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The Relationship Between Perceived Authentic Leadership Dimensions and Innovative Work Behaviour Among Manufacturing Employees in Penang, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Innovative work behaviour (IWB) is essential for manufacturing organisations in Penang, Malaysia, to remain competitive and adapt to Industry 4.0 transformations. As innovation depends on employees' willingness to generate, promote, and implement new ideas, understanding leadership factors that encourage innovative work behaviour has become increasingly important. Authentic leadership, characterised by self-awareness, internalised moral perspective, relational transparency, and balanced processing, has been recognised for fostering positive employee outcomes. However, existing studies have largely examined authentic leadership as a composite construct, providing limited insight into how its individual dimensions influence innovative work behaviour, particularly in the Malaysian manufacturing context. Therefore, the objective of this study was to examine the relationship between perceived authentic leadership dimensions and innovative work behaviour among Malaysian manufacturing employees. A cross-sectional quantitative survey design was employed. A total of 150 manufacturing employees were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling based on predefined inclusion criteria.

1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of Industry 4.0 has transformed the manufacturing landscape by introducing smart manufacturing systems driven by technologies such as artificial intelligence, automation, and digital integration. In Malaysia, the manufacturing sector remains a major contributor to economic growth and one of the country's largest employment-generating sectors. In particular, Penang is recognised as one of the country's leading manufacturing hubs, attracting multinational corporations and high-value investments, especially in electronics and high-tech industries. While the state continues to attract strong investment, it faces critical challenges

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regarding workforce readiness. For instance, talent shortages and skills mismatches, where employees' existing competencies do not align with the technical requirements of Industry 4.0 technologies, have been identified as major barriers to workforce readiness [1]. In addition, the retention of talented employees continues to affect workforce stability and organisational performance [2]. Collectively, these challenges impede the successful adoption of digital technologies and limit firms' ability to remain competitive in an increasingly dynamic business environment. Consequently, fostering innovation has become paramount for organisations seeking to enhance adaptability, improve performance, and sustain long-term competitiveness.

Innovation is particularly vital within Southeast Asian emerging economies, where knowledge-based competition continues to intensify [3]. In this context, an organisation's innovative capacity is largely determined by its employees' knowledge, skills, and capabilities [4]. This is especially evident in manufacturing settings, where product quality and competitiveness are not solely determined by technology, which is often accessible across firms, but by the calibre and innovative potential of the employees [5]. Innovative work behaviour (IWB) refers to the generation, promotion, and implementation of new ideas by employees in the workplace [6]. It is a multidimensional construct that reflects employees' contribution to overall organisational innovation processes [7]. However, despite its importance, many manufacturing organisations still implicitly associate innovation primarily with research and development (R&D) functions, thereby underestimating the contribution of employees across all organisational levels and departments. Therefore, understanding the factors that influence innovative work behaviour (IWB) among manufacturing employees has become increasingly important.

At the same time, the rise in organisational fraud and corporate misconduct in Malaysia has raised concerns regarding leadership credibility and ethical conduct. Evidence from PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) Global Economic Crime and Fraud Survey 2020 indicates persistently high levels of fraud among Malaysian organisations, highlighting the need for leadership approaches grounded in authenticity and ethical values [8]. In response, perceived authentic leadership has gained attention as a leadership style that fosters trust, ethical decision-making, and positive psychological development among employees. Authentic leadership is defined as a pattern of leader behaviour that promotes positive psychological capacities and an ethical climate by fostering self-awareness, internalised moral perspective, relational transparency, and balanced processing, which in turn supports the positive self-development of followers. In this study, authentic leadership is examined from employees' perceptual perspective and operationalised through its four behavioural dimensions, which are self-awareness, internalised moral perspective, relational transparency, and balanced processing [9].

Despite growing interest in perceived authentic leadership, existing research has largely examined it as a composite construct and has predominantly been conducted in Western contexts. This raises concerns about the generalisability of perceived authentic leadership mechanisms to non-Western settings such as Malaysia, where cultural and organisational dynamics may differ significantly. This highlights the need to examine how each dimension of perceived authentic leadership contributes to innovative work behaviour within the Malaysian manufacturing context. In particular, there is limited empirical understanding of how employees' perceptions of different dimensions of authentic leadership translate into innovative work behaviour in operational, non-R&D manufacturing roles. Therefore, this study addresses these gaps by providing a more nuanced, context-sensitive examination of leadership-innovation dynamics.

