related outcomes or achievements one accumulates as a result of work experiences" (Seibert *et al.*, 1999, p. 417). Specifically, career success can be analysed in terms of both objective and subjective dimensions (Heslin, 2005). Objective career success refers to observable career accomplishments that can be measured (Judge *et al.*, 1995; Wayne *et al.*, 1999; Ng *et al.*, 2005). Salary, promotions and hierarchical status are the most commonly used indicators of objective career success

because they can be directly assessed and verified (Abele *et al.*, 2011). Thus, in line with previous research, the present study used hierarchical status as the indicator of objective career success (Abele and Spurk, 2009; Abele *et al.*, 2011).

On the contrary, subjective career success refers to employees' feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction with their careers, which is partly based on objective indicators (Judge *et al.*, 1995). Career satisfaction is the most widely used indicator of subjective career success (Heslin, 2005). It is defined as the degree to which individuals believe that their career progress is consistent with their goals, values and preferences (Seibert and Kraimer, 2001). Hence, in the current study, career satisfaction was designated as the indicator of subjective career success.

Authentic leadership and career self-efficacy
Generalised self-efficacy is defined as the "belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). The present study, however, focusses on career self-efficacy, which is a context-specific form of self-efficacy. Specifically, it refers to the extent to which individuals believe that they are capable of successfully managing their careers (Day and Allen, 2004; Higgins *et al.*, 2008). Unlike generalised self-efficacy, which is a relatively stable trait-like belief in one's competence (Chen *et al.*, 2001), career self-efficacy is more malleable and has been found to be a stronger predictor of career-related outcomes (Spurk and Abele, 2011).

Bandura (1986) identified four techniques for increasing self-efficacy: enactive mastery (successful accomplishments); vicarious modelling (observational learning); verbal persuasion; and physiological arousal. It is expected that authentic leadership behaviours will have a positive effect on all the four sources of self-efficacy.

Authentic leaders lead by example and, therefore, serve as role models for their followers (Avolio *et al.*, 2004; Ilies *et al.*, 2005). According to the social learning theory (Bandura, 1986), individuals learn by observing and imitating the behaviours of credible and attractive role models. Thus, in accordance with this theory, it is argued that subordinates of authentic leaders will learn from their leaders by observing and emulating their work-related attitudes and behaviours. Such observational learning subsequently is expected to have a positive impact on employees' career self-efficacy (Day and Allen, 2004; Biemann *et al.*, 2015).

In addition, research evidence indicates that authentic leaders focus on identifying the talents of their followers, developing these talents into strengths and empowering their followers to perform tasks in which they have the potential to excel (Avolio *et al.*, 2004; Gardner *et al.*, 2005). Such positive behaviours on part of the leader make it more likely that the followers will have successful enactive mastery experiences, which, in turn, should strengthen their career self-efficacy.

Furthermore, through open and honest communication (relational transparency), authentic leaders can persuade their followers that they are capable of achieving their career goals. Previous research has shown that leaders' verbal persuasion can have a powerful impact on employees' career self-efficacy (Day and Allen, 2004).

Finally, authentic leaders create an environment of trust in their respective work units and as a result elicit positive emotions from their followers (Avolio *et al.*, 2004). Past studies have revealed that positive emotions have the capacity to broaden people's momentary thought action repertoires and build their enduring personal resources such as self-efficacy (Fredrickson, 2001; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009).

No previous study to the best of my knowledge has empirically examined the effects of authentic leadership on career self-efficacy. However, based on the above arguments, the following hypothesis is stated:

H1. Authentic leadership is positively related to career self-efficacy.

CDI

Career self-efficacy and career success

In this study, it is argued that career self-efficacy will positively contribute to employees' career success. Previous research has shown that efficacious people set more challenging goals for themselves, put more effort in their work and remain steadfast when they encounter difficulties (Gist and Mitchell, 1992; Bandura, 1997). Because of these characteristics, people with strong self-efficacy beliefs tend to perform at a higher level (Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998) and, therefore, are more likely to attain a significant position within their organisation. Abele and Spurk (2009) in their study found that career self-efficacy was positively linked to hierarchical status. Thus, it is predicted that:

H2. Career self-efficacy is positively related to hierarchical status.

