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The effects of authentic leadership on turnover intention

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between employees' perception of authentic leadership and their turnover intention as mediated by employees' work-group identification (WID) and work engagement.

Design/methodology/approach – Structural equation modeling was used to analyze the data from 623 Spanish employees.

Findings – Results show that authentic leadership has a negative effect on turnover intention and positive effects on work engagement and WID. The direct relationship between authentic leadership and turnover intention was found to be partially mediated by employees' work engagement.

Practical implications – One of the strongest implications that may be drawn from this study is that authentic leaders can influence employees' turnover intentions by positively enhancing their engagement. Thus, the study highlights authentic leadership as a key element for retaining valuable employees through the promotion of employees' work engagement.

Originality/value – To the authors' knowledge, this study is the first to analyze the association between authentic leadership and turnover intention and the meditational effect of work engagement and WID.

Keywords Turnover intention, Work engagement, Authentic leadership, Work-group identification

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Turnover and retention research has been prevalent within the management, psychology and sociology literatures for decades, and remains an important issue of interest as the world continues to migrate toward a knowledge-based economy. A recent meta-analytic review of employee turnover found evidence for a relationship between turnover and poorer organizational performance, demonstrating that the human and social capital losses from turnover were more important than the potential benefits of replacing departing employees with better or less expensive ones (see review by Hancock *et al.*, 2013).

The greater part of the turnover literature consists of studies of different individual-level predictors of turnover; including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and embeddedness (see review by Holtom *et al.*, 2008). In this sense, the role that both work engagement and work-group identification (WID) play in employee turnover intention has received significant attention in the literature. Work engagement is related to greater job satisfaction and lower turnover intention (Halbesleben, 2010; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Simpson, 2009). Moreover, WID and job satisfaction are significantly linked, as are job involvement and retention (Riketta and van Dick, 2005; van Dick *et al.*, 2008).

Consequently, in the current economic crisis where uncertainty and temporary employment threaten employee WID and work engagement, organizations require leaders who engage and motivate employees and who are thus able to retain valuable resources and reduce organizational brain drain. As such, authentic leadership may help to retaining employees via the promotion of identification with others in the work group or increased work engagement. However, as far as we know, the relationship between authentic leadership and turnover intention has not been empirically studied. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between employee perception of authentic leadership and turnover intention, and the potential mediating roles of WID and work engagement.

Literature review and hypotheses development
Turnover intention and authentic leadership
Turnover intention is defined as an individual's behavioral intention to leave the organization (Mobley *et al.*, 1979). The relationship between turnover and organizational performance has previously been examined, highlighting the personnel costs associated with the selection, recruitment, training, and development of new employees to replace the employees who voluntarily quit the organization (Hancock *et al.*, 2013; Holtom *et al.*, 2008). In fact, the economic costs of turnover represent between 150 and 250 percent of the employee's annual salary (Mello, 2011). Turnover has been found to be directly related to higher employee recruitment and training costs, low levels of employee morale, job satisfaction, and customer perception of lower service quality (Gray *et al.*, 2000). Furthermore, employee turnover has been linked to ineffective leadership (Abbasi and Hollman, 2000; Mossholder *et al.*, 2005). Given the costs, organizations should aim to manage turnover intention strategically. Since an employee's intentions to remain in a job is directly influenced by their relationship with their supervisor (Allen *et al.*, 2009; Cowden *et al.*, 2011), it seems that authentic leadership could provide an effective method to retain key employees through the development of trust and authentic relationships in the work group.

Authentic leadership is proposed as a root construct of the positive forms of leadership needed to develop trust and positive work environments, which are known to foster employee retention (Avolio *et al.*, 2004; Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Wong and Cummings, 2009). Authentic leadership is defined as "a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development" (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2008, p. 94). In their theory of authentic leadership, Avolio *et al.* (2004) suggest that authentic leaders enhance followers' engagement by strengthening the identification of the group members with each other and with the organization, and by promoting hope, trust, optimism, and positive emotions.