This study is significant as it contributes to the perceived authentic leadership literature by offering empirical evidence from a non-Western manufacturing context and by examining the distinct effects of leadership dimensions on innovative work behaviour. In addition, the findings provide

practical insights for manufacturing organisations in developing leadership practices that foster employee innovation and organisational competitiveness. Thus, this research aims to examine the relationship between the dimensions of perceived authentic leadership (self-awareness, relational transparency, internalised moral perspective, and balanced processing) and innovative work behaviour among manufacturing employees in Penang, Malaysia.

1.1 Self-Awareness and Innovative Work Behaviour

Self-awareness is a key dimension of perceived authentic leadership, referring to employees' perceptions of how well leaders understand their own strengths and limitations, as well as the impact of their behaviour on others. Leaders who demonstrate high self-awareness are more likely to engage in self-reflection and actively seek feedback from colleagues to deepen their understanding of themselves. They also acknowledge and take ownership of their mistakes while tailoring their support and delegating tasks according to employees' strengths [10].

From the perspective of Authentic Leadership Theory, self-aware leaders influence employee behaviour through reflective and value-consistent actions that signal authenticity and reliability. This perceived authenticity strengthens employees' trust in leadership and fosters a supportive psychological environment. In such an environment, employees feel more confident in expressing new ideas, as psychological safety reduces the fear of negative consequences, encourages risk-taking behaviour, and facilitates innovative work behaviour.

Empirical studies support this relationship. For instance, Bracht *et al.*, [10] found that self-aware leaders enhance psychological safety by encouraging feedback and reflection, while Abdullah *et al.*, [11] reported that self-awareness positively influences employees' idea generation and knowledge-sharing behaviours. Therefore, it is expected that self-awareness will positively influence innovative work behaviour.

H1: Self-awareness is positively related to innovative work behaviour among manufacturing employees

1.2 Internalised Moral Perspective and Innovative Work Behaviour

Internalised moral perspective is a key dimension of perceived authentic leadership, referring to employees' perceptions of the extent to which leaders are guided by internal moral standards and ethical values in their actions and behaviours [9]. Authentic Leadership Theory explains that leaders with a strong internalised moral perspective act consistently with their internal values rather than being influenced by external pressures, thereby demonstrating integrity and ethical stability in the eyes of employees.

Such consistency signals fairness and predictability in leadership behaviour, which helps reduce employees' uncertainty about how decisions are made and how their contributions will be evaluated. When employees perceive their leaders as ethically consistent, they are more likely to develop trust in leadership and perceive the work environment as fair and supportive. As a result, employees are more willing to take initiative and engage in innovative work behaviour.

Scholarly research on internalised moral perspective and ethically driven leadership provides supporting evidence for this association. For instance, Njoroge *et al.*, [12] found that leaders' internalised moral perspective significantly predicts employees' IWB in a retail pharmaceutical context. Although this study was conducted outside the manufacturing sector, it suggests that value-driven leadership may influence employees' willingness to engage in innovative work behaviours

across different organisational settings. Related literature on ethical leadership further supports this, indicating that leaders' integrity and value-driven decision-making may positively influence employees' work behaviours [13]. Therefore, it is expected that an internalised moral perspective will positively influence innovative work behaviour.

H2: Internalised moral perspective is positively related to innovative work behaviour among manufacturing employees

1.3 Relational Transparency and Innovative Work Behaviour

Perceived authentic leadership includes relational transparency as one of its essential dimensions, which refers to employees' perceptions of leaders' openness in expressing their true thoughts, emotions, and intentions, as well as their willingness to share relevant information and engage in transparent communication [9]. As conceptualised in Authentic Leadership Theory, relational transparency reflects leaders' genuine self-expression, which signals authenticity, and reduces ambiguity in leader–employee interactions. Such openness fosters trust by allowing employees to better understand their leader's intentions and expectations, thereby creating a more predictable and supportive relational environment. When employees perceive their leaders as open and transparent, they are likely to feel safer expressing opinions, discussing concerns, and sharing unconventional ideas without excessive fear of negative judgement. This supportive interpersonal climate may encourage employees to take initiative, engage in collaborative problem-solving, and experiment with new approaches, which are behaviours closely associated with innovative work behaviour (IWB).