In addition, research evidence indicates that efficacious people are more adept at shaping and selecting their work environment and as a consequence are more likely to obtain a better person job fit (DeRue and Morgeson, 2007). Performing jobs that are congruent with one's personality and skills may give rise to the feeling that one has chosen the right career and has put one's skills to good use, which, in turn, should lead to greater career satisfaction (Jawahar and Liu, 2017). Several empirical studies have shown that individuals who possess a strong sense of self-efficacy tend to feel more satisfied with their careers (Valcour and Ladge, 2008; Abele and Spurk, 2009). Hence, it is speculated that:

H3. Career self-efficacy is positively related to career satisfaction.

The mediating role of career self-efficacy

As discussed earlier, authentic leadership behaviours are likely to have a strong impact on employees' career success. Authentic leaders empower their subordinates, treat them fairly and focus on developing their skills and abilities (Gardner *et al.*, 2005). Previous research has shown that such positive leader behaviours can play a pivotal role in helping employees to attain a high degree of career success (Vincent-Höper *et al.*, 2012; Biemann *et al.*, 2015).

However, the relationship between authentic leadership and career success may not be direct or unconditional. For instance, Avolio *et al.* (2004) argued that "although authentic leadership is important, it is not sufficient to achieve desired goals" (p. 804). In view of this fact, these authors suggest three pathways through which authentic leadership can affect follower outcomes: hope, positive emotions and trust.

Ilies *et al.* (2005) also echoed similar thoughts and contended that authentic leaders are likely to influence their followers' growth and development indirectly by modelling and supporting self-determination, leading by example and increasing followers' identification with the leader and the organisation.

On the basis of this evidence, it is expected that authentic leadership will affect the two indicators of career success: hierarchical status and career satisfaction indirectly through the mediating mechanism of career self-efficacy. Specifically, it is envisaged that authentic leadership will boost employees' career self-efficacy (*H1*), which subsequently will lead to a higher level of career success (*H2* and *H3*). Thus, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H4. Career self-efficacy will mediate the effects of authentic leadership on hierarchical status.

H5. Career self-efficacy will mediate the effects of authentic leadership on career satisfaction.

Figure 1 summarises the hypothesised relationships discussed in the preceding paragraphs.

Method

Sample and procedure

The sample for this study comprised of full-time employees who were working in different departments (e.g. marketing, finance, quality assurance and engineering) of a leading food and beverage company located in Pakistan. This company is currently producing a diverse range of high-quality food products such as milk, juices and cooking oil.

Data for this study were collected by administering a paper and pencil questionnaire to the selected sample of employees. Specifically, 250 questionnaires accompanied by a cover letter assuring confidentiality were handed over to the relevant officials of the company for distribution to each participant. Involvement and participation in this study was completely optional. The respondents completed the questionnaire and returned it in a sealed envelope to the concerned officials. The author subsequently collected the questionnaires from the company's head office.

Out of the 250 questionnaires that were distributed, 162 useable questionnaires were received. Thus, the response rate was 64.8 per cent. This response rate is considered adequate for studies conducted at the individual level (Baruch and Holtom, 2008). About 94 per cent of the participants were male. The average age and organisational tenure of the respondents were 33.3 (SD = 6.83) and 4.8 (SD = 5.06) years, respectively. Approximately, 44 per cent of the participants held a Master's degree, 52 per cent held a Bachelor's degree and about 2 per cent held a high school diploma.

Measures

Authentic leadership. Employees' perceptions of their supervisor's authenticity were measured by the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire developed by Walumbwa *et al.* (2008). This questionnaire consists of 16 items and measures the four components of authentic leadership: balanced processing, internalised moral perspective, relational transparency and self-awareness. Balanced processing was assessed with three items (e.g. "My supervisor solicits views that challenge his or her deeply held positions"). Internalised moral perspective was measured with four items (e.g. "My supervisor makes decisions based on his/her core beliefs"). Relational transparency was assessed with five items ("My supervisor is willing to admit mistakes when they are made"). Finally, self-awareness was measured with four items ("My supervisor is eager to receive feedback to improve interactions with others"). All items relating to the four dimensions of authentic leadership were rated on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (frequently, if not always). Results showed that the four dimensions of authentic leadership were highly correlated with each other (average correlation = 0.73). The reliabilities for the balanced processing, internalised moral perspective, relational transparency and self-awareness sub-scales were 0.74, 0.81, 0.81 and 0.80, respectively, while the reliability for the full scale was 0.93.