Prior research in the leadership-related variables that influence employee turnover intention has mainly focussed on supervisor support and trust. Supervisor support has effectively been found to be positively related to intent to stay (Chen *et al.*, 2008; Lacey *et al.*, 2007; Lu *et al.*, 2005; Lynn and Redman, 2005; Nedd, 2006; Sourdif, 2004; Tourangeau and Cranley, 2006). In particular, Strachota *et al.* (2003) found that employees who voluntarily left their jobs reported leaving due to being unhappy with management support and having concerns regarding this lack of support. In addition, trust among employees has also been found to be an important variable related to intent to stay

(Gregory *et al.*, 2007). There has been less research devoted to the retention effects of trust within the work group. Despite this fact, since authentic leadership is posited to create trust among employees (Gardner *et al.*, 2005) and to support the positive self-development of followers (Luthans and Avolio, 2003), it seems logical to suppose that authentic leadership will be negatively related to turnover intention among employees.

To our knowledge, this is the first study to directly explore the relationship between authentic leadership and turnover intention. Previous research has analyzed the indirect relationship between both variables, through work-related bullying, burnout (Laschinger and Fida, 2014) and job satisfaction (Laschinger *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, previous research found significant relationships between turnover intention and transformational leadership (e.g. Boyle *et al.*, 1999; Doran *et al.*, 2004), a positive form of leadership that is related to authentic leadership. Given the relationships presented above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1. Authentic leadership will be negatively related to turnover intention.

WID and turnover intention
The importance of the psychological bond between employees and their work-group has been underlined by previous studies (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Haslam, 2001; Hogg and Terry, 2001). This bond is usually called "WID" and it has been defined as the perception of oneness with or belongingness to the work-group or organization (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). WID is a part of individual social identity that consists "of those aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging" (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, p. 40). This concept is central to two of the most important theories formulated in social psychology that aim to explain the relationships between individuals and groups: Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) and Self-Categorization Theory (Turner *et al.*, 1987).

When WID is high, the organization or work group is part of the employee's self-concept, either cognitively (e.g. internalizing organizational or group values), emotionally (e.g. pride in being part of the group), or both. There is a large amount of research evidence for a positive relationships between organizational and WID and extra-role behaviors, job satisfaction, job involvement, job motivation and a negative relationship between organizational identification and WID and turnover intention (Riketta, 2005; Riketta and van Dick, 2005; Van Knippenberg and Van Schie, 2000).

Members that identify with an organization are more likely to remain with the organization and expend effort on behalf of that organization (Dutton *et al.*, 1994). Previous research supports that individuals who feel a high sense of collective identity at a group level will express a greater willingness to contribute to group objectives (Conger *et al.*, 2000) and present a lower degree of turnover intention (e.g. Cole and Bruch, 2006; Van Knippenberg and Van Schie, 2000). Therefore, lower turnover intention may be considered to be a consequence of higher WID. As such, as replication of these findings, we hypothesize the following:

H2. WID will be negatively related to turnover intention.

WID and authentic leadership
In the authentic leadership literature, Avolio *et al.* (2004) suggest that authentic leaders "increase followers' social identification by creating a deeper sense of high-moral values and expressing high levels of honesty and integrity in dealing with followers" (p. 807). Moreover, these authors suggest that authentic leaders keep their followers engaged for collective benefits (e.g. work team, department, and organization) by

reflecting on their own selves and on others (Avolio *et al.*, 2004). Similarly, Ilies *et al.* (2005) add that "authentic leaders' high levels of self-awareness, in combination with their authentic behavioral and relational orientation, can influence followers' feelings of identification with the leader and the organization" (p. 383).

Previous research has empirically examined the relationship between positive forms of leadership and WID (e.g. Conger *et al.*, 2000; Epitropaki and Martin, 2005; Moriano *et al.*, 2009), suggesting that transformational and charismatic leaders have a positive effect on identification because they connect with followers' self-concepts and enhance the collective identity in those self-concepts (Kark and Shamir, 2002; Shamir *et al.*, 1993). Authentic leaders' high levels of self-awareness, in combination with their authentic behavioral and relational orientation, can influence followers' feelings of identification with the leader and work-group. Likewise, personal identification with authentic leaders is likely to influence followers' work group and organizational identification, because the leader represents the interests of the group and works toward achieving goals that are important for the organization (Ilies *et al.*, 2005).

