# How Can Authentic Leadership Influence Interprofessional Collaboration?

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*Abstract*—The paper aims to analyze the impact of authentic leadership on staff engagement, communication, and organizational culture in interprofessional collaboration. Based on the theory of authentic leadership, this paper will analyze its influence on staff engagement, communication, and organizational culture. First, authentic leadership focuses on three areas to promote staff engagement: building trust, empowerment, and providing information and support. Second, authentic leadership enhances communication by encouraging employees to speak up and resolve conflicts. Finally, authentic leadership promotes organizational culture by building trust and sharing knowledge with employees. The paper analyzes the application of authentic leadership in interprofessional collaboration, providing a new theoretical perspective for Chinese managers and nurses, and contributing to the development of interprofessional collaboration.

*Keywords*—authentic leadership, interprofessional collaboration, staff engagement, communication, organizational culture

## I. INTRODUCTION

With an ageing population and an increasing incidence of chronic diseases, interprofessional collaboration is needed to provide patients with more comprehensive care (Drinka and Clark, 2016). World Health Organization (WHO) calls on healthcare professionals to work together to improve healthcare delivery through interprofessional collaboration (World Health Organization, 2010). In the face of how to effectively promote interprofessional collaboration, the definition of interprofessional collaboration should be identified first. Interprofessional collaboration has been defined as a "partnership between people from diverse backgrounds with distinctive professional cultures and possibly representing different organizations or sectors, who work together to solve problems or provide services" (Morgan *et al.*, 2015). By implementing interprofessional collaboration, it is possible to build comprehensive, coordinated, and safe health systems that meet the needs of patients. Nursing leaders play an important role in the practice of interprofessional collaboration (Goldsberry, 2018). Research has shown that a good interprofessional team needs clear team leadership. In excellent interprofessional teams, good communication, respect roles, democracy, and empowerment are common characteristics of leaders (Nancarrow *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, the nature of interprofessional collaboration calls for authentic leadership. Authentic leaders can help their teams thrive in complex and challenging circumstances (Shirey *et al.*, 2019). Research has shown how collaborative and transformational leadership affect interprofessional collaboration (Smith *et al.*, 2018). However, there is limited research on how authentic leadership affects interprofessional collaboration. Therefore, this paper will analyze how authentic leadership affects interprofessional collaboration by discussing the concept of authentic leadership, its role of it in staff engagement, communication and organizational culture.

## II. METHODOLOGY

Based on the theory of authentic leadership, this paper will analyze its influence on staff engagement, communication and organizational culture. English databases such as PubMed, Embase, The Cochrane library, Ovid and EBSCO are searched by computer, and the search time is from the establishment of the database to December 2022.

## III. RESULTS

### A. What's Authentic Leadership?

Authentic leadership was first proposed by Luthans and Avolio. Authentic leadership is defined as: "a transparent and ethical model of leadership behaviour that encourages shared decision-making and follower involvement" (Avolio *et al.*, 2009). Luthans and Avolio described authentic leaders as leaders who are "confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, transparent, moral/ethical, future-oriented, and give priority to developing associates to be leaders". There are four key characteristics of authentic leadership: relational transparency, self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing (Panczyk *et al.*, 2018). Relational transparency involves showing themselves as they truly are. It is achieved through the appropriate sharing of feelings and values and by engaging and listening to different points of view and opinions (Gardner *et al.*, 2005). Self-awareness is the ability to evaluate a person's strengths and weaknesses (Avolio *et al.*, 2009). Internalized moral perspective refers to acting following internal moral and ethical values (Avolio *et al.*, 2009). Finally, Balanced information processing is the ability to objectively analyze all relevant data to make decisions.

### B. The Role of Authentic Leadership in Staff Engagement

Authentic leadership can promote interprofessional collaboration by promoting staff engagement. The aim of interprofessional collaborative practice is the active involvement of each discipline and the reinforcement of patient-centred values (Herbert, 2005). Effective

interprofessional collaboration is achieved through the combined efforts of team members (Sicotte *et al*., 2002). Many studies have shown that interprofessional collaboration can be promoted through staff engagement (Martinussen *et al*., 2012). Besides, research has shown that staff engagement is positively associated with some outcomes in interprofessional collaboration, such as job satisfaction and patient safety (Keyko *et al*., 2016).

