

ISRG Journal of Economics, Business & Management (ISRGJEBM)



ISRG PUBLISHERS

Abbreviated Key Title: Isrg J Econ Bus Manag

ISSN: 2584-0916 (Online)

Journal homepage: <https://isrgpublishers.com/isrgjebm/>

Volume – II Issue - II (March – April) 2024

Frequency: Bimonthly



The effect of Authentic Leadership on Corporate Social Responsibility in Vietnam.

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| Received: 30.03.2024 | Accepted: 01.04.2024 | Published: 04.04.2024

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the relationship between authentic leadership and corporate social responsibility of employees in Vietnam. The analyses are based on data collected through an online survey of 321 gen Z employees from various Vietnam companies nationwide through Google Form. Through quantitative research and using SPSS24 and Smart-PLS to analyze, the results indicate that authentic leadership has a positive influence on corporate social responsibility. The more authentic leaders are, the more organizations contribute to society. The findings not only aim to explore the significance of authentic leadership in social responsibility of companies, but also suggest implications for organizations and management. By enhancing leadership qualities as well as deepening commitment to the society, companies can gain a wide variety of benefits.

Key Words: Authentic leadership, corporate social responsibility, Smart-PLS, Vietnam.

1. Introduction

In the rapidly globalizing world, the role of businesses in society has undergone a significant transformation. According to Minh et al. (2018), beyond contributing to economic growth and employment, businesses are increasingly expected to address pressing social and environmental challenges. This shift in expectations has led to the rise of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), a concept that encapsulates the responsibilities of businesses towards various stakeholders in society.

However, CSR is not a one-size-fits-all concept. It is highly contextual and contingent, varying across different countries and cultures. In the context of Vietnam, a developing country experiencing rapid economic growth and societal changes, the nature of CSR is influenced by specific institutional factors such as

tradition, political governance, and modernity (Minh et al., 2018). For instance, Khuong et al. (2021) highlighted the importance of stakeholder involvement in shaping CSR programmes in Vietnam. Furthermore, real-life examples of CSR initiatives in Vietnam, as documented by Ameln (2019), provided valuable insights into how businesses are navigating the complex landscape of CSR in the country.

One key aspect that can shape the practice of CSR in a particular context is leadership. Authentic leadership, characterized by self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and an internalized moral perspective (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Avolio et al., 2004; Gardner et al., 2005), can play a pivotal role in driving CSR initiatives. However, the relationship between authentic

leadership and CSR, particularly in the Vietnamese context, is an area that warrants further exploration.

This paper aims to delve into this relationship, shedding light on how authentic leadership can influence the practice of CSR in Vietnam, and how this, in turn, can contribute to sustainable development and enhance corporate reputation. The insights gleaned from this exploration can provide valuable guidance for businesses striving to navigate the complex landscape of CSR in Vietnam.

2. Literature review

• Authentic leadership

In the past ten years, authentic leadership has gained popularity and is gaining interest from scholars and practitioners alike (Gill and Caza 2018). Through identification, empowerment, growth, and promotion of followers' potential, leaders who uphold ethics and authenticity have an impact on their followers (George 2003; Luthans and Avolio 2009). Four main characteristics of authentic leadership have been identified by literature: self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Avolio et al., 2004; Gardner et al., 2005). According to Gardner et al. (2005), self-awareness requires authentic leaders to have a profound understanding of both their own advantages and disadvantages as well as how their actions affect other people. Being able to control one's own behavior in accordance with one's own moral principles and standards rather than caving in to outside pressure is known as an internal ethical stance. As a result, authentic leaders make choices and behave in ways that are genuinely compatible with their beliefs (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al., 2005). Before reaching a final decision, leaders engage in balanced processing, wherein they theologically evaluate all pertinent information (Walumbwa et al., 2008). According to Gardner et al. (2005), they also listen to opposing points of view and refrain from forcing their own opinions on others. In their interactions with subordinates, authentic leaders demonstrate lymphatic expression by being open and honest about their feelings. This promotes cooperation, trust, and teamwork (Gardner et al., 2005).