Furthermore, authentic leaders may increase followers' WID by creating a deeper sense of high-moral values and expressing high levels of honesty and integrity in their dealings with followers. According to Avolio *et al.* (2004), by enacting these behaviors, authentic leaders elicit positive emotions and a sense of identification among employees. We propose that this process enables employees to connect with the leaders' values, beliefs, goals, and activities over time, and therefore result in higher WID, and consequently, lower turnover intention.

Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3. Authentic leadership will be positively related to WID.

H4. The relationship between authentic leadership and turnover intention will be mediated by WID.

Work engagement and turnover intention
Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) conceptualized work engagement as a motivational construct defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, by the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and by persistence in facing obstacles. Dedication is described as having a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge at work. Absorption is categorized by full concentration, happiness, and engrossment in one's work whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulty detaching oneself from work (Salanova *et al.*, 2005). Thus, work engagement is characterized by a high level of energy and strong sense of identification with one's work (González-Romá *et al.*, 2006).

The implication of work engagement in organizational performance has been studied, yielding empirical evidence for its relationship to employee attitudes, intentions, and behaviors (Saks, 2006), including intention to remain in the company (Harter *et al.*, 2003; Koyuncu *et al.*, 2006; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). We therefore hypothesize the following as a replication of these findings:

H5. Work engagement will be negatively related to turnover intention.

Authentic leaders enhance work engagement by crafting social identity
Leadership is considered to be a major factor contributing to employee work engagement (Harter *et al.*, 2002). Previous research has examined the relationship

between work engagement and leadership. For example, Bono and Judge (2003) found that employees working with transformational leaders reported higher levels of work engagement. Similarly, Tims *et al.* (2011) found a significant relationship between transformational leadership and employees' daily engagement. Babcock-Roberson and Strickland (2010) found that charismatic leadership was positively related to work engagement, and that work engagement fully mediated leadership's effects on organizational citizenship behavior. Furthermore, previous research has supported the positive relationship between authentic leadership and followers' work engagement (e.g. Giallonardo *et al.*, 2010). Thus, as a replication of those results, we hypothesize the following:

H6. Authentic leadership will be positively related to work engagement.

In relation to the influence of leaders, Steffens *et al.* (2014) suggest that employees are more likely to be engaged at work when they have a better understanding of the meaning and purpose of the work group they belong to and of what it stands for in relation to other groups. Specifically, Steffens *et al.* (2014) found that leaders are able to encourage work engagement and prevent strain among group members by creating a shared special sense of "us." These findings suggest that authentic leadership means being capable of facilitating the development of a special sense of "us" shared among the leader and the group members.

Consistent with the arguments presented above, a direct relationship from WID to work engagement is specified in the following way:

H7. WID will be positively related to work engagement.

Finally, based on the evidence presented above, we hypothesize that work engagement will mediate the relationship between authentic leadership and turnover intention. That is, authentic leadership will increase employee work engagement which will in turn decrease employee turnover intention:

H8. The relationship between authentic leadership and turnover intention will be mediated by work engagement.

Theoretical and empirical evidence suggests that authentic leadership may be related to employee retention. In this study the possible mechanisms through which leaders may foster this retention are examined. According to the previous literature we propose that leaders will reduce employee turnover through the development of work engagement and WID. In the proposed model turnover intention is suggested to be a direct consequence of these two key mediating variables, which are assumed to exert a negative effect on turnover intention. Thus, perceived authentic leadership may increase employee work engagement and WID, and therefore may have an indirect effect on turnover intention through work engagement and WID.

The model elucidated in the above discussion is presented in Figure 1.

