# Unlocking Auditor Potential: How Authentic Leadership Drives Work Engagement Through Meaning and Safety

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## Abstract

This research is in the realm of management accounting with a focus on external auditor behavior as part of an organization's management control system. The purpose of this study is to analyze the effect of authentic leadership on auditor work engagement through the mediating role of work meaning and psychological safety. This study was conducted on 130 external auditors working in various public accounting firms in East Java. A quantitative approach was used in this study with the Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis technique. The results of the study indicate that authentic leadership has a significant effect on work meaning and psychological safety. These two mediating variables are then proven to have a positive effect on auditor work engagement. These findings provide theoretical contributions in expanding the management accounting literature, especially in the context of the influence of leadership behavior on psychological outcomes and non-financial performance of auditors. Practically, these results serve as an important reference for audit firm management in building a more authentic and supportive work culture in order to improve the performance and engagement of audit professionals. The conclusion of this study emphasizes the importance of authentic leadership as a managerial strategy to strengthen the quality of human resources in the audit sector.

Keywords: external auditor, psychological safety, work engagement, authentic leadership, meaning of work

## Abstrak

Penelitian ini berada dalam ranah akuntansi manajemen dengan fokus pada perilaku auditor eksternal sebagai bagian dari sistem pengendalian manajemen suatu organisasi. Tujuan dari penelitian ini

adalah untuk menganalisis pengaruh kepemimpinan autentik terhadap keterikatan kerja auditor melalui peran mediasi makna kerja dan keselamatan psikologis. Penelitian ini dilakukan terhadap 130 auditor eksternal yang bekerja di berbagai kantor akuntan publik di Jawa Timur. Pendekatan kuantitatif digunakan dalam penelitian ini dengan teknik analisis Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan autentik berpengaruh signifikan terhadap makna kerja dan keselamatan psikologis. Kedua variabel mediasi ini kemudian terbukti berpengaruh positif terhadap keterikatan kerja auditor. Temuan ini memberikan kontribusi teoritis dalam memperluas literatur akuntansi manajemen, terutama dalam konteks pengaruh perilaku kepemimpinan terhadap hasil psikologis dan kinerja non-keuangan auditor. Secara praktis, hasil ini berfungsi sebagai referensi penting bagi manajemen kantor audit dalam membangun budaya kerja yang lebih autentik dan suportif guna meningkatkan kinerja dan keterikatan profesional audit. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya kepemimpinan autentik sebagai strategi manajerial untuk memperkuat kualitas sumber daya manusia di sektor audit.

Kata kunci: auditor eksternal, keselamatan psikologis, keterlibatan kerja, kepemimpinan autentik, makna kerja

## Introduction

The role of external auditors is increasingly strategic in ensuring the reliability of financial reports and the integrity of corporate governance. However, the dynamics of stressful work, tight time targets, and high professional expectations often have a negative impact on the psychological condition and work engagement of auditors.[1],[2],[3],[4]. In the context of modern

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[1] Catarina Santos Henriques and António Samagaio, "Impact of Stress, Job Satisfaction, Work–Life Balance and Telework on Auditors' Job Performance: A PLS-SEM and FsQCA Approach," Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance ahead-of-p, no. ahead-of-print (January 1, 2024), https://doi.org/10.1108/JOEPP-03-2024-0135.

[2] Huanmin Yan and Shengwen Xie, "How Does Auditors' Work Stress Affect Audit Quality? Empirical Evidence from the Chinese Stock Market," China Journal of Accounting Research 9, no. 4 (2016): 305–19, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cjar.2016.09.001.

[3] Antonio Samagaio, Paulo Morais Francisco, and Teresa Felício, "The Relationship between Soft Skills, Stress and Reduced Audit Quality Practices," Review of Accounting and Finance 23, no. 3 (January 1, 2024): 353–74, https://doi.org/10.1108/RAF-06-2023-0186.

[4] Hamideh Asnaashari et al., "The Effect of Auditors' Work Stress and Client Participation on Audit Quality in the COVID-19 Era," Journal of Facilities Management 23, no. 2 (January 1, 2025): 181–208, https://doi.org/10.1108/JFM-01-2023-0005.

management accounting, attention is not only focused on financial aspects and efficiency, but also on non-financial dimensions such as work engagement, work meaningfulness, and psychological safety as important indicators of overall organizational performance. One relevant approach in this context is authentic leadership, a leadership style that emphasizes the values of honesty, transparency, and self-awareness. Authentic leadership is believed to be able to create a supportive work climate, build trust, and increase a sense of ownership in the work, which in turn can encourage deeper auditor involvement.[5].

Initial findings from observations and surveys of 30 external auditors in several Public Accounting Firms (KAP) in East Java showed that 63% of auditors felt that their work was less meaningful, 57% felt that leadership in the workplace provided less psychological support, and only 34% admitted to having a high level of work engagement. In-depth interviews also revealed that some auditors felt that they were only carrying out administrative tasks without feeling a significant contribution to organizational values. This phenomenon indicates a psychological gap in auditor management that has the potential to hinder work effectiveness and reduce audit quality. Although various studies have discussed the importance of leadership in improving employee performance, there are still few that specifically examine the relationship between authentic leadership and auditor work engagement through psychological mechanisms such as work meaning and psychological safety simultaneously.