Among the many predictors of staff engagement, leadership is undoubtedly important (Carasco-Saul *et al*., 2015). Researches have shown that authentic leadership focuses on three areas to promote staff engagement: building trust, empowerment, and providing information and support. First, authentic leadership demonstrates integrity, builds trust and open relationships with followers, and enables followers to achieve their true potential (Avolio *et al*., 2009). Authentic leaders have high self-esteem and accept their strengths and shortcomings objectively. They show their true self to others in a trustworthy and open way, and they inspire others to do the same (Alok and Israel, 2012). Authentic leadership with an internalized ethic is likely to treat followers with dignity and fairness, which contributes to gain the trust of employees (Pati and Kumar, 2010). As described by Kahn (1990), these behaviours can increase the engagement of staff in their work. Followers may feel more confident in engaging in interprofessional collaborative practice when they work in an environment that supports and recognizes their professional role (Regan, *et al*., 2016). Second, authentic leadership involves followers in decision-making through empowerment. Authentic leadership, directly and indirectly, enhances job satisfaction and staff engagement through empowerment (Ca and Hk, 2013). Kanter's theory of structural empowerment suggests that authentic leadership enables employees to do their jobs in a meaningful way (Kanter, 1993). Authentic leadership empowers followers and allows them to do their work flexibly. Therefore, when followers are empowered, they will be more productive and efficient in achieving organizational goals. Empowered followers can perform even when their tasks are challenging because they feel they have control over their work (Horwitz *et al*., 2017). Authentic leadership uses a "balanced process" to gather enough opinions and perspectives from followers before making important decisions, including those which are inconsistent with their personal beliefs (Panczyk *et al*., 2018). At the same time, authentic leadership empowers nurses to participate in clinical decision-making and organize the clinical care system. Finally, authentic leadership provides information and support to increase staff engagement. Authentic leadership leads to a greater understanding of the needs of followers and therefore provides information, support and resources to followers. As a result, followers can focus on accomplishing their work goals rather than spending their energy competing for limited resources (Read and Laschinger, 2015).

### C. The Role of Authentic Leadership in Communication

Authentic leadership can promote interprofessional collaboration through communication. Communication is also seen as a key determinant of effective interprofessional collaborative practice (Martín-Rodríguez *et al*., 2005).

Nijhuis et al (Nijhuis *et al*., 2007) argue that communication can promote or weaken collaboration at all levels of healthcare, making it a basis for considering or evaluating team practices. Pullon *et al*. (2016) argue that opportunities for frequent communication are necessary for effective interprofessional collaborative practice. In the practice of effective interprofessional collaboration, all people with relevant expertise should be able to express their views and share information freely (Xyrichis and Lowton, 2008). However, interprofessional tensions resulting from hierarchy, socialization, and power differentials may prevent these processes (Reeves *et al*., 2010). In practice, the professional hierarchy may result in some professions failing to make their voices heard (Long *et al*., 2006).

Authentic leadership enhances communication by encouraging employees to speak up and resolve conflicts. First, authentic leaders play an important role in encouraging employees to speak up. The more open, fair, and respectful a leader is, the less likely employees are to remain silent (Janssen and Gao, 2015). Authentic leadership focuses on opening communication and always seeks advice from team members before making decisions. This means that authentic leadership can encourage feedback from each interprofessional team member (Diddams and Chang, 2012). Besides, authentic leaders openly express their thoughts and feelings and share information with others, which contributes to establishing a trusting relationship with employees (Amos and Klimoski, 2014). When employees trust their leaders, they will be willing to communicate with the leaders (Hsiung, 2012). In interprofessional teams, team members in different professional roles perform differently. For example, Walter et al. found that in interprofessional collaboration in a paediatric cardiac intensive care unit, it was mostly the cardiac intensive care unit physicians who led the presentations, while other team members spoke rarely (Walter *et al.*, 2019). Besides, Morrison, See and Pan argue that employees with less power are more likely to remain silent and unable to express their views in interprofessional teams (Morrison *et al*., 2015). Authentic leadership contributes to breaking the silence of employees and motivates them to speak up through the act of showing an authentic personality (Guenter *et al*., 2017). Second, Authentic Leadership Contributes to resolving employee conflict. Due to differences in expertise, team members may have different views on practical issues and conflicts can easily appear (Freeth, 2001). Research shows that leadership attributes for effective conflict resolution include approachability, unbiasedness, and a willingness to listen (Brown *et al.*, 2011). Authentic leaders have an internalized ethic. They can treat their employees with respect and fairness (Laschinger *et al*., 2015). Besides, Authentic leadership can create a work environment where bullying is not tolerated (Laschinger *et al*., 2012). This is important to resolve conflicts between members of interprofessional teams.