• Corporate social responsibility

CSR has been a topic of scholarly research for many years; however, there is still no consensus definition. According to a research by Dahlsrud (2008) on 37 definitions of CSR from various sources, the author concludes that CSR encompasses social, environmental, economic, voluntary, and stakeholder issues of the business.

However, Dahlsrud's (2008) study has overlooked a significant number of CSR definitions (Sarkar and Searcy, 2016). Therefore, Sarkar and Searcy (2016) have conducted a study of 110 CSR definitions from various sources to gain an overview of the definition from 1953 to 2014. According to the authors, CSR comprises 6 main dimensions: economic, social, ethical, stakeholders, voluntary, and sustainability. The economic dimension indicates that economic objectives remain central to company activities, but profit pursuit should be within legal boundaries. The social dimension refers to the need for businesses to accept and take responsibility for the consequences of their activities, along with attaching economic responsibility to certain obligations to help improve society. The ethical dimension includes fairness, transparency, responsibility, and reputation maintenance in an organization's activities. The stakeholders

dimension of CSR extends to both internal and external entities that the company is responsible for. These are individuals or groups who can influence or be influenced by the business (Clarkson, 1995), including citizens, local communities, employees and their families, competitors, suppliers, and customers. The voluntary dimension suggests that complying with legal regulations is not enough, companies need to go beyond the minimum requirements of those regulations. In other words, businesses need to engage in voluntary activities or other social roles. The sustainability dimension aims for a balance between a company's economic activities and social, environmental activities. Moreover, sustainability involves not only the company's concern for the environment at the present time but also concerns the welfare of future generations. Hence, Sarkar and Searcy (2016) conclude that CSR involves companies primarily taking responsibility for their core economic responsibilities and voluntarily exceeding the minimum level required by law to ensure that they act ethically, consider the impact of their activities on stakeholders, and contribute to global sustainability.

• Effect of authentic leadership on corporate social responsibility

Many studies indicate the positive impact of leadership styles on CSR activities, such as ethical leadership (Kim and Thapa, 2018), transformational leadership (Khan et al., 2017; Manzoor et al., 2019), etc. However, research on the relationship between authentic leadership and CSR is limited in terms of quantity and context, thus requiring further empirical research to generalize the result.

Some scholars suggest that authentic leadership positively affects CSR (Chaudhary, 2021; Iqbal et al., 2018). Organizations with authentic leaders incline to demonstrate positivity, morality, honesty, reliability, and transparency in their interactions with stakeholders, leading to stronger dedication to fulfilling their CSR responsibilities (Fox et al., 2020). Specifically, authentic leaders are compassionate, they are also active listeners so they thoroughly consider stakeholders before making decisions and endeavor to assist those in need of their support (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). As a result, they direct firms to engage more actively in CSR activities to meet those needs. Hence, Iqbal et al. (2018) suggest that businesses led by authentic leaders will be more actively involved in CSR activities. We therefore hypothesize that:

Hypothesis: Authentic leadership positively affects corporate social responsibility.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

Throughout this study, the methods used are quantitative research methods and qualitative research methods, which focus primarily on quantitative research methods. With the qualitative research method, the research was conducted through a Google Form and sent to a target group between the ages of 18-25 years old. The survey was conducted from December 2023 to January 2024. The authors received 321 valid results. According to the result, 76.6% of respondents are female; 217 respondents are between the age 18-20 years old; Most of the respondents have bachelor degree, which are account for 91.3%, 50.8% and 38.3% of respondents work in small and medium scale company, respectively, the remaining 10.9% are working at the large scale company. Finally, 32.1% of respondents doing the research have been working for

their current company for less than 3 months, 26.5% have been working for 3 to 6 months.

3.2. Measure

The scale is carefully filtered through previously published reliable domestic and foreign scale samples. The scale used is a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). All measures were obtained using a self-administered questionnaire.

Authentic leadership (AL): AL was measured using the 16 items of the AL Questionnaire (ALQ) developed by Neider and Schriesheim (2011). Sample items include: 'My leader solicits feedback for improving his/her dealings with others', 'My supervisor says exactly what he or she means'.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): CSR was measured using the 6 items developed by Mohr and Webb (2005), Yadav et al (2018). Sample items include: 'The organization makes effort to reduce the pollution from its factories/ departments', 'The organization makes effort to regularly make donations to charity'.