Method
Participants
The sample consisted of 623 employees (43.4 percent men), with an average age of 38.17 years (SD $= 9.84$) and mean organizational tenure of 8.71 years (SD $= 9.10$). Most participants had college (55.1 percent) or vocational training degrees (14.9 percent) and 24.4 percent worked in managerial positions. Participants belonged to 120 public (55.9 percent) and private (44.1 percent) organizations from

Figure 1.
Theoretical model
and hypotheses
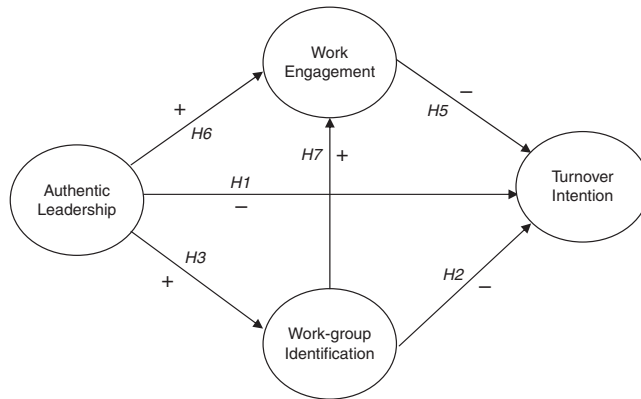
different sectors, including those of health (17.3 percent), education (14.1 percent), and administration (11.1 percent). Most organizations were either large-(44.9 percent) or medium-sized (34.3 percent).

Procedure
Employees belonging to work groups with the same leader (at least three people for each supervisor) were recruited to participate in the study with the assistance of psychology students completing a research master's degree at the Spanish University for Distance Education. The average number of participants in each team was 5.23 (SD = 2.43). Paper-and-pencil questionnaires were used to collect the data. Employees were informed in a cover letter that their participation was voluntary and all information would be strictly confidential and be used only for research purposes. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaires alone.

Measure
Authentic leadership. To assess this variable we used the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ), originally developed by Walumbwa *et al.* (2008), and validated in Spain by Moriano *et al.* (2011). The ALQ measures four dimensions of leadership: relational transparency (five items, e.g. "My leader says exactly what he or she means"), internalized moral perspective (four items, e.g. "My leader demonstrates beliefs that are consistent with actions"), balanced processing (three items, e.g. "My leader solicits views that challenge his or her deeply held positions"), and self-awareness (four items, e.g. "My leader seeks feedback to improve interactions with others"). Responses were recorded on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 7 (always).

WID. This was assessed with the Spanish version of the Mael and Ashforth's (1992) six-item scale, which is one of the most widely used measures of organizational identification (Haslam, 2001). Following Van Knippenberg and Van Schie (2000) procedure, items were modified to measure participants' identification with their particular work-group rather than with the organization as a whole (e.g. "When someone criticizes my work-group, it feels like a personal insult" or "I'm very interested in what others think about my work-group"). Responses to these items were given on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 7 (totally agree).

Work engagement. Employee work engagement was assessed using the Spanish short version of the Utrecht work engagement scale-9 (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006). A sample

item is: "At my work, I feel that I am bursting with energy". All items are scored on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always).

Turnover intention. This variable was measured using an adaptation of the instrument developed by Meyer *et al.* (1993), and consisted of the following three items: "How often do you feel like quitting your job in this organization?", "How likely is it that you will actually leave your organization within the next year?", and "How likely is it that you will actually leave your organization within five years." The response options to the first item ranged from 1 (almost never) to 7 (almost every day), while the options to the second and third item ranged from 1 (very unlikely) to 7 (very likely). The responses were coded such that high scores reflected stronger intention to leave the organization.

Demographic data. Participants were asked to provide information about their age, gender, academic background, and organizational tenure. Organizational tenure was assessed by asking the number of years the respondent had worked at their current organization.

Data analysis
We used structural equation modeling (SEM) to test our hypotheses using the IBM SPSS AMOS 20 software in order to assess diverse relationships simultaneously. SEM also facilitates the assessment of direct, indirect and total effects and, by explicitly assessing error in the structural model, simultaneously assesses the quality of measurement and causal relationships among the constructs (Astrachan *et al.*, 2014). The analyses were carried out by inputting the matrix of the original data and using the maximum likelihood procedure.

The goodness-of-fit of the models was evaluated using relative and absolute indices as recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999). The absolute goodness-of-fit indices (GFIs) calculated were the χ^2 GFI, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the GFI, and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). The relative GFI computed was the comparative fit index (CFI).