Career self-efficacy. Career self-efficacy was assessed with the five-item scale developed by Higgins *et al.* (2008). A sample item includes: "When I make career decisions, I am
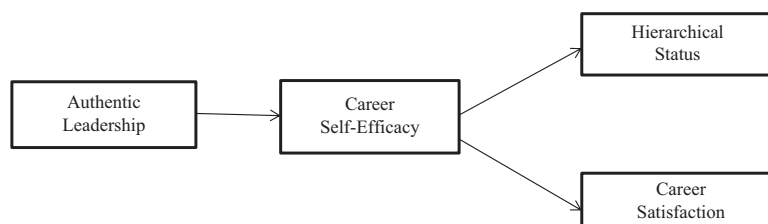

Figure 1.
Hypothesised model

confident they are good ones". All the five items were scored on a five-point scale anchored by 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). The α reliability for this scale was 0.80.

Career satisfaction. The five-item scale developed by Greenhaus *et al.* (1990) was utilised to measure career satisfaction. A sample item includes: "I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career". Respondents rated the five items on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The coefficient α for this scale was 0.82.

Hierarchical status. Following Abele and Spurk (2009) and Abele *et al.* (2011), hierarchical status was measured by three dichotomous variables: permission to delegate work (0 = no, 1 = yes), project responsibility (0 = no, 1 = yes) and official leadership position (0 = no, 1 = yes). The scores obtained on each variable were added together to compute an overall score of hierarchical status for each respondent. Thus, the total score for the hierarchical status variable could vary between 0 and 3. This three-item scale exhibited a satisfactory reliability of 0.72.

Control variables. Gender, age and education level were included as control variables in this study because previous research has shown that these demographic characteristics have the potential to influence employees' career success (Judge *et al.*, 1995; Ng *et al.*, 2005). Gender (1 = male; 0 = female) was measured through a dummy variable, while education level was assessed with three categories: high school diploma (coded as 1); Bachelor's (coded as 2); and Master's (coded as 3). Age, on the other hand, was self-reported in years.

Results

Descriptive statistics

The means, standard deviations and correlations among the study variables are presented in Table I. Results reported in Table I showed that authentic leadership was positively correlated with career self-efficacy ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.01$) Furthermore, it was found that career self-efficacy was positively associated with both career satisfaction ($r = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$) and hierarchical status ($r = 0.20$, $p < 0.05$). Finally, results depicted in Table I revealed that age was positively linked to career satisfaction ($r = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$), while gender and education level were not significantly related to any of the study variables. In view of this fact, gender and education level were excluded from subsequent analyses.

Measurement model

The research hypotheses were tested by conducting structural equation modelling (SEM) using LISREL 8.80 (Joreskog and Sorbom, 2006). In line with the suggestions put forward by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), a two-step analytical procedure was adopted for this study. In the first step, the measurement model was estimated by using confirmatory factor analysis, while in the second step the fit of the structural model was evaluated.

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	0.94	0.24	na						
2. Age	33.3	6.83	0.18*	na					
3. Education level	2.43	0.53	0.02	−0.02	na				
4. Authentic leadership[a]	3.78	0.65	−0.08	−0.01	−0.01	*0.93*			
5. Career self-efficacy	4.12	0.52	−0.13	0.12	0.08	0.41**	*0.80*		
6. Hierarchical status	2.38	0.98	−0.03	0.10	0.04	0.11	0.20*	*0.72*	
7. Career satisfaction	3.69	0.68	0.04	0.20**	−0.09	0.30**	0.30**	0.16*	*0.82*

Notes: Cronbach's α reliabilities for observed variables are in italic in the diagonal. [a]Scores of the 16 items of the authentic leadership scale were averaged to compute the overall score for authentic leadership. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$

Table I. Descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables

The measurement model consisted of four latent variables: authentic leadership, career self-efficacy, career satisfaction and hierarchical status. Career self-efficacy (five items), career satisfaction (five items) and hierarchical status (three items) were modelled by their respective items. On the contrary, in line with previous research, authentic leadership was indicated by its four dimensions: balanced processing, internalised moral perspective, relational transparency and self-awareness (e.g. Laschinger and Fida, 2014).