Table 1: Items, Outer loading and VIF value

Item	Question	Outer loading	VIF	Source
AL - Authentic leadership				
AL1	My leader solicits feedback for improving his/her dealings with others.	0.795	2.617	Neider and Schriesheim (2011)
AL2	My leader clearly states what he/she means.	0.771	2.685	
AL3	My leader shows consistency between his/her beliefs and actions.	0.783	2.542	
AL4	My leader asks for ideas that challenge his/her core beliefs.	0.769	2.637	
AL5	My leader describes accurately the way that others view his/her abilities.	0.806	3.086	
AL6	My leader admits mistakes when they occur.	0.785	2.411	
AL7	My leader uses his/her core beliefs to make decisions.	0.667	1.9	
AL8	My leader carefully listens to alternative perspectives before reaching a conclusion.	0.832	3.321	
AL9	My leader shows that he/she understands his/her	0.805	2.2722	

	strengths and weaknesses.			
AL10	My leader openly shares information with others.	0.774	2.477	
AL11	My leader resists pressures on him/her to do things contrary to his/her beliefs.	0.565	1.575	
AL12	My leader objectively analyzes relevant data before making a decision.	0.815	3.063	
AL13	My leader is clearly aware of the impact he/she has on others.	0.751	2.897	
AL14	My leader expresses his/her ideas and thoughts clearly to others.	0.803	2.897	
AL15	My leader is guided in his/her actions by internal moral standards.	0.803	2.761	
AL16	My leader encourages others to voice opposing points of view. (B)	0.806	2.582	
CSR - Corporate Social Responsibility				
CSR1	The organization makes effort to reduce the pollution from its factories/ departments	0.849	2.458	Mohr and Webb (2005), Yadav et al. (2018)
CSR2	The organization makes effort to reuse materials and products in providing new products/services	0.815	2.461	
CSR3	The organization makes effort to conserve water and energy	0.787	2.351	
CSR4	The organization makes effort to regularly make donations to charity	0.796	2.703	
CSR5	The organization makes effort to recognition of employees for their volunteer work in the community	0.817	2.875	

CSR6	The organization makes effort to donate some of their products to people in need			
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3.3. Analysis technique

Collected data are processed and analyzed using SPSS 24 and SmartPLS 4.0. Data were collected and analyzed to test the reliability and validity of the scale by combining convergent and discriminant validity. The study was tested using the SEM model.

4. Result and discussion

4.1. Descriptive Statistic

The data was analyzed using the SmartPLS 4.0 program. Demographic information about the respondents, such as their age, gender, level of education, company size, and work experience, was also collected for additional research. Using SPSS's frequency analysis, descriptive statistics of consumer demographic data were conducted.

Table 2: Demographic profile

Attribute	Value	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std.
Age	18-20	217	67.6	2.44	1.01
	21-25	104	32.4		
Gender	Male	75	23.4	2.48	1.01
	Female	246	76.6		
Level of education	Higher education	18	5.6	2.5	1.01
	Bachelor	293	91.3		
	College	4	1.2		
	Vocational	0	0		
	Below vocational level	6	1.9		
Company size (employees)	Small	163	50.8	2.5	1.01
	Medium	123	38.3		
	Large	35	10.9		

Work experience	Below 3 months	103	32.1	2.5	1.01
	From 3 months to below 6 months	85	26.5		
	From 6 months to below 12 months	61	19		
	From 1 year to below 3 years	51	15.9		
	Above 3 years	21	6.5		

4.1. Convergent Validity

Convergence validity refers to the extent to which similar constructs converge towards or correlate with one another to validate different measures (Wang, French & Clay, 2015). In this context, the outer loading of each indicator under each construct has been examined using SmartPLS 4. The standard and satisfactory value of loading is suggested to be between 0.4 and 0.7 whereas a value below 0.40 is considered unacceptable and to be eliminated from the model in Smart PLS. Contrarily, the loading with values below 0.7 may not be deleted, if deleting it does not affect the value of composite reliability and average variance extracted.

