Authentic Leadership and Feedback-Seeking Behavior:

An examination of the cultural context of mediating processes in China

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ABSTRACT

Despite an increasing number of studies showing a positive relationship between workplace contextual factors and feedback seeking, little is known about the influence that leaders exert on promoting follower feedback-seeking behavior. The present article developed a model to fill this void and tested it with data from a sample of 237 supervisor–follower dyads. We hypothesized and found that authentic leadership was positively related to feedback seeking behavior mediated by both perceived value and cost of feedback seeking. The results also demonstrated that power distance moderated the relationship between authentic leadership and perceived value.

Keywords:

Feedback seeking, authentic leadership, perceived value and cost of feedback seeking, power distance
INTRODUCTION

Since the construct of feedback-seeking behavior was proposed by Ashford and Cummings (1983), considerable research effort has been invested in this topic. Defined as the effort to ask immediate supervisors for information concerning inadequacies in work behavior and work performance (Ashford, 1986; Chen, Lam & Zhong 2007), subordinates’ feedback-seeking inquiry has been identified as an important resource for employees to gain self-views and clarify roles (e.g., Ashford et al. 2003; Brown & Dutton 2003), and has been empirically demonstrated to be linked to a variety of positive work outcomes, such as performance enhancement and goal attainment (Ammons 1956; Chen et al. 2007; Iligen, Fisher & Taylor 1979). In light of this, scholars and practitioners alike have sought to identify ways to promote employee feedback seeking. The resulting efforts by such investigators have suggested that feedback seeking is influenced by a group of personal characteristics such as self-esteem, goal orientation, desire for control, and external feedback propensity (e.g., Ashford 1986; Ashford & Black 1996; Bernichon, Cook & Brown 2003; Fedor, Rensvold & Adams 1992; Renn & Fedor 2010; VandeWalle & Cummings 1997), as well as contextual factors such as work uncertainty and favorable feedback environment (e.g., Ashford & Cummings 1983, 1985; Ashford & Northcraft 1992; Callister & Kramer 1999; Gupta, Govindarajan & Malhotra 1999; Rosen, Levy & Hall 2006; Steelman, Levy & Snell 2004).

Given the dominant role that leaders play in the workplace, previous research presents some intriguing evidence that one key contextual factor that could have substantial impact on feedback seeking are leaders (e.g., Chen et al. 2007; VandeWalle, Ganesan, Challagalla & Brown 2000). For instance, Chen et al. (2007) found that leader-member exchange is positively related to followers’ feedback-seeking behavior. The empirical study conducted by VandeWalle et al. (2000) has provided evidence for a positive relationship between a leader’s initiating structure and followers’ feedback seeking. More recently, researchers have begun investigating broader theories of leadership behavior, such as authentic leadership. Related arguments suggest that authentic leaders makes a critical contribution to follower feedback seeking by emphasizing the importance of knowing, accepting and acting on the true self, but empirical evidence has been lacking (Gardner et al. 2005; Ilies et al. 2005; Shamir & Eilam 2005). Accordingly, the first contribution of the present study was to examine the relationship between authentic leadership and follower feedback seeking behavior.

In addition to investigating the positive influence of authentic leadership on employee feedback-seeking behavior, we also built upon the feedback seeking model (Ashford 1983; Ashford et al. 2003) to probe the underlying mechanisms through which authentic leaders exert positive influence on their followers’
feedback seeking. To our knowledge, our study is the first to introduce the feedback seeking model into authentic leadership studies and to explore the mediating role of the perceived value and cost of feedback seeking in the authentic leadership-follower feedback-seeking behavior relationship. Taken from Azjen’s theory of planned behavior (Ajzen 1985, 1987), Ashford and colleagues’ model of feedback seeking is based on the notion that feedback-seeking behavior is predicted by people’s attitudes toward it (Ashford 1983; Ashford et al. 2003). Personal and contextual factors could therefore promote or diminish feedback-seeking behavior by positively influencing favorable attitudes (termed as “perceived value” or “instrumental motive”) and/or negatively influencing unfavorable attitudes (termed as “perceived cost” or “ego-defence and image-defence motives”) toward such behavior (e.g., Ashford et al. 2003; VandeWalle & Cummings 1997; VandeWalle et al. 2000). Following this line of reasoning, the second contribution of the current study was to examine the underlying mechanism through which authentic leadership positively influences follower feedback-seeking behavior. Specifically, we argue that authentic leadership positively affects the perceived value of feedback seeking while negatively influencing its perceived cost, which in turn promotes follower feedback-seeking behavior.