A number of previous studies provide a strong foundation for exploring this topic.[6]found that authentic leadership increases psychological safety and employee engagement in the service sector.[7]shows that the meaning of work

[5] Omar Durrah et al., "Authentic Leadership Behaviors and Thriving at Work: Empirical Evidence From The Information Technology Industry in Australia," Psychological Reports 127, no. 4 (December 5, 2022): 1911–40, https://doi.org/10.1177/00332941221144601.

[6] Mahadih Kyambade et al., "Authentic Leadership and Performance of Public Servants in Tanzania Context: The Mediating Role of Motivation," International Journal of Public Leadership 20, no. 3/4 (January 1, 2024): 189–203, https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPL-03-2024-0031.

[7] Laura Klara Schoofs, Lucas Alexander Maunz, and Jürgen Glaser, "Multi-Level Effects of Authentic Leadership on Self-Actualization at Work – the Mediating Roles of Authentic Followership and

plays a mediator role in the influence of leadership on work engagement.[8]revealed that engagement increases when employees feel their leaders are honest and consistent with their values.[9]emphasizes the role of authentic leadership in building trust and psychological safety among internal auditors.[10]as a pioneer of authentic leadership theory, states that this leadership style is based on authentic values, integrity, and transparency in action. Unfortunately, studies that integrate all of these variables in the context of the external auditor profession are still very limited, especially in Indonesia. This is the literature gap that this study aims to fill, namely by building a model that links authentic leadership, work meaningfulness, psychological safety, and work involvement as a whole.

This study aims to examine the effect of authentic leadership on external auditors' work engagement by considering the mediating role of work meaning and psychological safety. Specifically, this study will examine whether the two psychological variables can bridge the positive effect of authentic leadership on auditors' work engagement in the context of their professional work. The theoretical benefits of this study are to enrich the literature on behavioral management accounting with a conceptual model that is relevant to modern organizational practices. Meanwhile, in practice, the results of this study can provide strategic input for audit firm leaders in designing more adaptive, humanistic, and value-based human resource management policies.

Based on the background, the hypotheses proposed in this study are as

Basic Psychological Need for Satisfaction," Current Psychology 43, no. 16 (2024): 14494–505, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-05480-6.

[8] Rupak Rauniar and Ray Cao, "An Empirical Study on the Role of Authentic Leadership in Strategic Agile Operations, Organizational Sustainability, and Business Performance," Global Journal of Flexible Systems Management, 2025, https://doi.org/10.1007/s40171-024-00432-w.

[9] Qi Zheng, Chuqing Dong, and Yafei Zhang, "When Relational Transparency Backfires: Examining the Various Impacts of Authentic Leadership on Employee Trust during the COVID-19 Pandemic," Corporate Communications: An International Journal 29, no. 3 (January 1, 2024): 430–50, https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-05-2023-0066.

[10] Bulent Uluturk, Elgiz Yilmaz Altuntas, and Pelin Hürmeriç, "Authentic Leadership, Motivating Language, Psychological Empowerment, and Work Engagement: A Serial Mediation Model," International Journal of Business Communication 62, no. 2 (January 21, 2024): 402–31, https://doi.org/10.1177/23294884231223521.

follows: (H1) Authentic Leadership has a positive effect on Work Engagement; (H2) Authentic Leadership has a positive effect on Work Meaningfulness; (H3) Authentic Leadership has a positive effect on Psychological Safety; (H4) Work Meaningfulness has a positive effect on Work Engagement; (H5) Psychological Safety has a positive effect on Work Engagement; (H6) Work Meaningfulness mediates the effect of Authentic Leadership on Work Engagement; and (H7) Psychological Safety mediates the effect of Authentic Leadership on Work Engagement.

## Theoritical Review

This research is based on two main complementary theoretical frameworks, namely Positive Organizational Behavior (POB)[11] as a grand theory, and Authentic Leadership Theory (ALT)[12] as a middle range theory. Positive Organizational Behavior Theory developed by[13] departs from a positive psychology approach in the organizational context, which emphasizes the importance of building positive psychological strengths such as hope, optimism, self-efficacy, and resilience. In the context of professional auditors who face high work pressure, this theory is relevant because it emphasizes that organizations managed with a positive approach will be better able to create a psychologically healthy, meaningful work environment that supports employee engagement. POB also states that positive leadership can shape deeper and more constructive work experiences for individuals, including increasing perceptions of the meaning of work and a sense of security in work.

As the main supporter, the middle level theory used in this study is the

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[11] Thanh D Nguyen et al., "Psychological Capital: A Literature Review and Research Trends," Asian Journal of Economics and Banking 8, no. 3 (January 1, 2024): 412–29, https://doi.org/10.1108/AJEB-08-2023-0076.