In the analysis of this study, most of the items are above 0.7. There are some items which are AL7, AL11 and CSR6 between 0.4 and 0.7. We decide to eliminate these items to improve CA and CR value. The particular result shows in table 1.

In step 2, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability and AVE values were tested. Traditionally, to determine the internal consistency of all the items and constructs, Cronbach's alpha was used. However, this has several shortcomings, to overcome which researchers suggested using composite reliability besides Cronbach's alpha to effectively measure convergent validity. Usually, both Cronbach's alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR) between 0.7 and 0.9 is satisfactory (Hair et al, 2019). Below this range, CA and CR values between 0.6 and 0.7 are also acceptable in descriptive research and exploratory research. However, a value of 0.95 is considered an invalid measure of construct. Besides these, an AVE value of over 0.5 indicates an acceptable measure of convergent validity.

According to our analysis, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability and AVE values meet the expectation. The particular result shows in Table 3.

Table 3: Measurement validity and construct reliability

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	AVE
AL	0.945	0.948	0.585
CSR	0.872	0.874	0.661

4.1. Discriminant Validity

Several thresholds have been defined for Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT), such as 0.85 by Clark and Watson (2016) and 0.9 by Henseler et al. (2015). However, Table 4 shows that all correlation values are less than the lowest predefined threshold of 0.85, reflecting an acceptable level of HTMT as a criterion to assess discriminant validity. The particular result shows in Table 4.

Table 4: HTMT value

	AL	CSR
AL		
CSR	0.426	

According to Hair et al. (2019), if the VIF is 5 or above, the model has a very high possibility of multicollinearity. The VIF values in our research are below 5, which are acceptable. Table 1 shows the particular result.

4.1. Assessment of structure model

The standard bootstrapping procedure was applied in this research to ascertain the significance of the path coefficients with 5000 bootstrap samples (Hair et al. 2011; Ringle et al. 2012). To evaluate the quality of the inner model, path coefficient, effect size, coefficient of determination, and cross-validated redundancy were applied as suggested by Hair et al. (2011).

In order to understand the significant effects of the selected determinants, SmartPLS 4 opens an avenue for the users to produce t-value, p-value, and standard error. The calculation of the p-value is done at a 95 percent confidence level due to its acceptability in the research.

R² explains how much effect the independent variable has on the dependent variables. Academic researchers suggest observing the role of thumb in identifying the effects, for example, 0.75 (substantial), 0.50 (moderate), and 0.25 (weak), respectively (Ringle et al., 2011). The resulting coefficient of determination of CSR is 0.156, which proves that AL explains 15.6% of the variation in the CSR variable.

According to the suggestions of Cohen (1988), f² values of 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 represent small, moderate, strong effects of the construct respectively. f² between two variables in our research result in 0.185, which means AL has moderate effect on CSR.

As shown in Table 5, hypothesis H1, which asserts a positive relationship between AL and CSR was supported using PLS output with a significant relationship (B = 0.391, t = 11.381, p-value = 0.000) found between these two variables.

Table 5: Structural model result

Hypothesis	Effect	β	Standard error	T-test	p-value	Result
H1	AL → CSR	0.402	0.051	7.793	0.000	Supported

4.2. Discussion

The result indicates that authentic leadership positively influences CSR, which is consistent with the findings of Iqbal et al. (2018) and Chaudhary (2021). Authentic leaders will encourage organizations to engage in activities that demonstrate social responsibility. Within the organization, authentic leaders will promote CSR by satisfying the needs and expectations of employees, while also fostering positive behaviors in the workplace such as promoting employee engagement, affective commitment, reducing turnover intention, etc. (Khan et al., 2017; Oh and Oh, 2017; Ribeiro et al., 2018). In terms of external issues, authentic leaders, which are characterized by transparency, empathy, and concern for the well-being of the community, may guide organizations to actively demonstrate their social roles through activities such as philanthropy, environmental protection, resource conservation, legal compliance, ethical and responsible operation, etc. Therefore, by cultivating authentic qualities in managers, organizations will contribute to addressing both internal and external problems leading to boost reputation, win public trust, create competitive advantages, and other economic benefits (Webber, 2023).