Since cultural values provide cues for individuals to make sense of the external environment, individual differences in cultural values may substantially influence interpretations of leadership behaviors in work settings (e.g., Farh, Hackett & Liang 2007; Kirkman, Chen, Farh, Chen & Lowe 2009). Indeed, previous authentic leadership studies have emphasized the important role of cultural values (e.g., Cooper, Scandura & Schriesheim 2005; Gardner et al. 2005; Michie & Gooty 2005; Sharmir & Eilam 2005). To our knowledge however, no empirical evidence to date justifies such a claim. Therefore, in the present study we made a third contribution by examining the moderating role of an individual’s cultural value of power distance on the relationship between authentic leadership and the perceived value and cost of feedback seeking. The theoretical framework that guides the present study appears in Figure 1.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Authentic Leadership and Feedback Seeking

Authentic leadership is defined as “a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capabilities and a positive ethical climate, to foster great self-awareness, an
internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive development” (Walumbwa et al. 2008: 92). Four underlying dimensions of authentic leadership have been validated: self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing and internalized moral perspective (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al. 2005; Ilies et al. 2005; Shamir & Eilam 2005; Walumbwa et al. 2008). Previous empirical studies have demonstrated that the four dimensions are highly correlated though each making a unique contribution to the higher order construct of authentic leadership (Clapp-Smith, Vogelgesang & Avey 2009; Jensen & Luthans 2006; Walumbwa et al. 2008). We take up this lead in the present study by treating authentic leadership as a higher order, multidimensional construct.

The first component, self-awareness, reflects both the product and process. It involves having an understanding of, and trust in, one’s needs, values, emotions, capabilities, goals and his/her impact on others, as well as the process whereby one comes to continuously reflect on the multifaceted self, which often occurs through exposure to others or is triggered by life events (e.g., Gardner et al. 2005; Ilies et al. 2005; Shamir & Eilam 2005). Relational transparency includes the leader’s presentation of his or her authentic self-aspects, both good and bad (as opposed to the false or distorted self) to followers. The self-disclosure process involves leaders openly sharing information and knowledge, as well as a mutual communication of the true thoughts and feelings that often enhance the development of mutual intimacy and trust (Eagly 2005; Gardner et al. 2005; Kernis 2003; Walumbwa et al. 2008). Balanced processing includes the processing of self-relevant information from diverse sources, such as personal thoughts, feelings and evaluative messages from others, before coming to a decision and/or committing to an act without ignoring, denying, distorting, or exaggerating this information (Gardner et al. 2005; Walumbwa et al. 2008). The fourth dimension, internalized moral perspective, represents the notion of acting upon the true self. It refers to when leaders behave in accordance with their deeply held needs, values, and beliefs toward internalized or integrated goals, rather than in accordance with external pressures (Avolio & Gardner 2005; Deci & Ryan 2000; Gardner et al. 2005; Walumbwa et al. 2008).

The proposed view of authentic leadership by scholars suggests that authentic leaders are deeply aware of and trust their values/moral perspectives and beliefs, as well as the context in which they operate. They build trust and intimacy and win respect from followers by transparently interacting with them, valuing diverse viewpoints, and acting in accordance with those deeply held personal values and convictions in order to lead in a manner that followers recognize as authentic, effective and of high moral character (e.g., Avolio & Gardner 2005; Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans & May, 2004; Avolio & Luthans, 2006; Luthans & Avolio, 2003, 2009; May, Chan, Hodges & Avolio 2003; Walumbwa et al. 2008). Through
this set of behaviors, leaders convey the message of integrity, transparency, openness, fairness, trust and respect for others, all of which could encourage their followers to proactively seek feedback, know the self better, accept the actual self while moving toward the better possible self, and to reflect and act upon such knowledge on a daily basis. Accordingly,

Hypothesis 1. Authentic leadership positively influences follower feedback seeking.