### D. The Role of Authentic Leadership in Organization Culture

Authentic leadership can promote interprofessional collaboration by promoting organizational culture. Organizational culture is the invisible architecture of the

organization (Suppiah *et al.*, 2011). A team culture of trust, mutual respect, reliability, commitment and support is the key to a good interprofessional team (Nancarrow *et al.*, 2013b). Besides, interprofessional collaboration requires culture such as collaboration, integrity compassion, and sharing knowledge (Bourne *et al.*, 2019).

Authentic leadership promotes organizational culture by building trust and sharing knowledge with employees. First, Wah (2015) argues that leaders play an important role in developing trust in team members. Authentic leadership encourages the qualities of hope, trust, and positive emotions in employees (Gardner and Schermerhorn, 2004). Authentic leadership enhances respect and trust among employees (Bamford *et al.*, 2013). Additionally, authentic leaders can act following beliefs and moral values that are consistent with their behaviour (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2008). Gardner et al. state that authentic leaders can show their true selves by knowing their strengths and weaknesses, thus assisting in building trust and cooperation between team members (Gardner *et al.*, 2005). These behaviours can contribute to the development of trust between members of interprofessional teams (Iqbal *et al.*, 2019). Second, an interprofessional team is a complex group of professionals from different disciplines, with different skills and knowledge (Lee and Hong, 2014). Therefore, leaders need to create a culture of knowledge sharing among team members (Malik *et al.*, 2016). According to George and Sims (George and Sims, 2007), authentic leadership can create an atmosphere of trust and transparency among employees, which also assists in dispelling the myth that sharing knowledge is disempowering (Cabrera *et al.*, 2006). The creativity of nurses is positively affected by their knowledge sharing behaviour and information exchange among nurses (Malik *et al.*, 2016). Knowledge sharing can lead to increased individual and collective creativity (Dyer and Nobeoka, 2000). Authentic leadership promotes creativity through the expression of ideas, open sharing of information and transparency in relationships (Anwar *et al.*, 2019). When authentic leadership builds a strong relationship with employees, employees are willing to explore new ideas and share information. At the same time, authentic leadership is considered to be an important leadership style that promotes employee creativity by developing a positive psychological state in individuals (Rego *et al.*, 2012). As a result, the employees of authentic leadership are more willing to share their knowledge. They are willing to learn something from interprofessional team members and create new knowledge together (Edú-Valsania *et al.*, 2016).

## IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study focuses on how can authentic leadership influence interprofessional collaboration. Interprofessional collaboration plays an important role in healthcare today. Through interprofessional collaboration, professionals from different disciplines work together to develop the most appropriate care plan for the patients. Effective implementation of interprofessional collaborative practice requires the combined efforts of team members and effective management by leaders. Authentic leadership improves staff engagement by empowering them to participate in decision-making. In addition, authentic leadership focuses on fairness, trust and respect, which can reduce conflict and promote communication among team members. At the same time, authentic leadership also promotes the sharing of information among employees and thus promotes innovation. These characteristics are important in interprofessional collaboration practice. However, in the practice of interprofessional teamwork, it is unlikely to use only one type of leadership. Facing different situations and employees, leaders may switch between different types of leadership. Therefore, the organization should choose the appropriate type of leadership based on the characteristics of the interprofessional team as well as the practice issues.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Author Contributions

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