[12] William L Gardner et al., "Authentic Leadership Theory: The Case for and Against," The Leadership Quarterly 32, no. 6 (2021): 101495, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2021.101495.

[13] Fred Luthans, "The Need for and Meaning of Positive Organizational Behavior," Journal of Organizational Behavior 23, no. 6 (September 1, 2002): 695–706, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/job.165.

Authentic Leadership Theory (ALT) which was introduced by[14]. ALT explains that authentic leaders are those who have high self-awareness, behave consistently with internal moral values, are open in building interpersonal relationships, and are able to assess information objectively. These characteristics enable leaders to create a work climate that is transparent, ethical, and supports employee psychology. In the context of auditors, authentic leaders can build trust and a sense of psychological security that is important for auditors in carrying out their duties with integrity and full involvement. ALT also explains that authentic leadership has a direct influence on the emergence of work meaningfulness, namely the individual's perception that the work being done is important, valuable, and impactful. This combination of work meaning and security is what then triggers work engagement, namely emotional attachment and full commitment to work.

By combining Positive Organizational Behavior as a macro framework that explains the importance of positive behavior in organizations, and Authentic Leadership Theory as a micro framework that explains the process of individual psychological change in organizations, this study builds a conceptual model that connects authentic leadership, work meaning, psychological safety, and auditor work engagement. This model is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of behavioral-based management accounting science and provide a practical foundation in building a more supportive organizational culture and empowering external auditors.

**Authentic Leadership**

Authentic Leadership is a leadership style that emphasizes authenticity, moral integrity, transparency, and self-awareness of leaders in carrying out their roles.[15]. Authentic leaders are believed to be able to build strong interpersonal relationships and mutual trust with their team members through open

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[14] Bruce J Avolio and William L Gardner, "Authentic Leadership Development: Getting to the Root of Positive Forms of Leadership," The Leadership Quarterly 16, no. 3 (2005): 315–38, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.03.001.

[15] Avolio and Gardner.

communication and consistency of values. Authentic Leadership Theory explains that authentic leaders not only focus on achieving organizational targets, but also play an active role in the personal and professional development of their subordinates. In the context of complex work such as the auditor profession, the presence of authentic leaders is important because they are able to create a psychologically safe work climate, while encouraging the perception that the auditor's work has value and meaningful contributions. Several studies have shown that authentic leadership contributes to creating working conditions that support employee engagement emotionally and cognitively.[16].

**Work Meaningfulness**

Work meaningfulness is defined as an individual's perception that the work they do has a purpose, makes a positive contribution, and is aligned with personal values.[17]. The theory of work meaning states that when individuals perceive their work as meaningful, they will be more intrinsically motivated and exhibit higher work engagement. In a professional work environment such as an auditor, whose work is often repetitive and stressful, task meaning becomes important for maintaining persistence, integrity, and job satisfaction. Previous research has shown that work meaning acts as a strong mediating variable between leadership style and work engagement.[18]Authentic leaders play a major role in helping employees find relevance and value in their work through recognition, honest feedback, and alignment between the organization's vision and personal goals.

**Psychological Safety**

Psychological safety is a condition in which individuals feel safe to

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[16] S. J Walumbwa, FO, Avolio, BJ, Gardner, WL, Wernsing, TS, & Peterson, "Authentic Leadership: Development and Validation of a Theory-Based Measure," Journal of Management 34, no. 1 (2008): 89–126, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206307308913.

[17] Akram Hatami, Aldona Glińska-Neweś, and Jan Hermes, "Experiencing Meaningful Work through Corporate Volunteering: The Other as a Source of Meaning," Humanistic Management Journal, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1007/s41463-024-00186-8.

[18] Sneha Kandoth and Suraj Kushe Shekhar, "Employees' Intrinsic Motivation in Mediating the Relationship between Perceived Ambidextrous Organizational Culture and Innovative Behavior in the Indian IT Sector," The Learning Organization 32, no. 2 (January 1, 2025): 237–58, https://doi.org/10.1108/TLO-03-2024-0089.

express ideas, ask questions, raise concerns, and admit mistakes without fear of being punished or belittled.[19]. In the audit profession that demands high levels of accuracy and honesty, a sense of team safety is an important element to foster openness and effective communication. Psychological safety theory emphasizes that a supportive work environment free from interpersonal threats will facilitate engagement and innovation. Authentic leaders who are open and consistent will be better able to create this sense of psychological safety.[20]. In many studies, psychological safety has been shown to mediate the relationship between positive leadership style and work engagement, including in high-risk professions such as auditors.

**Work Engagement**

Work engagement is a positive psychological condition characterized by vigor, dedication, and full involvement (absorption) in work.[21]. Individuals who have high engagement are not only physically present at work, but also emotionally and cognitively attached to their work. The theory of work engagement states that a work environment that provides meaning, a sense of security, and support from leaders will increase employee engagement. In the audit profession, engagement is very important because it is related to audit quality, professional ethics, and resilience to external pressures. Recent studies confirm that work engagement is influenced by positive psychological conditions, including perceptions of leadership and the work

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[19] Maria Kassandrinou et al., "Employee Silence, Job Burnout and Job Engagement among Teachers: The Mediational Role of Psychological Safety," Health Psychology and Behavioral Medicine 11, no. 1 (December 31, 2023): 2213302, https://doi.org/10.1080/21642850.2023.2213302.