Authentic Leadership, Perceived Value and Cost, and Feedback-Seeking Behavior

Previous feedback seeking literature has suggested that perceived value (the beliefs about the instrumental value of feedback itself) and perceived cost (the belief that asking for feedback may damage the ego and/or image) are key predictors of feedback seeking behavior (see the review by Ashford et al. 2003), and they are often considered the mechanisms by which personal and contextual factors contribute to feedback seeking (e.g., VandeWalle & Cummings 1997; VandeWalle et al. 2000). The rationale is that people’s feedback-seeking behavior is predicted by their attitudes toward such behavior. Therefore, personal or contextual factors that make people form more favorable attitudes (perceived value), and/or less unfavorable attitudes (perceived cost) towards feedback seeking will promote feedback seeking behavior. Following this line of reasoning, we suggest that by promoting greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of followers and themselves, authentic leaders exert an influence on the perceived value and cost of feedback seeking, which in turn promotes feedback-seeking behavior (Avolio et al. 2009).

More specifically, when authentic leaders fundamentally address the importance of knowing the true self in the context of the surroundings (Avolio & Gardner 2005; Sparrow 2005; Walumbwa et al. 2008), followers are encouraged to clarify their own self-awareness and are more likely to find feedback seeking valuable for their own self-awareness, meaning that followers will be more motivated to seek it. Furthermore, by practicing feedback seeking themselves and using such valuable information to clarify and reflect on self-aspects, authentic leaders ensure that the acknowledgement of one’s own weaknesses is an important aspect of obtaining self-awareness and personal growth (Ilies et al. 2005; Gardener et al. 2005), and that proactively seeking feedback in whatever form only signals a desire to know the self. Thus, followers of authentic leaders are less likely to be concerned about hurting their ego or losing their image in front of others and should be more willing to seek feedback.
Likewise, relationship transparency is likely to be positively related to feedback seeking behavior. When leaders disclose their self-aspects to followers, they build authentic relationships characterized by intimacy and trust (Avolio et al. 2004; Eagly 2005). In this regard, authentic leaders render feedback seeking more valuable and less costly by proactively serving as trustworthy and creditable feedback sources who are willing to share information, thoughts and feelings without distortion or judgment, as well as building an open and safe feedback channel that ensures the smooth delivery of such information. Thus, knowing authentic leaders to be a credible source and the authentic relations to be a trusty and safe medium, followers will be more willing to seek feedback from such leaders (Vancouver & Morrison 1995; Ashford & Tsui 1991).

Additionally, when authentic leaders emphasize the value of multiple perspectives in decision making and daily work practices (Avolio & Gardner 2005; Ladkin & Taylor 2010), followers are more likely to form a favorable attitude toward feedback because it is embedded with important information that helps to map the work environment and clarify various aspect of their job practices, and in turn show a stronger desire to seek it. Furthermore, because authentic leaders emphasize the diverse nature of others’ points of view, as well as treating views that challenge his or her deeply held positions as opportunities rather than threats, their followers are encouraged and well prepared to seek feedback with less perceived ego or image involvement and more willing to seek it in a proactive manner.

Finally, when authentic leaders serve as self-regulatory role models who act upon their authentic convictions, the followers are likely to proactively seek out, reflect on, and selectively internalize self-relevant information. In addition, through experiencing their leader’s authentic self-regulation, followers are more likely to realize that exerting an effort to know oneself is not an end but a continuous process. As a result they would be more likely to value the rich information that feedback could offer and proactively seek it in their own self-regulatory process. Likewise, because authentic leaders emphasize that people are best described as more or less knowing themselves and the ropes of their work, feedback itself does not signal performance status and is not exclusively for those who lack knowledge or perform poorly. Followers should therefore perceive less image or ego costs and be more willing to seek feedback. This leads us to the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 2.** Authentic leadership is positively related to perceived value of feedback seeking.

**Hypothesis 3.** Authentic leadership is negatively related to perceived cost of feedback seeking.

**Hypothesis 4.** The followers’ perceived value and perceived cost of feedback seeking mediate the positive relationship between authentic leadership and feedback-seeking behavior.
The Moderating Role of Power Distance