Results
Since all measures were collected using the same survey instrument, the possibility of common method bias was tested using Harman's single factor test (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). While one factor contributing to more than 50 percent of total variance is considered an indication of common method bias, the first factor in our analysis accounts for 34 percent of the total variance. Additionally, we controlled for the effects of a single unmeasured latent method factor in our analyses. We re-estimated our structural equation model adding a first-order factor with all of the measures as indicators to the proposed model (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). The results indicated that none of the individual path coefficients corresponding to relationships between the indicators and the method factor were significant. In addition, the paths that were significant when common method variance was not controlled for remained significant even when it was controlled for. On the basis of these results, common method bias does not seem to be a pervasive problem in this study.

Descriptive statistics and the correlation matrix are presented in Table I. They provide provisional support for the hypotheses. Authentic leadership and WID are positively related ($r = 0.36$, $p < 0.01$) and both are negatively related to turnover intention ($r = -0.29$, $p < 0.01$; $r = -0.24$, $p < 0.01$) and positively related to work engagement ($r = 0.54$, $p < 0.01$; $r = 0.57$, $p < 0.01$). In addition, the higher the

participants' work engagement, the lower their turnover intention ($r = -0.40$, $p < 0.01$). Among the control variables, seniority is negatively related to authentic leadership ($r = -0.11$, $p < 0.01$), WID ($r = -0.11$, $p < 0.01$) and to turnover intention ($r = -0.30$, $p < 0.01$), and age is negatively related to authentic leadership ($r = -0.09$, $p < 0.05$) and to turnover intention ($r = -0.27$, $p < 0.01$).

Measurement model

The measurement model analyzes the relationships between the manifest indicators and the hypothesized latent constructs. The analysis essentially needs to answer the question of how well the identified measures predict or construct the latent variables. In this section, we introduce internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, which are all essential to the outer model assessment.

Reliability of reflective constructs. The individual reliability of each indicator is given by loadings (or correlations) between the indicator and the construct (λ). A latent variable should explain a substantial part of each indicator's variance (usually at least 50 percent), and accordingly, the standardized outer loadings should be greater than 0.60 with a critical t-value over 1.96 for $p < 0.05$. (Hair *et al.*, 2006).

Scale reliability refers to the internal coherency of all indicators in relation to the construct. The scale composite reliability (ρ_c) is a preferred alternative to Cronbach's α as a measure of internal consistency reliability. While Cronbach's α assumes that all indicators are equally reliable, composite reliability scales indicators according to their reliability, thus resulting in a more reliable composite (Henseler *et al.*, 2009). The acceptable cutoff for ρ_c is set by the researcher and is the same as for Cronbach's α since both estimates measure internal consistency reliability. Consequently, a ρ_c value > 0.70 indicates acceptable internal consistency reliability, whereas a ρ_c value $\leqslant 0.60$ indicates a lack of reliability (Nunnally, 1978). The loadings of the indicators on the latent constructs were generally strong and ρ_c coefficients were high (see Table II).

Convergent and discriminant validity. The convergent validity represents the common variance between the indicators and their construct, and it signifies that a set of indicators represents one and the same underlying construct (Henseler *et al.*, 2009). Fornell and Larcker (1981) recommend using the average variance extracted (AVE) as a criterion for convergent validity. The higher AVE value, the more representative the indicators of the construct on which they load. In general, an AVE value $\geqslant 0.50$ reflects acceptable convergent validity (Chin, 1998; Fornell and Larcker, 1981). In this study, the AVE for each construct was satisfactory (see Table I).