[20] Philip Hurst and Maria and Kavussanu, "Authentic Leadership and Well-Being in Sport: The Mediating Role of Psychological Safety and the Moderating Role of Interpersonal Violence," International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, nd, 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2025.2477163.

[21] Wilmar B Schaufeli, Arnold B Bakker, and Marisa Salanova, "The Measurement of Work Engagement With a Short Questionnaire: A Cross-National Study," Educational and Psychological Measurement 66, no. 4 (August 1, 2006): 701–16, https://doi.org/10.1177/0013164405282471.

environment.[22],[23],[24]. Therefore, auditor engagement can be significantly enhanced through authentic leadership-based interventions that foster meaning and security in work.

**Authentic Leadership and Work Engagement**

Authentic leadership has a significant influence on work engagement because of its characteristics which encourage honest, open interpersonal relationships based on high moral values.[25]. Authentic leaders create an environment that fosters trust and loyalty, which are the basis for employees' emotional and cognitive engagement in their work. In the context of auditors, authentic leadership plays a critical role in building a sense of belonging to the work, which in turn increases auditors' dedication, passion, and engagement. As emphasized by[26]Authentic leadership is directly positively correlated with work engagement through the creation of a meaningful work environment and moral support.

**Authentic Leadership and Work Meaningfulness**

Authentic leadership is also closely related to the emergence of work meaningfulness. Authentic leaders not only convey the organization's vision transparently, but also help employees understand how their work contributes to a larger purpose.[27]. When auditors feel that their work is valued and aligned

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[22] Fouzia Ashfaq et al., "Fueling Work Engagement through Sustainable Leadership: Examining Sequential Mediation of Perceived Organizational Support and Mental Health," Human Systems Management 44, no. 2 (March 1, 2025): 287–301, https://doi.org/10.3233/HSM-240065.

[23] Pedro Ferreira, Sofia Gomes, and João M Lopes, "The Effect of Psychosocial Working Conditions on Work Engagement and Burnout in European Communication Industry," Corporate Communications: An International Journal ahead-of-p, no. ahead-of-print (January 1, 2025), https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-10-2024-0178.

[24] Viet Quoc Cao and Chau Ngoc Thi and Dong, "The Mediating Role of Work Engagement in the Impact of Authentic Leadership and Organizational Justice on Employee Mental Health," Cogent Psychology 11, no. 1 (December 31, 2024): 2432740, https://doi.org/10.1080/23311908.2024.2432740.

[25] Qing (Ray) Cao et al., "Effects of Authentic Leadership, Behavioral Integrity, and Project Governance on Project Performance," Project Management Journal 55, no. 4 (February 19, 2024): 441–60, https://doi.org/10.1177/87569728241231936.

[26] Inmaculada Adarves-Yorno, "Authentic Leadership BT - Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance," ed. Ali Farazmand (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 359–65, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20928-9_2198.

[27] Lars Hansson, "Meaningfulness of Work BT - Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research," ed. Filomena Maggino (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 4211–13, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-17299-1_1757.

with their personal values, the perception of meaningful work will increase. The theory of meaningful work states that meaning is not always inherent in the work itself, but can be formed through valuable social interactions and inspiration from leaders.[28]. Therefore, authentic leadership functions as the main trigger for the emergence of perceptions of the importance of the role of individuals in the organization.

**Authentic Leadership and Psychological Safety**

Authentic leadership also plays a vital role in shaping psychological safety. Leaders who are open, transparent, and consistent in their behavior will create a work climate where employees feel safe to speak up, share ideas, or admit mistakes without fear of sanctions or negative judgment.[29]. In the context of audit work that places great emphasis on accuracy and accountability, psychological safety becomes crucial to maintaining honesty, courage in decision making, and open communication. Research[30]also showed that authentic leadership positively influences the sense of psychological safety in the team, which then increases work effectiveness.

**Work Meaningfulness and Work Engagement**

Meaningfulness of work has been shown to be one of the strongest predictors of work engagement. Employees who feel that their work is meaningful tend to demonstrate high levels of dedication, enthusiasm, and genuine involvement in the tasks at hand.[31]. According to the theory of intrinsic motivation, the perception of meaning becomes a source of psychological energy that drives individuals to work wholeheartedly. In the auditor profession, where

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[28] Sandrine Frémeaux and Benjamin Pavageau, "Meaningful Leadership: How Can Leaders Contribute to Meaningful Work?," Journal of Management Inquiry 31, no. 1 (January 20, 2020): 54–66, https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492619897126.

[29] Pouria Ataei et al., "Effect on Authentic Leadership on Innovation Performance of Agriculture Jahad Organization in Kerman Province: The Mediating Role of Interpersonal Trust and Collaborative Culture," Results in Engineering, 2025, 105002, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rineng.2025.105002.