Consistent with prior research, the present study defines *power distance* at an individual level as “the extent to which an individual accepts the unequal distribution of power in institutions and organizations” (Clugston, Howell & Dorfman 2000: 9). It is typical for employees high in power distance to accept status differences and thus sense more tangible and intangible information, knowledge, behavior patterns, and modes of thought from their authentic leaders’ influence while being more willing to internalize information and transfer it into their attitudes towards behaviors at work (e.g., attitudes towards feedback seeking) (Farh et al. 2007; Yang, Mossholder & Peng 2007). Employees low in power distance, on the other hand, tend to be unreceptive to the message conveyed by authentic leaders and may not respond proactively, which may result in them being unmotivated to process and channel this kind of message towards attitudes concerning feedback seeking (i.e., perceived value and cost) (Farh et al. 2007; Kirkman et al. 2009). If this is true, followers high in power distance are fully committed to their authentic leaders, and can explore and exploit more from authentic leadership than their counterparts can, thus generating stronger perceived value and less perceived cost than those with low power distances. Accordingly, we hypothesized:

*Hypothesis 5. Power distance moderates the positive relationship between authentic leadership and perceived value in such a way that the relationships will be stronger for people higher, rather than lower, in power distance.*

*Hypothesis 6. Power distance moderates the negative relationship between authentic leadership and perceived cost in such a way that the relationships will be stronger for people higher, rather than lower, in power distance.*

METHOD

Research Setting, Sample, and Procedures

Participants in the current study were full time employees of an electricity supplier located in a major city in southern China. We designed two separate questionnaires for immediate supervisors and subordinates, thereby collecting data from two sources to minimize potential common method biases. The supervisor questionnaires were distributed to 74 work unit supervisors, who rated the level of four subordinates’ feedback-seeking behavior. The four immediate subordinates were randomly selected via the human
resource department. The 296 subordinates filled out a separate questionnaire that included items measuring their immediate supervisors' authentic leadership, their perceived value and cost of feedback seeking, demographics and work status. Each questionnaire was assigned an identification number so the responses of the employees could be matched with the evaluations of the immediate supervisors. Surveys were completed on a voluntary basis. Each packet contained an information sheet explaining the objective of the survey along with a consent form, survey questionnaire and a return envelope with seal tape to protect the respondents' confidentiality. Participants were instructed to complete the survey, put it in a sealed envelope and individually return it within two weeks to a box in the human resource department designated for that purpose. 62 supervisors and 254 subordinate questionnaires were returned with a response rate of 83.8% and 85.8% respectively. A total of 237 pairs remained after eliminating the uncompleted and unmatched questionnaires, resulting in an overall response rate of 80.0%.

The demographic data of the remaining subordinate sample was as follows. The average age of all the participants was 35.15 (SD = 8.50). The average organizational tenure was 13.84 years (SD = 2.84), job tenure was 9.48 (SD = 7.85) and the average years of education was 12.33 (SD = .75). The participants came from different levels of the company and held a variety of job titles, though the majority of them (94.9%) were non-supervisory employees, while the rest consisted of first line supervisors (4.2%), and middle managers (0.8%) (SD = .27). Most of them were in the technical (35.0%), sales/marketing (21.9%), customer service (18.6%), and research and development (11.8%) departments, but other supporting departments such as human resource/administration (10.1%), accounting/finance (9.7%), and computer systems (3.8%) were also represented (SD = 1.97).

Measures

We verified the Chinese versions of all measures by using the “translation-back-translation” method suggested by Brislin (1980).

Authentic leadership. We used the sixteen-item Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) (Avolio, Gardner & Walumbwa 2007) to measure authentic leadership, which includes self-awareness (e.g., “Accurately describes how others view his or her capabilities”), relational transparency (e.g., “Says exactly what he or she means”), balanced processing (“Solicits views that challenge his or her deeply held positions”), and internalized moral perspective (“Makes decisions based on his or her core values”). Using the “immediate supervisor” as the referent, subordinates were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with statements on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (frequently, if not always). The
results of confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the existence of a second-order authentic leadership model in which the four first-order factors contributed to an overall authentic leadership index ($\chi^2 = 191.29; df = 50; \text{RMSEA} = .08; \text{CFI} = .94; \text{TLI} = .92$). The Cronbach’s alpha for each of the four dimensions were at acceptable levels and as follows: self-awareness (.89), relational transparency (.89), balanced processing (.84), and internalized moral perspective (.86).

**Feedback seeking.** The immediate supervisors’ perception of their subordinates’ feedback seeking inquiry frequency was measured with a five-item scale validated by VandeWalle et al. (2000). Each supervisor was asked to provide his or her own ratings of how frequently each of the five aspects of feedback (i.e., the inadequacies of overall job performance, technical aspects of the job, values and attitudes of the firm, role expectations, and social behaviors) were asked by the subordinate rated. Scale anchors ranged from 1 (never) to 7 (always). The alpha reliability for the scale was .77.