Constructs	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Sex	1.57	0.51							
2. Age	38.17	9.84	−0.05						
3. Seniority	8.71	9.10	−0.05	0.72**					
4. Authentic leadership	3.16	0.90	−0.04	−0.09*	−0.11**	*0.90*			
5. WID	5.13	1.15	0.00	−0.04	−0.11**	0.36**	*0.73*		
6. Work engagement	4.73	1.38	0.04	0.01	−0.05	0.54**	0.57**	*0.93*	
7. Turnover intention	3.20	1.64	0.01	−0.27**	−0.30**	−0.29**	−0.24**	−0.40**	*0.83*

Notes: Diagonal elements in italics are the square root of AVE between the constructs and their indicators. For discriminant validity, diagonal elements should be greater than off-diagonals elements in the same row and column. **$p < 0.01$

Table I.
Means, standard deviations, correlations, and discriminant validity

Construct	Indicators	λ	t	CR	AVE	
Authentic leadership	SA	0.89	81.61	0.94	0.81	The effects of authentic leadership
	RT	0.89	75.02			
	BP	0.91	106.14			
	IMP	0.89	87.48			
Work-group identification	I1	0.72	21.29	0.89	0.54	
	I2	0.79	30.68			**963**
	I3	0.83	43.88			
	I4	0.80	34.21			
	I5	0.64	14.20			
	I6	0.66	16.76			
Work engagement	Vigor	0.94	117.75	0.96	0.88	
	Dedication	0.95	211.07			Table II.
	Absorption	0.92	107.27			Individual loadings
Turnover intention	T1	0.78	25.20	0.87	0.69	(λ), composite
	T2	0.84	32.41			reliabilities (CR),
	T3	0.86	39.73			t-values, and AVE

To assess discriminant validity among constructs, the AVE square root should be higher than the square of the construct's correlation with all other constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Thereby, each construct should share more variance with its own block of indicators than with another construct representing a different block of indicators (Henseler *et al.*, 2009). Table I shows correlations between the constructs and, along the diagonal, the AVE square root. In view of this data, there is discriminant validity among constructs assessed in the model, although all of them are significantly correlated.

SEM
Three models were designed to contrast the hypotheses using SEM. The first model includes only the direct effect of authentic leadership on turnover intention. The second model also introduces WID as a mediator. Finally, in the third model, work engagement is added as another mediator.

Diverse indices were used to test the goodness of fit of the model, such as the χ^2-statistic, χ^2 ($\chi^2 > 0.05$ indicates that the proposed model fits the data). Due to the sensitivity of the χ^2-statistic to sample size and deviations from normality, other absolute fit indices were proposed, such as the RMSEA, which is a measure of model discrepancy by degrees of freedom (RMSEA < 0.05 indicates a good fit). Likewise, we used the relative CFI and GFI, which both have a threshold value of 0.90 to indicate that the proposed model is a good fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999). In addition, the SRMR was used (SRMR < 0.08 indicates a reasonably good fit; Hu and Bentler, 1999).

Fit indices for the three alternative models are presented in Table III. The final model (effects mediated by WID and work engagement) outperforms the previous models. Results for the final model indicate a lower RMSEA and a higher explained variance of turnover intention than the base model (only direct effects of authentic leadership) and the model with WID as the sole mediator. The final model with standardized regression weights is displayed in Figure 2.

In the present study the mediating role of two variables, work engagement and WID was examined. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), four conditions are required to

establish mediation: (1) the independent and mediating variables must be significantly related, (2) the independent and dependent variables must be significantly related, (3) the mediator and dependent variable must be significantly related and (4) the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable should be non-significant or weaker when the mediator is added.

Our results show that authentic leadership was positively related to WID ($\beta = 0.51$, $p < 0.01$) and work engagement ($\beta = 0.87$, $p < 0.01$), thus, condition (1) and H3 and H5 were supported. Authentic leadership was negatively and significantly related to turnover intention ($\beta = -0.57$, $p < 0.01$) and, thus, supported condition (2) for mediation and H1. WID and work engagement were negatively and significantly related to turnover intention ($\beta = -0.37$, $p < 0.01$ and $\beta = -0.53$, $p < 0.01$, respectively) and, thus, supported condition (3) and H2 and H7. Furthermore, findings show that, after WID was taken into account, the effects of authentic leadership on turnover intention were still significant ($\beta = -0.44$, $p < 0.01$), which does not support H4. However, when work engagement was included into the relationship, the effects of authentic leadership became weaker, albeit still significant ($\beta = -0.18$, $p < 0.01$), indicating a partial mediation and thus supporting H8. Among control variables, organizational tenure was associated with turnover intention ($\beta = -0.08$, $p < 0.01$).