[30] Uluturk, Yilmaz Altuntas, and Hürmeriç, "Authentic Leadership, Motivating Language, Psychological Empowerment, and Work Engagement: A Serial Mediation Model."

[31] Prabhjot Kaur and Amit Mittal, "Meaningfulness of Work and Employee Engagement: The Role of Affective Commitment," The Open Psychology Journal 13 (2020): 115–22, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2174/1874350102013010115.

work tends to be complex and stressful, the meaning of work becomes an important motivational support. Study[32] asserts that when individuals feel significance in their work, engagement increases substantially, regardless of pressure or workload.

## Psychological Safety and Work Engagement

Psychological safety provides an important basis for creating engagement in work. Psychological safety allows auditors to feel free to engage, innovate, and take an active role without fear of failure or negative judgment.[33]. This condition creates a healthy psychological space and facilitates deep work engagement. Previous research by[34] shows that psychological safety improves the quality of work relationships and strengthens affective commitment to work, which are key elements of work engagement. Thus, the more psychologically safe an auditor's work environment is, the greater the chances of authentic and sustained engagement.

## Work Meaningfulness as a Mediator of the Influence of Authentic Leadership on Work Engagement

Authentic Leadership is characterized by transparency, internal morale, balanced information processing, and high self-awareness.[35] Authentic leaders encourage the creation of work meaning through consistent communication of values and empowerment of employees. Work meaningfulness, which is the individual's perception that their work is valuable and aligned with their personal goals.[36], tend to thrive in an authentic leadership environment. Employees who feel their work is meaningful are more emotionally and

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[32] Eun-Jee Kim and Sunyoung Park, "Linking Work Meaningfulness, Engagement and Job Crafting to Career Commitment," Baltic Journal of Management 19, no. 5 (January 1, 2024): 601–21, https://doi.org/10.1108/BJM-02-2024-0077.

[33] Tammy McCausland, "Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace," Research-Technology Management 66, no. 2 (March 4, 2023): 56–58, https://doi.org/10.1080/08956308.2023.2164439.

[34] Mariana Pinho and Belinda Colston, "Perceptions of Fairness, Inclusion and Safety: The Differential Impact of Contrasting Experiences on Academics and Professional Services Staff," Journal of Management and Governance, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10997-024-09721-z.

[35] Zheng, Dong, and Zhang, "When Relational Transparency Backfires: Examining the Various Impacts of Authentic Leadership on Employee Trust during the COVID-19 Pandemic."

[36] Uluturk, Yilmaz Altuntas, and Hürmeriç, "Authentic Leadership, Motivating Language, Psychological Empowerment, and Work Engagement: A Serial Mediation Model."

cognitively engaged in their work, which is reflected in high work engagement.[37]. Thus, Work Meaningfulness becomes an important pathway that bridges the relationship between Authentic Leadership and Work Engagement. Research by[38]also showed that meaningfulness plays a significant mediating role in this relationship, where authentic leadership not only creates meaning, but also increases psychological engagement.

## Psychological Safety as a Mediator of the Influence of Authentic Leadership on Work Engagement

Psychological Safety refers to the belief that the work environment is safe to take interpersonal risks, such as speaking up or having an opinion without fear of being embarrassed or punished.[39]Authentic leadership characterized by openness and moral integrity creates a safe space for team members to express themselves. Authentic leaders provide emotional support and create a climate of trust that reinforces feelings of psychological safety.[40]. When employees feel psychologically safe, they tend to be more actively involved in their work because they dare to show initiative and creativity. Work engagement as a psychological condition characterized by enthusiasm, dedication, and absorption[41] is very likely to increase if the work environment is based on psychological safety. A study by[42]strengthens this mediation role, where

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[37] Kim and Park, "Linking Work Meaningfulness, Engagement and Job Crafting to Career Commitment."

[38] Kwasi Dartey-Baah, Latifa Issahaku, and Bridget Akwetey-Siaw, "Authentic Leadership and Employee Engagement: The Mediating Role of Employee Work Environment," Industrial and Commercial Training 57, no. 1 (January 1, 2025): 118–34, https://doi.org/10.1108/ICT-06-2024-0045.

[39] Rebecca Kechen Dong, Xiaomei Li, and "Banjo" Roxas Hernan, "Psychological Safety and Psychosocial Safety Climate in Workplace: A Bibliometric Analysis and Systematic Review towards a Research Agenda," Journal of Safety Research 91 (2024): 1–19, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsr.2024.08.001.

[40] Dana H Born, Marc Correa, and Bill George, "Authentic Leadership across Levels: Unlocking Global Potential," Organizational Dynamics, 2025, 101143, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2025.101143.

[41] Vítor Hugo Silva and Ana Patrícia Duarte, "The Role of Work Engagement and Psychological Safety in How Socially Responsible Human Resources Management Affects Employee Voice Behavior," International Journal of Organizational Analysis ahead-of-p, no. ahead-of-print (January 1, 2024), https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOA-09-2024-4820.