The measurement model provided a good fit to the data: $\chi^2(113) = 172.52$, $p < 0.01$; CFI = 0.97; RMSEA = 0.06; SRMR = 0.07. All the indicators loaded significantly on their respective latent factors, with factor loadings ranging from 0.53 to 0.89.

In order to establish discriminant validity among the four study variables, the fit of the measurement model was compared with the fit of three alternate models. Model 1 was a three-factor model in which the indicators of authentic leadership and career self-efficacy were combined to form a single factor; Model 2 was also a three-factor model in which the indicators of career satisfaction and hierarchical status were combined to form a single factor; and Model 3 was a one-factor model in which all the observed indicators were forced to load on a single factor.

Results of the χ^2 difference test (Hu and Bentler, 1999) revealed that relative to the measurement model, Model 1 ($\Delta\chi^2(3) = 228.27$, $p < 0.01$; CFI = 0.85; RMSEA = 0.12; SRMR = 0.11), Model 2 ($\Delta\chi^2(3) = 107.05$, $p < 0.01$; CFI = 0.91; RMSEA = 0.09; SRMR = 0.10) and Model 3 ($\Delta\chi^2(6) = 612.12$, $p < 0.01$; CFI = 0.65; RMSEA = 0.19; SRMR = 0.16) exhibited a poor fit to the data. These results indicate that the four variables used in this research were distinct.

Model testing
Results of SEM demonstrated that the research model depicted in Figure 1 provided a satisfactory fit to the data: $\chi^2(131) = 203.10$, $p < 0.01$; CFI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.06; SRMR = 0.08. The fit of this fully mediated model was then compared with the fit of two partially mediated models. Model 1 included a direct path from authentic leadership to hierarchical status, while Model 2 specified a direct path from authentic leadership to career satisfaction. The fit of these competing models was compared with the χ^2 difference test. Results of these analyses are presented in Table II.

Results showed that Model 1 provided an adequate fit to the data but was not significantly better than the hypothesised model ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 0.31$, $p > 0.05$) and the direct path from authentic leadership to hierarchical status was insignificant ($\beta = 0.05$, ns).

In contrast, Model 2 provided a significantly better fit to the data than the research model: ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 6.39$, $p < 0.05$). Furthermore, the direct path from authentic leadership to career satisfaction was also significant ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.01$). Taken together, these results suggest that Model 2 fits the present data better than the other two models and, therefore, it was chosen as the final model.

Examination of the paths in the final model (Figure 2) revealed that *H1* was fully supported; authentic leadership was positively and significantly associated with career

Model	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
Research model	203.10**	131	–	–	0.96	0.06	0.08
Model 1[a]	202.79**	130	0.31 (ns)	1	0.96	0.06	0.08
Model 2[b]	196.71**	130	6.39*	1	0.96	0.06	0.07

Notes: CFI, comparative fit index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; SRMR, standardised root mean square residual. [a]Model 1 adds a path from authentic leadership to hierarchical status; [b]Model 2 adds a path from authentic leadership to career satisfaction. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$

Table II.
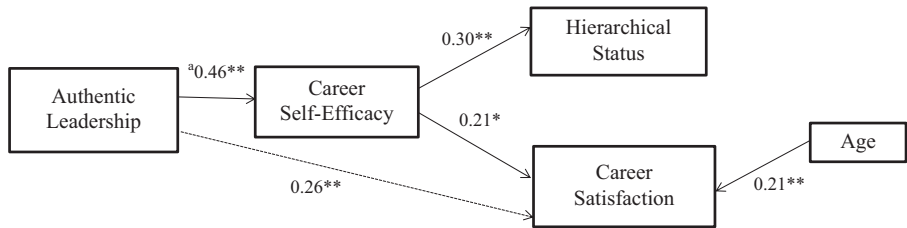Comparison of the structural models

Figure 2.
Final model

Notes: For the sake of clarity, only structural relationships are shown. [a]These numbers represent the standardised β coefficients. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$

self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.46$, $p < 0.01$). In addition, it was found that career self-efficacy was positively related to both hierarchical status ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$) and career satisfaction ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, *H2* and *H3* were also substantiated. Furthermore, as noted above, the direct path from authentic leadership to hierarchical status was insignificant. This finding implied that career self-efficacy fully mediated the relationship between authentic leadership and hierarchical status. Hence, *H4* was fully corroborated. On the contrary, it was found that the direct path from authentic leadership to career satisfaction was significant. This result signified that career self-efficacy partially mediated the effects of authentic leadership on career satisfaction. Thus, *H5* was partly supported. Finally, results showed that age was positively linked to career satisfaction ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.01$).