**Perceived value of feedback seeking.** We measured perceived feedback seeking value using Ashford’s (1986) six-item scales. Subordinates rated the extent to which they agree with the statements on a seven-point response format (1, “strongly disagree”; 7, “strongly agree”). An example item is “I find feedback on my performance useful.” The scales’ reliability was .84.

**Perceived cost of feedback seeking.** We used a five-item scale to measure employees’ feedback seeking cost perceptions. Response options ranged from 1, “strongly disagree” to 7, “strongly agree.” A sample item is, “I think my boss would think worse of me if I asked him/her for feedback.” The alpha reliability for the scale was .70.

**Power distance.** We used the six items developed by Dorfman and Howell (1988). Responses to the items used a five-point scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Sample items include “Managers should make most decisions without consulting subordinates,” and “It is frequently necessary for a manager to use authority and power when dealing with subordinates.” The alpha reliability for this scale was .91.

**Control variables.** We included six control variables for testing the hypotheses. We controlled job tenure because previous research has demonstrated that this could account for variance in feedback seeking (e.g., Ashford 1986; Ashford & Cummings 1985; Ashford & Black 1996). In keeping with other authentic leadership research (e.g., Walumbwa et al. 2008), we also controlled the participants’ age, gender, education, position, department and company tenure in the current company. Age, education, job and
company tenure were measured by the number of years. Gender was coded 0 for “female” and 1 for “male”. The nominal variable of the employee position was coded 1 for “non-supervisory employees,” 2 for “first-level supervisor/manager,” and 3 for “middle-level manager.”

**Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

Although the variables included in the current study are theoretically distinctive, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to empirically demonstrate the distinctiveness of authentic leadership, perceived value, perceived cost, feedback seeking and power distance. Given that the sample size is small in relation to the measurement items, we adopted the well-accepted procedure used by previous researchers (Aryee, Chen, Sun & Debrah 2007; Bagozzi & Heatherton 1994; Hui, Lee & Rousseau 2004; Wang, Law, Hackett, Wang & Chen 2005). For authentic leadership, we used the four dimensions as its indicators by averaging items for each sub-dimension. And for other studied variables, we created three indicators to represent each of them. Based on the factor analysis results, the items with the highest and lowest loadings were averaged first, followed by the two items with the next highest and lowest loadings until all the items for each construct had been combined to three indicators. As shown in Table 1, the hypothesized 5-factor model fits the data well ($\chi^2 = 137.38; df = 94; RMSEA = .04; CFI = .98; TLI = .97$) and provided a significantly better fit than any other alternative nested model, thus providing empirical evidence of the distinctiveness of the constructs studied. We therefore proceeded to test the hypotheses.

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Insert Table 1 about here
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**RESULTS**

Table 2 contains means, standard deviations, reliabilities and zero-order correlations among all the variables. Supporting Hypothesis 1, authentic leadership was significantly and positively correlated with feedback seeking ($r = .19, p < .01$). As is evident from Table 3, authentic leadership was positively related to perceived value ($\beta = .23, p < .01$) and negatively related to perceived cost ($\beta = -.36, p < .01$). Hypothesis 2 and 3 were fully supported.

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Insert Table 2 and 3 about here
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Hypothesis 4 predicted that the positive relationship between authentic leadership and feedback is mediated by perceived value and cost. Overall model fit for our fully mediating model was satisfactory ($\chi^2 = 118.48; df = 61; \text{RMSEA} = .06; \text{CFI} = .97; \text{TLI} = .95$). Against our baseline model, we tested a partial mediation model (model 2), in which a direct path from authentic leadership to feedback seeking was added. As shown in Table 4, the addition of this path did not improve model fit and the chi-square difference between our fully mediated model (Model 1) and Model 2 was not significant ($\Delta \chi^2 = .03; \Delta df = 1; p > .05$). Under principle of model parsimony, the fully mediated model (Model 1) better fit our data. Thus, we concluded that perceived value and perceived cost fully mediates the relationship between authentic leadership and feedback seeking, which fully supports Hypothesis 4. Figure 2 therefore displays a more parsimonious model that achieves the same fit level.