5. Conclusion and implications

This research examines the effect of authentic leadership on CSR. A positive correlation between authentic leadership and CSR has been found through analyzing data from 321 employees in Vietnam. Authentic leaders who possess ethical, transparent, compassionate traits and strategic vision tend to encourage more intense forms of social responsibility. Specifically, regarding internal CSR, authentic leadership guarantees a fair, secure, and courteous workplace for employees. In terms of external CSR, authentic leadership is beneficial by encouraging organizations to involve in community and environmental-focused initiatives.

Based on the finding, we propose some practical implications for managers in particular and organizations in general:

With regard to business managers, they should enhance awareness of the importance of authentic leadership. This can be accomplished by reading books and articles about authentic leaders, drawing lessons from their experiences. as well as discussing with other executives about the value of authentic leadership for CSR. They can also take part in seminars, offline or online training courses on authentic leadership to increase their knowledge, comprehension, and experience. Specifically, to help them develop genuine leadership traits, individuals should enroll in training courses run by respectable organizations or work with private coaches. Besides, by participating in online forums or support groups related to authentic leadership, they can also approach a variety of knowledge sources. Leaders can begin putting authentic leadership into practice in their organizations by providing an environment that is honest, open, and trustworthy for their employees, encouraging them to volunteer and give back to the community, and identifying and rewarding staff members who exhibit authentic traits. However, leaders who possess knowledge

and comprehension of authentic leadership may not necessarily be able to implement this approach in a real-world setting. Therefore, they must regularly assess themselves in order to track their own development of authentic qualities, via some suggested tool such as Authentic Leadership Inventory, LMX, and MLQ models. Additionally, to obtain the most accurate viewpoint, leaders should also conduct surveys, interviews, and ask for feedback about their leadership style from subordinates, superiors, and staff members.

Regarding organizations, they should incorporate CSR into operations and business processes by integrating CSR into development strategies. Companies must have measurable, specific CSR objectives. It is also critical to emphasize and improve communication about the CSR initiatives both internally and externally through sharing the business's social responsibility initiatives on websites, social media, and other channels of communication. In addition to communication campaigns, creating and planning events to foster awareness of staff members and the public about the CSR activities is also crucial. Some social programs and activities include volunteering programs for the elderly and orphaned children, environmental protection initiatives, support for nonprofit organizations, etc. can encourage employee participation and enhance a company's reputation as responsible citizens and corporations, and fulfill CSR objectives. Furthermore, companies must monitor and assess the results of their CSR initiatives, and they should incorporate CSR reports into their annual or sustainability reports. Final implication is that companies should create policies that motivate executives to adopt CSR. Companies ought to create guidelines that encourage executives to take part in social responsibility initiatives. Encouragement by itself, though, is insufficient; companies must provide leaders with the financial and human resources they need to carry out CSR activities. Besides, policies that honor and commend authentic leaders who have successfully implemented CSR also provide a strong incentive to keep up their excellent job.

There are still many obstacles and difficulties in implementing aforementioned regulations since adopting them to every Vietnamese business demands more thorough and rigorous investigation for validation. Nonetheless, these policies can be considered by companies to put into practice in order to boost productivity, build prestige, and retain talents.

Despite fulfilling the research goals, there are still some limitations. Due to the limited sample size and the fact that the majority of the data included in the study came from workers in the northern area, the research sample's representativeness was low. Furthermore, this study exclusively makes use of quantitative research techniques, such as data analysis and surveys. Although this approach is easy to use for analysis and yields clear conclusions about the links between variables, it might not offer a deeper understanding of the experiences of employees in the workplace. Employees in diverse businesses are also supervised by and collaborate with a variety of leaders, each of whom has a unique style of leadership, but this study only investigates the effect of authentic leadership style; thus, more research is required to analyze how alternative leadership philosophies, like authoritarian or democratic, affect workers. Besides, in order to extend the research topic and improve the generalizability of the findings, further studies can take the current work as a strong starting point and enlarge the research sample by interviewing a variety of participants at various points in time. In addition, qualitative research techniques such as individual or group

interviews can be used in future studies to learn more about the research subjects and identify other variables that affect how much a CSR program is impacted by an authentic leadership style. Finally, investigating other leadership styles with authentic leadership and CSR might deepen and widen research in this field.

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