The mediation hypothesis was further tested by using the bootstrapping procedure developed by Preacher and Hayes (2008). Specifically, to examine the significance of the mediated effects, 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs) around the indirect effects were constructed from 5,000 bootstrap samples. A mediated effect is considered significant if the 95% bias-corrected CI does not contain a zero (Hayes, 2018).

The results of this analysis revealed that the indirect effect of authentic leadership on hierarchical status through career self-efficacy was 0.14 (0.46×0.30) and the 95% bias-corrected CI around this indirect effect was [0.03, 0.26]. Similarly, it was found that the indirect effect of authentic leadership on career satisfaction via career self-efficacy was 0.10 (0.46×0.21) and the 95% bias-corrected CI around this indirect effect was [0.01, 0.18].

Since, these CIs did not contain a zero, it can be concluded that the mediating effect of career self-efficacy on the authentic leadership–hierarchical status relationship and on the authentic leadership–career satisfaction relationship was significant (Hayes, 2018). In short, these results provide strong support for the mediation hypothesis.

Discussion
The central aim of this study was to examine the effects of authentic leadership on employees' objective (hierarchical status) and subjective (career satisfaction) career success. In addition, it sought to examine the mediating role of career self-efficacy in these relationships. Results showed that career self-efficacy fully mediated the relationship between authentic leadership and hierarchical status, while it partially mediated the effects of authentic leadership on career satisfaction. The practical and theoretical implications of these findings and the limitations of this research are discussed below.

Theoretical implications
This study makes three distinct contributions. First, as mentioned earlier, past studies have shown that authentic leadership is positively associated with various follower outcomes (e.g. Banks *et al.*, 2016; Hoch *et al.*, 2018). However, no previous study to the best of my knowledge has explored the impact of this leadership style on employees' career success.

The present study fills this void by empirically establishing a link between authentic leadership and employees' objective (hierarchical status) and subjective (career satisfaction) career success. By doing so, this research expands the existing nomological network of authentic leadership and provides a new perspective on this significant concept.

Specifically, the results of this study suggest that leaders' authenticity does seem to have a positive effect on employees' career satisfaction and their status within the organisation. These findings tend to endorse the view that supportive leadership practices can play a crucial role in propelling employees towards greater achievement and success (Kraimer *et al.*, 2015; Raghuram *et al.*, 2017).

Second, this study contributes to the authentic leadership literature by examining and confirming career self-efficacy as a mediating mechanism through which authentic leadership ultimately influences employees' career success. Results of this study showed that as hypothesised, career self-efficacy fully mediated the link between authentic leadership and hierarchical status. This finding is congruent with past research, which contends that authentic leadership is unlikely to have a direct effect on follower outcomes (Avolio *et al.*, 2004; Ilies *et al.*, 2005). On the contrary, authentic leaders are more likely to influence their followers indirectly by creating conditions, which facilitate their growth and development (Avolio and Gardner, 2005).

However, contrary to expectation, career self-efficacy partially mediated the effects of authentic leadership on career satisfaction. Previous research has shown that organisational sponsorship variables such as supportive leader behaviours are stronger predictors of subjective career success (Ng *et al.*, 2005). Specifically, Ng *et al.* (2005) argued that organisational sponsorship signals to the employees that they are valued and possess career potential. Such signals, in turn, are likely to evoke more favourable affective reactions including higher levels of career satisfaction and a stronger sense of career success (Ng *et al.*, 2005). This could be one possible reason why authentic leadership had a direct effect on career satisfaction in addition to its indirect effect via career self-efficacy. Other studies have also reported similar findings. For instance, Kim and Beehr (2017) in their study found that empowering leadership had both a direct as well as an indirect effect on career satisfaction. Likewise, Vincent-Höper *et al.* (2012) showed that the effect of transformational leadership on subjective career success was only partly mediated by work engagement.