[42] Fazal Ur Rehman and Ali Zeb, "Investigating the Nexus between Authentic Leadership, Employees' Green Creativity, and Psychological Environment: Evidence from Emerging Economy," Environmental Science and Pollution Research 30, no. 49 (2023): 107746–58, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11356-023-29928-1.

psychological safety is proven to significantly link the positive effects of Authentic Leadership to the level of employee work engagement.

## Research Methods

This study uses a quantitative approach to test the relationship between variables that have been determined in the conceptual framework. The independent variable in this study is Authentic Leadership, while the dependent variable is Work Engagement. The two mediating variables identified in this study are Work Meaningfulness and Psychological Safety.

The subjects in this study were external auditors working at Public Accounting Firms (KAP) operating in East Java. The sampling technique was carried out purposively, with the criteria of auditors who have had at least one year of experience in external audit practice and are still actively working at KAP registered with the Indonesian Institute of Public Accountants (IAPI). The number of respondents successfully collected in this study was 130 external auditors.

The research instrument used was a closed questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale, which was compiled based on indicators from each construct. For the Authentic Leadership variable, indicators were used that were developed based on the construct of[43],[44] includes self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing. The Work Meaningfulness variable is measured through an individual's perception of the value and significance of the work they do. Psychological Safety is measured through the perception of safety in expressing oneself in the work environment. Meanwhile, Work Engagement is measured through three main dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption.

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[43] A. Vitasari, A., & Yustina, "The Link Between Authentic Leadership, Work Meaningfulness, and Work Engagement in Auditors," Accounting Analysis Journal 12, no. 1 (2023): 71–83, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15294/aaj.v12i1.63238.

[44] Richa Chaudhary and Chinmay Panda, "Authentic Leadership and Creativity," International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management 67, no. 9 (January 1, 2018): 2071–88, https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPPM-02-2018-0082.

The data collection process was carried out through the distribution of online and offline questionnaires to respondents who met the criteria. Before the analysis was carried out, the data was first tested for completeness, then the data cleaning stage was carried out to ensure the validity of the input.

The analysis technique used is Partial Least Square - Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the help of the latest version of SmartPLS software. The analysis begins with the evaluation of the measurement model (outer model), which includes convergent validity tests (Average Variance Extracted/AVE), construct reliability (Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha), and discriminant validity. Furthermore, a test is carried out on the structural model (inner model) to assess the strength of the relationship between constructs through the path coefficient value and its significance based on the bootstrapping test. In addition, a mediation analysis was conducted to test whether Work Meaningfulness and Psychological Safety significantly mediate the effect of Authentic Leadership on Work Engagement.

These research steps are systematically arranged so that they can be replicated by other researchers in a similar context. Replication can be done using similar research designs, tested instruments, and comparable populations and analysis techniques.

<div align="center"><b>Research Result</b></div>

**Descriptive Statistics**

A total of 130 external auditors who were respondents had varying demographic characteristics, with a dominant age of 25–35 years (65.4%) and work experience of more than 2 years (72.3%). The average overall score for the Authentic Leadership variable was 4.12; Work Meaningfulness of 4.06; Psychological Safety of 3.95; and Work Engagement of 4.18. This high average score indicates that respondents tend to give a positive assessment of their leaders' authentic leadership as well as a positive perception of the meaning of work and psychological safety, which is then reflected in high work engagement.

**Table 1**

**Outer Model Testing**

| Construct | Loading Factor | AVE | Composite Reliability |
|---|---|---|---|
| Authentic Leadership | > 0.70 | > 0.50 | > 0.70 |
| Work Meaningfulness | > 0.70 | > 0.50 | > 0.70 |
| Psychological Safety | > 0.70 | > 0.50 | > 0.70 |
| Work Engagement | > 0.70 | > 0.50 | > 0.70 |

Source; processed primary data (2025)

Evaluation of construct validity and reliability shows that all items have loading factor values above 0.70, AVE values above 0.50, and Composite Reliability (CR) values above 0.70. This indicates that the research instrument has adequate convergent validity and internal reliability. Discriminant validity was tested using the Fornell-Larcker and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) criteria, and all values met the requirements below 0.90, indicating that each construct is well distributed and does not overlap conceptually.

**Table 2**

**Inner Model Testing**

| Connection | Path Coefficient ($\beta$) | p-value | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| Authentic Leadership → Work Meaningfulness | 0.576 | < 0.001 | Significant |
| Authentic Leadership → Psychological Safety | 0.493 | < 0.001 | Significant |
| Work Meaningfulness → Work Engagement | 0.447 | < 0.001 | Significant |
| Psychological Safety → Work Engagement | 0.362 | < 0.001 | Significant |
| Authentic | 0.119 | > 0.05 | Not Significant |

| | |
|---|---|
| Leadership → Work Engagement | |

Source; processed primary data (2025)

The results of the path coefficient test show that Authentic Leadership has a significant effect on Work Meaningfulness ($\beta$ = 0.576; p < 0.001) and Psychological Safety ($\beta$ = 0.493; p < 0.001). Furthermore, Work Meaningfulness has a significant effect on Work Engagement ($\beta$ = 0.447; p < 0.001), as well as Psychological Safety on Work Engagement ($\beta$ = 0.362; p < 0.001). However, the direct effect of Authentic Leadership on Work Engagement is not significant ($\beta$ = 0.119; p > 0.05), which indicates a full mediation effect.