Existing literature substantiates this linkage. Prior studies suggest that relational transparency fosters an open and collaborative work environment that encourages employees to exchange knowledge, communicate ideas, and participate more actively in problem-solving. For instance, Bai *et al.*, [14] found that perceived authentic leadership, including relational transparency, positively influenced IWB among employees in high-tech manufacturing organisations. Similarly, Li and Peng [15] reported that relational transparency reduces knowledge-hiding behaviour by fostering openness and collaboration among employees. Collectively, these findings indicate that transparent leader–employee interactions may strengthen employees' willingness to share ideas and explore new solutions within the workplace.

Related studies on communication climate provide additional support for this argument. Mat Arifin *et al.*, [16] observed that open and transparent communication enhances employees' IWB in Malaysian research and development (R&D) organisations, while Khalid *et al.*, [17] highlighted that transparent communication practices encourage idea sharing, collaboration, and problem-solving among employees. Although these studies were not exclusively conducted in manufacturing settings, their findings consistently suggest that openness and transparent communication help create a supportive environment where employees feel more confident contributing ideas and participating in innovative activities. Drawing from Authentic Leadership Theory and the existing empirical literature, this study proposes that relational transparency is positively associated with innovative work behaviour.

H3: Relational transparency is positively related to innovative work behaviour among manufacturing employees.

1.4 Balanced Processing and Innovative Work Behaviour

Balanced processing forms an important aspect of perceived authentic leadership, referring to employees' perceptions of the extent to which leaders objectively evaluate relevant information and consider diverse viewpoints before making decisions [9]. From the perspective of Authentic Leadership Theory, balanced processing reflects leaders' openness to multiple perspectives, which signals fairness, objectivity, and respect for employee input. This behaviour enhances employees' trust in leadership by demonstrating that decisions are not based solely on authority or hierarchy but on careful evaluation of information.

When employees perceive that their leaders genuinely consider diverse viewpoints, they are more likely to feel valued and included in the decision-making process. This perceived inclusiveness encourages employees to express ideas, share knowledge, and engage in constructive discussions, which are essential for innovative work behaviour. Prior studies support this mechanism. For instance, Nursilawati [18] found that leadership practices incorporating employee input enhance innovation in manufacturing settings, while Husin *et al.*, [19] reported that employee involvement in decision-making increases innovative work behaviour through higher work engagement.

Further evidence suggests that leadership practices that encourage employees' feedback improve creativity and voice behaviour, as employees feel more confident contributing ideas for organisational improvement [20]. Therefore, balanced processing is expected to positively influence innovative work behaviour.

H4: Balanced processing is positively related to innovative work behaviour among manufacturing employees.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative cross-sectional research design, which enables data collection from a large number of respondents efficiently and cost-effectively [21]. The data were gathered at a single point in time, with participants selected according to predefined criteria. The target population of this study comprises employees of manufacturing companies in Penang, Malaysia. Penang was selected as the area of interest, as it is well established as a significant manufacturing hub in Malaysia. All manufacturing employees were eligible to participate, regardless of company size or department, provided they met the established criteria, including age, educational qualifications, job position, and tenure under their current supervisor.

A sample size of 150 respondents was determined using G*Power. This study employed a non-probability purposive sampling method, where participants were intentionally selected based on their employment in the manufacturing sector in Penang to ensure relevance to the study context. To further expand the sample size, a snowball sampling technique was used, in which initial participants were encouraged to share the survey link with colleagues who met the participation criteria. This combination was particularly suitable given the practical challenges of accessing a complete and centralised list of manufacturing employees across organisations in Penang, as employees are distributed across multiple firms operating under different organisational structures and databases. Despite this, access to respondents was systematically facilitated through professional networks, allowing the study to reach relevant participants efficiently while maintaining sample quality.

Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed on social media platforms such as LinkedIn, where potential respondents were identified from their professional profiles.

Participation was voluntary, and ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection. A participant information sheet was provided at the beginning of the survey, followed by sections covering demographics and the study variables. Perceived authentic leadership (PAL) dimensions, which are self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalised moral perspective, were treated as independent variables, while innovative work behaviour (IWB) was the dependent variable.

The study variables were measured using established questionnaires, namely the Authentic Leadership Inventory (ALI), consisting of 14 items to measure perceived authentic leadership dimensions, and a 9-item Innovative Work Behaviour scale to measure employees' innovative work behaviour. The reliability of the instruments was confirmed through a pilot study and actual data analysis, with Cronbach's alpha values indicating strong internal consistency (ALI: pilot $\alpha = .93$, actual $\alpha = .91$; IWB: pilot $\alpha = .95$, actual $\alpha = .94$), demonstrating that the instruments were highly reliable and appropriate for this study context. All variables were measured using self-reported responses. This approach is appropriate as the study focuses on employees' perspectives of leadership and their own innovative work behaviour. Prior research supports the use of self-reports for measuring innovative work behaviour, showing consistency with supervisory ratings [22]. The data was then analysed using simple linear regression.

3. Results and Discussion

Prior to the regression analysis, data screening procedures were conducted to ensure the absence of missing data and outliers, and to assess the normality of the dataset. The results indicated that the data met the assumptions of simple linear regression, and were therefore considered suitable for further analysis. The sample comprised manufacturing employees in Penang with a relatively young profile (mean = 32.15, standard deviation = 5.98), with most of whom had tertiary-level education and held mid- to senior-level positions. The majority had between one to five years of working experience under their current supervisor, indicating sufficient interaction with their current supervisor to evaluate leadership behaviours and their own innovative work behaviour. Then, simple linear regression was conducted to examine the predictive effect of each dimension of perceived authentic leadership on innovative work behaviour among manufacturing employees. The results indicate that all dimensions significantly influence innovative work behaviour, highlighting the role of leadership behaviours in shaping employees' innovation-related actions within the manufacturing context.

To begin with, the self-awareness dimension was found to significantly predict innovative work behaviour ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$), as shown in Table 1. This indicates that employees who perceive their leaders as being more aware of their own values, strengths, and limitations are more likely to engage in innovative work behaviour. In manufacturing environments, where work processes are highly standardised and performance is closely monitored, employees often operate within strict procedural boundaries that emphasise accuracy and precision. Therefore, in such environments, employees may become more cautious and less willing to engage in experimentation or idea generation due to fear of errors [23]. However, when leaders are perceived as self-aware, their openness in acknowledging mistakes and engaging in reflective behaviour helps reduce employees' fear of negative consequences of their innovative actions [24]. This shifts employees' cognitive appraisal of risk, making innovative actions appear less threatening within a structured environment. As a result, employees are more likely to feel psychologically safe to express new ideas and engage in proactive problem-solving behaviours, even in high-precision manufacturing settings [25].

Similarly, internalised moral perspective was found to significantly predict innovative work behaviour ($\beta = 0.41, p < 0.001$). This suggests that employees' perceptions of their leaders' consistency in acting in accordance with their internal ethical values shape employees' innovative work behaviour. In manufacturing environments, where performance pressures and strict KPIs often emphasise efficiency and output, leaders may face pressure to prioritise operational demands over ethical considerations. However, leaders with a high internalised moral perspective may consistently demonstrate strong moral values and fairness, which signals that decisions are guided by stable ethical principles rather than situational pressures. This ethical consistency enhances employees' trust and encourages them to share ideas, take initiative, and engage in innovative work behaviour, as they are more likely to believe that their contributions will be treated fairly and supported by their leaders.