Table 3 illustrates the results for Hypothesis 5 and 6, which put forth that authentic leadership would have a greater impact on perceived value and cost for higher power distance than lower power distance followers. Control variables (i.e., age, gender, education level, position, job tenure, company tenure and department) were entered at step 1, while authentic leadership and power distance were entered at steps 2. At step 3, we entered the interaction of authentic leadership and power distance. The results showed that the changes in the multiple squared correlation coefficient ($\Delta R^2$) associated with authentic leadership*power distance two-way interaction term was statistically significant for perceived value ($\beta = .15, \Delta R^2 = .02, p < .01$) and perceived cost ($\beta = .18, \Delta R^2 = .03, p < .01$).

To interpret the specific pattern of the moderating effect in H5 and H6, the regression equations were calculated for the relationship between authentic leadership and perceived value and cost at high and low levels of power distance respectively. Following Cohen and Cohen (1983), we defined the high and low values as plus and minus one standard deviation from the mean. As shown in Figure 3, the pattern of this interaction was exactly as predicted: the linear relationships between authentic leadership and perceived value were stronger for the high power distance group. Thus, Hypothesis 5 received strong support.
Unexpectedly however, the moderating effect of power distance on the relationship between authentic leadership and perceived cost as shown in Figure 4 ran in the opposite direction of our prediction, therefore failing to support Hypothesis 6.

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Insert Figure 3 and 4 about here

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DISCUSSION

In the present study, we developed and tested a model linking authentic leadership with followers’ feedback-seeking behavior by investigating the underlying mechanisms as well as the boundary condition. The results revealed that (a) authentic leadership was positively associated with follower feedback seeking; (b) the positive relationship was mediated by followers’ perceptions of both the value and cost of feedback seeking; and (c) the relationship between authentic leadership and perceived value were contingent on followers’ cultural value of power distance in such a way that the relationships will be stronger for people higher, rather than lower, in power distance.

Theoretical Implications

The present research has a number of theoretical implications regarding feedback seeking and authentic leadership. To begin with, our findings have important theoretical contributions for the rising research in identifying leadership’s role in promoting proactive feedback seeking. Although authentic leadership has been linked to feedback seeking (Gardner et al. 2005; Ilies et al. 2005; Shamir & Eilam 2005), the role of authentic leadership in promoting follower feedback seeking has hardly been theorized or empirically investigated. Addressing this issue, and building on Ashford and colleagues’ well-accepted model of feedback seeking (Ashford 1986; Ashford & Cummings 1983; Ashford et al. 2003), we proposed and found that authentic leaders could promote follower feedback seeking behavior through influencing the perceived value and cost of feedback seeking. By doing so, the present study not only formulates and empirically tests the authentic leadership-feedback seeking relationship, but also identifies its underlying psychological processes of perceived value and costs. Additionally, our study supports the feedback seeking model by providing further evidence of the important role that perceived value and costs plays in channeling contextual influences into feedback seeking behavior (e.g., Ashford et al. 2003).
Feedback seeking researchers have concluded that followers’ personal characteristics may play a role in the influence of contextual factors on feedback seeking behavior (Butler 1993; VandeWalle & Cummings 1997; VandeWalle et al. 2000; Northcraft & Ashford 1990; Ashford 1986; Wada 1990). The research of VandeWalle et al. (2000) in particular points out the importance of studying leadership’s influence on feedback seeking in concert with follower dispositions. We extend this perspective by highlighting the moderating role of an individual cultural value of power distance. We suggest that high power distance followers would be more likely to sense, extract and most importantly internalize the message that authentic leadership conveys, and therefore create favorable conditions to channel leadership influence into attitudes (i.e., perceived value and costs), which will lead to feedback seeking. In the light of our findings, we therefore encourage future researchers to identify additional individual cultural values as enhancers, neutralizers, or substitutes for authentic leadership in the context of promoting feedback seeking and other work outcomes.

**Practical Contributions**

Practically, our model suggests that authentic leadership can enhance employees’ feedback-seeking behavior. Other than some factors that go beyond the organisation’s control, such as learning orientation and personality, authentic leadership can be developed through training programs (e.g., Avolio & Gardner 2005; Shamir & Eilam 2005; Walumbwa et al. 2008). Organisations could therefore provide opportunities for managers to develop their authentic leadership in order to motivate employees to seek feedback. The mediating influences of employee perceived value and cost of feedback seeking suggest that authentic leaders should pay attention to followers’ attitudes towards feedback seeking in order to promote feedback-seeking behavior. Accordingly, strategies that enhance employee attitudes intervention should be incorporated into authentic leadership training programs.