Mediation analyses were further tested using the bootstrapping method with bias-corrected confidence estimates (MacKinnon *et al.*, 2004; Preacher and Hayes, 2004).

Model	χ^2(df)	p	RMSEA	GFI	CFI	SRMR
M1: direct effects of authentic leadership (no mediation)	92.23 (13)	< 0.001	0.09	0.96	0.96	0.08
M2: effects mediated only by WID	305.16 (86)	< 0.001	0.06	0.93	0.95	0.06
M3: effects mediated by WID and work engagement	766.76 (242)	< 0.001	0.05	0.91	0.95	0.07

Note: RMSEA, Root mean square error of approximation; GFI, Goodness-of-fit index; CFI, Comparative fit index; SRMR, Standardized root mean square residual
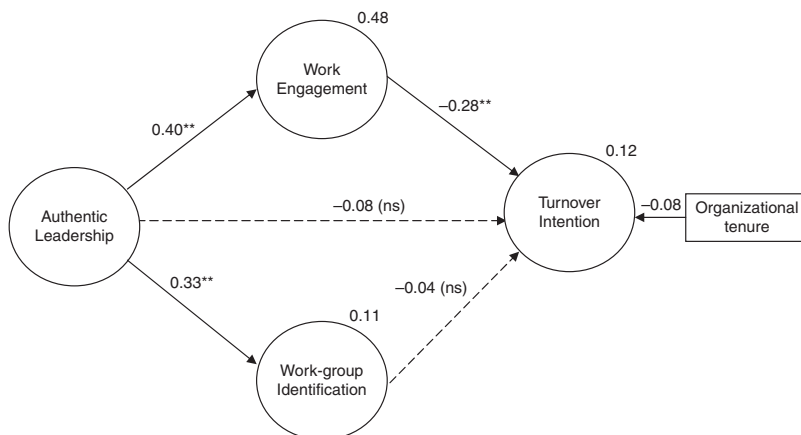
Table III.
Fit indices for the three alternative models explaining turnover intention

Figure 2.
Standardized estimations for Model 3

Note: **p<0.01

In the present study, the 95 percent confidence interval of the indirect effects was obtained with 5,000 bootstrap resamples (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). Results of the mediation analysis confirmed the mediating role of engagement in the relation between authentic leadership and turnover intention ($B = -0.43$; CI $= -0.56$ to -0.31). In addition, results indicated that the direct effect of authentic leadership on turnover intention became weaker ($B = -0.18$, t (621) $= -1.96$, $p = 0.04$) when controlling for engagement, thus suggesting partial mediation, and supporting H8.

Discussion

Identifying the factors that connect employees with their organizations and prevent the turnover of valuable employees is critical for any company due to the human and social capital losses related to turnover (Hancock *et al.*, 2013). The main purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between authentic leadership, a form of leadership that has received a lot of attention in recent years, and turnover intention. We also explored the mediating role of two variables that have traditionally been related to turnover intention: WID and work engagement.

In recent years there has been a growing interest in the study of authentic leadership. However, the empirical operationalization of this leadership model through the ALQ is relatively recent and its effects and underlying processes need to be investigated more thoroughly (Gardner *et al.*, 2011). As such, in this study we analyzed the association between authentic leadership and turnover intention, and the mediating effects of work engagement and WID. Our main hypothesis was that authentic leadership would increase WID and work engagement and in turn decrease employee turnover intention. In order to test the proposed mediation model, several hypotheses about the relationship between the variables of the study were generated. In general, the hypotheses were supported. We found positive associations between authentic leadership and work engagement (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2008), and between authentic leadership and WID (Avolio *et al.*, 2004; Ilies *et al.*, 2005). These findings are important because they show that authentic leaders enhance both work engagement and WID, through the use of behaviors based on self-awareness, relational transparency, and internalized moral and balanced processing. As predicted, we also found a direct negative relationship between authentic leadership and turnover intention, and between turnover intention and both work engagement and WID (e.g. Cole and Bruch, 2006; Harter *et al.*, 2003; Van Knippenberg and Van Schie, 2000; Koyuncu *et al.*, 2006; Saks, 2006). Also consistent with previous literature, a significant effect of WID on employee turnover intention was also found.