**Table 3**

**Mediation Testing**

| Mediation | Mediation Coefficient ($\beta$) | p-value | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| Authentic Leadership → Work Meaningfulness → Work Engagement | 0.258 | < 0.01 | Significant |
| Authentic Leadership → Psychological Safety → Work Engagement | 0.179 | < 0.01 | Significant |

Source; processed primary data (2025)

Mediation analysis using bootstrapping technique shows that Work Meaningfulness significantly mediates the relationship between Authentic Leadership and Work Engagement ($\beta$ = 0.258; p < 0.01). Similarly, Psychological Safety is proven to mediate the same relationship significantly ($\beta$ = 0.179; p < 0.01). Both variables function as a psychological bridge connecting authentic leadership with external auditor work engagement.

**Discussion**

**The Influence of Authentic Leadership on Work Meaningfulness**

The finding that Authentic Leadership has a significant effect on Work Meaningfulness ($\beta$ = 0.576; $p < 0.001$) strengthens the argument that authentic leaders are not only work directors, but also shapers of work meaning for their team members. Authentic leaders are characterized by self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced information processing, and strong internal morale.[45]. These characteristics create honest and reflective working relationships, where subordinates feel valued and understood, thus helping them find meaning in their work.[46].

Research by[47]showed that authentic leadership was positively correlated with perceptions of meaningful work through a stronger sense of calling and professional identity. In addition,[48]asserts that authentic leaders tend to build deep interpersonal relationships, allowing employees to internalize work values in a more personal and meaningful way.

**The Influence of Authentic Leadership on Psychological Safety**

Authentic Leadership also significantly increased Psychological Safety ($\beta$ = 0.493; $p < 0.001$), indicating that the presence of authentic leaders allows for the creation of a safe work climate and supports self-expression. According to[49], psychological safety allows individuals to take interpersonal risks without fear of negative consequences. Leaders who demonstrate empathy, consistency, and honesty create a safe space for dialogue, especially in a stressful profession like auditing.

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[45] Schoofs, Maunz, and Glaser, "Multi-Level Effects of Authentic Leadership on Self-Actualization at Work – the Mediating Roles of Authentic Followership and Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction."

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Research by[50]found that authentic leadership is critical to creating a work environment that eliminates fear and distrust. In addition, research[51]asserts that authentic leadership increases trust between teams and creates barrier-free communication channels, which ultimately strengthens a positive psychological climate.

**The Influence of Work Meaningfulness on Work Engagement**

The relationship between Work Meaningfulness and Work Engagement ($\beta = 0.447$; $p < 0.001$) strengthens the theory that work engagement grows from an individual's perception of meaning in their work. Individuals who understand the significance of the tasks they perform will be more motivated to show energy, commitment, and absorption in their work.[52] [53]classify sources of work meaning into four main domains: self-connection, unification, contribution, and individuation—all of which can be strengthened by leadership perceptions and work experiences.

Study[54]also identified work meaning as one of the main predictors of work engagement, stating that meaningful work experiences strengthen intrinsic motivation and expand individuals' capacity to work authentically. In fact, according to[55],meaningful work not only increases engagement but also strengthens long-term well-being.

**The Influence of Psychological Safety on Work Engagement**

Psychological Safety has a significant positive effect on Work Engagement

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[50] Florian M Artinger et al., "Coping with Uncertainty: The Interaction of Psychological Safety and Authentic Leadership in Their Effects on Defensive Decision Making," Journal of Business Research 190 (2025): 115240, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2025.115240.

[51] Ataei et al., "Effect on Authentic Leadership on Innovation Performance of Agriculture Jahad Organization in Kerman Province: The Mediating Role of Interpersonal Trust and Collaborative Culture."

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[53] Blake A Allan, "Task Significance and Meaningful Work: A Longitudinal Study," Journal of Vocational Behavior 102 (2017): 174–82, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2017.07.011.

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[55] Timo Meynhardt, Carolin Hermann, and Jessica Bardeli, "Connecting Value Creation for Society with Work Engagement: The Relevance of an Organization's Public Value as an Extension of the Job Characteristics Model," Current Psychology 43, no. 27 (2024): 23260–77, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-024-05922-9.

(β = 0.362; p < 0.001). When individuals feel psychologically safe, they are more open to taking initiatives, expressing ideas, and interacting actively without fear of being judged. This is very important in the audit profession which requires the courage to express professional opinions even in stressful situations.

Study by[56]shows that psychological safety is one of the main conditions in the work engagement model, along with meaningfulness and availability.[57]also explains that optimal engagement can only be achieved if individuals feel secure in their work roles. Recent research from[58]found that safety increases open communication, collaboration, and team learning, all of which strengthen work engagement.