In addition, our study suggests that followers of authentic leaders do not uniformly interpret the signals that the leaders convey, and high power distance individuals are those who may have the most to gain from authentic leadership experience. Being aware of moderators helps managers to identify the contexts in which authentic leadership is most likely or unlikely to enhance feedback seeking. This is important because other complimentary organizational practices could be used for those where such enhancement is weaker. For example, organizations may enhance the willingness of low-power distance subordinates to be more willing to seek feedback through building an organizational culture and favorable work group climates, such as a supportive feedback seeking environment and affective and ethical climates (e.g., Ashford 1993; Choi, Price & Vinokur 2003; Rosen, Levy & Hall 2006; Steelman, Levy & Snell 2004;
Victor & Cullen 1988; Whitaker, Dahling & Levy 2007). These practices will compliment authentic leadership to influence feedback seeking attitudes and ultimately feedback-seeking behavior.

Limitations

Although the results are encouraging, several limitations warrant discussion to properly interpret the results of this research. One limitation is that although we built the hypotheses with the relevant theory and previous research evidence, the cross-sectional design implies that it is difficult to make a definitive conclusion regarding causality. Additional quasi-experimental or longitudinal research would be useful to ascertain the causal basis of the relationships examined in this study. A second limitation of this research concerns the generalizability of our results. The data used in the present study was only collected from one workplace within the electricity supply industry, thus the extent to which the results are applicable to other organizations or industries can only be speculated. The general applicability of the present findings should therefore be examined in other types of organizations and/or industries in future research.

CONCLUSION

Given the critical role of proactive feedback seeking in the workplace, leaders often face the challenge of promoting the value of feedback seeking while easing the potential risk that may be perceived by followers in order to promote such valuable behavior. Our study addresses this challenge by suggesting that authentic leadership is an effective way to nurture feedback seeking through enhancing the perceived value while decreasing the perceived cost of such behavior. Our results also caution that individual cultural values such as power distance should be considered in authentic leadership practice.
REFERENCES


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<th>CFI</th>
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** $p < .01$
### TABLE 2
Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Correlations among Study Variables

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<th>3</th>
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<td>Perceived cost</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>-.33** .23** (.70)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Feedback seeking</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.19** .19** -.18** (.77)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Power distance</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.23** .62** .05 .18** (.91)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P < .05; **P < .01
### TABLE 3
Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Moderation by Power Distance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Perceived value</th>
<th>Perceived cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1: Controls</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company tenure</td>
<td>-.26*</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job tenure</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| ΔR² | .05 | .03 |
| ΔF  | 1.53| 1.17|

| **Step 2: Main effects**   |                 |                |
| Authentic leadership       | .23**           | -.36**         |
| Power distance             | .55**           | .16*           |

| ΔR² | .40**| .12** |
| ΔF  | 19.75**| 4.49** |

| **Step 3: Moderating effect**|                 |                |
| Authentic leadership × power distance | .15** | .18** |

| ΔR² | .02**| .03** |
| ΔF  | 19.12**| 5.00** |

* P < .05; ** P < .01
### TABLE 4
Comparison of Structural Equation Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model and Structure</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$\Delta \chi^2$</th>
<th>TLI</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: AL $\rightarrow$ PC + PV $\rightarrow$ Feedback seeking</td>
<td>118.48</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: AL $\rightarrow$ PC + PV $\rightarrow$ Feedback seeking and AL $\rightarrow$ Feedback seeking</td>
<td>118.45</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FIGURE 1
Hypothesized Model of Authentic Leadership and Follower Feedback Seeking
FIGURE 2
Authentic Leadership and Perceived Value by Power Distance

- Low power distance
- High power distance

Perceived Value

Authentic Leadership
FIGURE 3
Authentic Leadership and Perceived Cost by Power Distance
FIGURE 4
Results of Structural Equation Modelling on the Mediating Effects of Perceived Value and Cost

Authentic Leadership

Value Perceptions

Cost Perceptions

Feedback Seeking

.33**

-.14**

.26**

-.55**