Finally, this study also broadens the literature on career self-efficacy by identifying a new antecedent of this construct in the form of authentic leadership. Results of this study suggest that authentic leadership behaviours are likely to have a significant impact on employees' career self-efficacy. This result is consistent with past studies, which have demonstrated that employees who receive continuous support and guidance from their leaders tend to feel more confident about accomplishing their career-related goals (Biemann *et al.*, 2015; Kim and Beehr, 2017).

Practical implications
The findings of this research can have important ramifications for organisations. Specifically, results of this study indicate that authentic leaders can have a positive effect on employees' career success. Career success is not only important to individuals, but also to organisations because employees' personal success can eventually translate into organisational success (Ng *et al.*, 2005; Abele *et al.*, 2011).

So how can organisations promote authentic leadership? In order to achieve this goal, it is suggested that organisations should adopt a two pronged strategy. First, by using selection tools such as personality tests, structured interviews and simulation exercises, organisations should try to identify and hire authentic leaders for key management positions. Second, organisations can consider using different training techniques such as role plays, leaderless group discussions and multisource feedback to inspire their existing

leaders to exhibit authentic leadership behaviours (Ilies *et al.*, 2005). Specifically, through these training techniques organisations should encourage leaders to express their true feelings and emotions in the workplace, openly share information and ideas with others, analyse all relevant information before making decisions and develop self-awareness by reflecting on their values and behaviours and how these qualities influence their interactions with subordinates (Laschinger and Fida, 2014).

Limitations and future research directions
Like any study, this one is not without limitations. First, data for this study were collected from a single organisation based in Pakistan. This may restrict the generalisability of the results to other work contexts. Thus, future research in multiple organisational settings may prove useful for increasing the external validity of this study.

Second, the present study had a cross-sectional design and, therefore, it is difficult to make any firm conclusion about causality. In order to obtain a better idea about causality, future research in this area can attempt to analyse the model developed in this study with a longitudinal research design.

Third, since data on all the study variables were collected through self-reports from employees, there is a possibility that the findings of this research may have been influenced by common method variance (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). To assess whether or not common method variance distorted the findings of this study, the fit of the measurement model was compared to the fit of an alternative model, which controlled for the effects of an unmeasured latent methods factor (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Results showed that the model with the method factor provided a good fit to the data (χ^2(96 df) $= 123.16$, $p < 0.05$; CFI $= 0.99$; RMSEA $= 0.04$; SRMR $= 0.05$) and brought about a significant improvement in fit over the measurement model ($\Delta\chi^2$(17) $= 49.36$, $p < 0.01$). However, all the observed indicators loaded significantly and in the expected direction on their corresponding latent factor. Furthermore, it was found that the method factor accounted for only 11.15 per cent of the total variance, which was considerably less than the threshold value of 25 per cent advocated by Williams *et al.* (1989). In short, these results seem to suggest that common method variance did not have an adverse impact on the findings of this study. To avoid the negative effects associated with this problem, it is recommended that future research should attempt to collect data from multiple sources.

Fourth, this study focussed on authentic leadership in general and as a result did not examine the impact of its four components (balanced processing, internalised moral perspective, relational transparency and self-awareness) on career satisfaction and hierarchical status. Thus, in order to acquire further insights into the authentic leadership–career success relationship, future studies should strive to explore the effects of each component of this leadership style on different indicators of subjective and objective career success.

Fifth, although career self-efficacy fully mediated the link between authentic leadership and hierarchical status, it only partially mediated the effects of authentic leadership on career satisfaction. These results suggest that there may be other mediation mechanisms involved in addition to career self-efficacy. Thus, future research can attempt to identify other variables that may act as mediators in the relationship between authentic leadership and the two career outcomes included in this study.

Finally, previous research has shown that other forms of positive leadership such as empowering leadership (Kim and Beehr, 2017), transformational leadership (Joo and Lim, 2013) and leader member exchange (Raghuram *et al.*, 2017) can also have a strong impact on employees' career success. Therefore, it is suggested that future studies should control for the effects of these leadership styles in order to determine whether authentic leadership uniquely contributes to employees' career success above and beyond these leadership styles.

Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of authentic leadership in enhancing employees' career success. Specifically, results showed that authentic leadership behaviours can positively contribute to employees' career satisfaction and their status within the organisation by amplifying their career self-efficacy. Thus, in order to ensure that employees fulfil their potential and achieve their career goals, it is imperative that organisations create an environment, which facilitates the development of authentic leaders.

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