**The Influence of Authentic Leadership on Work Engagement**

Although the direct effect between Authentic Leadership and Work Engagement is not significant (β = 0.119; p > 0.05), this actually shows the importance of the role of mediating variables in bridging the relationship. This finding implies that authentic leadership does not immediately increase engagement, but rather needs to go through the formation of work meaning and a safe psychological climate first.

This finding is consistent with the complex model of the relationship between leadership and engagement described by[59], where indirect effects are more dominant than direct effects. Research[60]also supports that authentic

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[56] Md Karim Rabiul et al., "Linking Human Resources Practices to Employee Engagement in the Hospitality Industry: The Mediating Influences of Psychological Safety, Availability and Meaningfulness," European Journal of Management and Business Economics 32, no. 2 (January 1, 2023): 223–40, https://doi.org/10.1108/EJMBE-12-2020-0347.

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[58] Claudia Lenuta Rus et al., "Intra-Team Learning Behaviors and Psychological Safety: Linking Team Leader Coaching Behaviors and Team Performance in Work Teams," Team Performance Management: An International Journal ahead-of-print, no. ahead-of-print (January 1, 2025), https://doi.org/10.1108/TPM-05-2024-0052.

[59] Qaisar Iqbal et al., "A Moderated-Mediation Analysis of Psychological Empowerment: Sustainable Leadership and Sustainable Performance," Journal of Cleaner Production 262 (2020): 121429, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2020.121429.

[60] Asier Baquero, "Authentic Leadership, Employee Work Engagement, Trust in the Leader, and Workplace Well-Being: A Moderated Mediation Model," Psychology Research and Behavior Management 16, no. null (December 31, 2023): 1403–24, https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S407672.

leadership is more effective in increasing engagement if accompanied by psychological variables such as empowerment, trust, and safety.

**Work Meaningfulness as a Mediator**

Work Meaningfulness acts as a significant mediator in the relationship between Authentic Leadership and Work Engagement ($\beta = 0.258$; $p < 0.01$). This confirms that authentic leadership has an impact on engagement only when it is able to foster the perception of the importance and value of work. Meaningfulness acts as a psychological bridge that channels the leader's values into the internal motivation of subordinates.

Study of[61] supports this mediating role, emphasizing that leaders can facilitate the search for work meaning by providing a clear vision and values that align with employees' personal goals. Meaningfulness also strengthens employees' affective relationships with the organization.[62].

**Psychological Safety as a Mediator**

Psychological Safety is also a significant mediator in the relationship between Authentic Leadership and Work Engagement ($\beta = 0.179$; $p < 0.01$). Authentic leaders enable the formation of a work climate that supports openness, trust, and interpersonal courage. This encourages individuals to be more actively involved in work without fear of judgment or failure.

Research by[63] has confirmed that psychological safety plays an important role in the relationship between leadership and engagement. In addition,[64] in his meta-analysis stated that psychological safety significantly increases work outcomes such as performance, satisfaction, and engagement.

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[61] Schoofs, Maunz, and Glaser, "Multi-Level Effects of Authentic Leadership on Self-Actualization at Work – the Mediating Roles of Authentic Followership and Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction."

[62] Frank Martela et al., "What Makes Work Meaningful? Longitudinal Evidence for the Importance of Autonomy and Benefits for Meaningful Work," Journal of Vocational Behavior 131 (2021): 103631, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2021.103631.

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**Closing**

This study aims to examine and explain the relationship between Authentic Leadership and Work Engagement in external auditors, by considering the mediating role of Work Meaningfulness and Psychological Safety. Based on the results of the analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that auditor work engagement is not directly influenced by authentic leadership, but rather through two main psychological pathways: perception of work meaning and psychological safety. This finding suggests that authentic leadership is only effective in increasing work engagement if it is able to create a meaningful and emotionally safe work environment. In other words, there is a full mediation effect indicating that the two mediating variables are important psychological mechanisms in bridging the influence of leadership on non-financial work outcomes.

The main contribution of this study lies in mapping the complex psychological pathways linking leadership style to work engagement in the context of the external audit profession—a domain that has received little attention in the authentic leadership literature. This study enriches the body of work and organizational psychology by demonstrating that the creation of work meaning and psychological safety are not merely enabling factors, but central elements in facilitating professional engagement. These theoretical implications open up opportunities for the development of leadership models that are more oriented toward strengthening internal psychological factors, as well as providing policy direction for organizations to design more targeted values-based leadership training and psychosocial intervention programs.

**Suggestion**

Based on the findings and discussions in this study, it is suggested that organizations where external auditors work pay more attention to the development of authentic leadership styles through leadership training based on the values of honesty, integrity, and empathy. In addition, organizations need to build a work system that supports the creation of work meaning and a sense

of psychological safety, for example through open communication, constructive feedback, and recognition of individual contributions. Increasing auditor work engagement is not enough with just a structural or procedural approach, but requires psychosocial interventions that can strengthen the emotional and value connections between auditors and their work. For further research, it is suggested to examine other factors such as trust in leadership, emotional intelligence, or job crafting as additional variables to enrich the work engagement model in the context of professional auditing.

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