Finally, we found a mediating effect of work engagement in the relationship between authentic leadership and turnover intention. Authentic leaders may enhance employee work engagement by acting as role models, which, in turn, would influence turnover intention. This modeling process would transmit leader's engagement and commitment with the work and guide followers about how to be emotionally and physically connected with and motivated toward their work (Avolio *et al.*, 2004). The mediating effect of WID on the relationship between authentic leadership and turnover intention was not supported by the data, suggesting that one of the mechanisms through which authentic leaders influence employee turnover intention is through the promotion of work engagement and not by fostering WID. In other words, the connection of the employee with his or her work, more than with his or her work group, seems to explain the effects of authentic leadership on turnover intention.

Regarding the control variables, employees with more organizational tenure reported lower levels of turnover intention. This finding is in line with previous

studies that suggest that workers having a shorter organizational tenure are more likely to quit their jobs (e.g. Kim and Stoner, 2008; Somers, 1996; Stone *et al.*, 2006). An explanation for this effect may be that with increasing seniority within an organization, workers are more likely to gain status. Leaving their position entails entering a competitive job market and having to build up their value in a new organization and therefore, in most cases presents a less attractive option that remaining in their current position (Hellman, 1997).

Our study is relevant to better understanding the processes through which authentic leadership influences employee behavior. Our findings suggest that authentic leadership is positively associated with both WID and work engagement, and that authentic leadership reduces employee turnover intention through the development of work engagement. Therefore, work engagement seems to be a key factor for retaining employees.

Our findings have both theoretical and practical implications. At the theoretical level they contribute to a better understanding of the psychosocial processes linking authentic leadership to employee turnover. To our knowledge, this is the first study to explore the relationship between authentic leadership and turnover and to propose a model of the possible paths (WID and work engagement) through which authentic leadership influences turnover intention.

At the practical level, in the present economic crisis, which is characterized by temporary employment and uncertainty, hiring, and training authentic leaders who may enhance positive consequences on employees is especially relevant to maintain the motivation and performance of employees in this situation. Furthermore, the results obtained in this work are relevant for the retention of valuable employees. Paradoxically in times of crisis preventing turnover may be more important than in a stable economic situation because those who leave the company may probably be the best employees, who may have positive expectations of having other opportunities in the current labor market.

Our results suggest that authentic leaders may be able to influence employee turnover intention by increasing their work engagement, which might be achieved by acting as role models and transmitting their commitment and connection to the work to employees. Therefore, it makes sense to select and train authentic leaders, who are able to create feelings of engagement among employees and retain valuable human resources, thus fostering organizational performance.

If the above findings are taken into account the organizations would be able to survive in a dynamic environment by treating their employees as one of their most valuable assets. Given the examined relationships, motivating and retaining employees may aid the companies to enhance their competitiveness in this world of globalization.

Despite these contributions the study has some limitations. First, self-report measures were used to analyze employee perceptions. Self-reported data contains several potential sources of bias that should be noted as limitations, such as social desirability bias, and inflation of the observed relationship between the measured constructs (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). In addition, as the cross-sectional nature of the study does not allow for confident causal conclusions, further studies are needed to confirm the causal nature of these relationships. However, the cross-sectional design provides relevant insights and is useful as a first step in studying phenomena of interest. Another limitation of the present study is that turnover intention was the only outcome variable examined, however, other factors such as performance and unit effectiveness would be particularly interesting to investigate in future studies in order to assess the organizational outcomes of authentic leadership and the mediating role of work

engagement. Finally, regarding data collection, the large number of research assistants who collaborated in obtaining the data allowed the access to a variety of companies and working groups. This provides an advantage when generalizing our results. However, it made it difficult to know some aspects of data collection such as the response rate. In future research these aspects should be more strictly controlled.

In conclusion, the present study demonstrates the positive effects of authentic leadership on employees and organizations, proposing authentic leadership as a key factor to aid in retaining valuable employees through the promotion of employee work engagement.

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