Relational transparency also significantly predicted innovative work behaviour ($\beta = 0.28, p < 0.001$). This demonstrates that employees' perception of their leaders' openness in sharing information and expressing their true thoughts and intentions contributes to greater employee engagement in innovative work behaviour. In manufacturing organisations in Penang, employees work in highly structured environments characterised by strict procedures, quality standards, and interdependent workflows. From the employees' perspective, engaging in innovative behaviour may involve uncertainty regarding acceptable risk levels, tolerance for errors, and the consequences of deviating from established processes [26]. Although innovation requires experimentation and trial-and-error learning, employees may not always be certain about the boundaries of acceptable innovation. When employees perceive their leaders as open and transparent in communication, this helps reduce such uncertainty by clarifying expectations related to innovation-related actions. This perceived clarity strengthens employees' confidence to share ideas, propose improvements, and experiment without excessive fear of negative evaluation. As a result, relational transparency fosters a more supportive environment for idea sharing and collaborative problem-solving. This is particularly important in manufacturing settings, where continuous improvement often relies on cross-functional input [27].

In addition, balanced processing showed a significant positive effect on innovative work behaviour ($\beta = 0.39, p < 0.001$). The finding suggests that when manufacturing employees perceive leaders as considering diverse viewpoints before making decisions, they become more willing to contribute ideas despite existing hierarchical structures. This may be particularly important in Malaysian manufacturing settings, where decision-making is often top-down, and employees may have limited opportunities to voice suggestions despite being closely involved in day-to-day operational processes [28]. In this context, leaders who actively seek and consider multiple viewpoints signal that employee input is valued regardless of hierarchical position. This perception helps reduce structural barriers and encourages employees, particularly front-line operators and middle-level staff, to share ideas related to process improvements and operational inefficiencies [29]. In addition, balanced processing supports cross-functional collaboration in manufacturing organisations where departments often operate in silos [30]. When leaders consider inputs across units, employees are more likely to engage in knowledge sharing beyond functional boundaries, facilitating collective problem-solving and enhancing innovative work behaviour [27].

Overall, the findings indicate that all the dimensions of perceived authentic leadership significantly contribute to innovative work behaviour among manufacturing employees. This suggests that employees' perceptions of their leaders play a significant role in shaping their engagement in innovative work behaviour. While each dimension operates through different behavioural mechanisms, including enhancing confidence, building trust, reducing ambiguity, and encouraging inclusive decision-making, these findings collectively highlight the importance of

perceived authentic leadership in supporting employee innovation. In the context of manufacturing environments characterised by procedural rigour, hierarchical structures, and interdependent processes, such leadership behaviours may help employees navigate constraints while remaining engaged in innovation-related activities. These findings underscore the need for organisations to foster leadership practices that not only emphasise operational efficiency but also support employees' willingness to contribute ideas and participate in continuous improvement.

Table 1

Summary of Simple Linear Regression Results for Dimensions of Perceived Authentic Leadership on Innovative Work Behaviour

Variables	β	t-value	Sig.
Self-awareness	0.45	6.10	<0.001
Internalised moral perspective	0.41	5.53	<0.001
Relational transparency	0.28	3.59	<0.001
Balanced processing	0.39	5.14	<0.001

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study examined the influence of individual dimensions of perceived authentic leadership on innovative work behaviour among manufacturing employees in Penang, Malaysia. The findings indicate that all four dimensions (self-awareness, internalised moral perspective, relational transparency, and balanced processing) significantly predict innovative work behaviour, supporting all proposed hypotheses and confirming that the study objective has been achieved. These findings demonstrate how leadership behaviours can be leveraged to enhance employees' engagement in innovation within structured manufacturing environments.

From a practical perspective, the study provides a cost-effective and efficient approach for manufacturing organisations to enhance innovative work behaviour through leadership development rather than relying solely on technological investments. Specifically, human resource practitioners and managers can design targeted training and development programmes that focus on strengthening key leadership behaviours, such as openness in communication, ethical consistency, and inclusive decision-making. By embedding these behaviours into leadership practices, organisations can create a work environment that encourages employees to contribute ideas and engage in innovation, even in hierarchical and process-driven settings.

Nevertheless, this study is subject to certain limitations. The use of purposive and snowball sampling may limit the generalisability of the findings, as the sample may not fully represent the broader manufacturing workforce in Penang. Future research is encouraged to adopt more representative sampling approaches and extend the study across different industries or organisational contexts to further validate and expand these findings.

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