

Systematic Literature Review: (SLR) on Authentic Leadership and Creativity

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Abstract

This systematic literature review (SLR) examines empirical research published between 2015 and 2025 on the relationship between Authentic Leadership (AL) and Creativity. Using the keywords “Authentic Leadership” AND “Creativity”, searches were conducted across EBSCO, Web of Science, Emerald, and JSTOR. A total of 916 studies were initially identified, and after multiple screening, 29 empirical articles met the inclusion criteria. The review reveals that authentic leadership consistently enhances creativity across diverse sectors and national contexts. However, this relationship is largely indirect, operating through mediators such as psychological capital, affective commitment, intrinsic motivation, and knowledge sharing. Several moderators, including learning culture, empowerment, and leader-member exchange (LMX), further shape the strength of this relationship. The findings contribute to theoretical perspectives such as Social Exchange Theory and Positive Organizational Behavior by demonstrating how authentic leadership builds psychological resources that promote creativity. The review highlights the critical role of contextual and psychological mechanisms in strengthening creative outcomes under authentic leadership.

Keywords: Authentic Leadership; AL; Creativity; Employee creativity; Leadership Style; SLR

1. Introduction

Authentic Leadership (AL) has emerged as a significant leadership style that emphasizes transparency, ethical behavior, and relational honesty. Upsurge with the work of Kernis (2003) and Avolio et al., (2004), research on AL or leader's authenticity has gained stark attention by various scholars due to its positive impact of organizational outcomes. Kernis (2003, pg. 13) coined AL as “*reflecting the unobstructed operation of one's true, or core self in one's daily enterprise.*” Later, Avolio et al., (2004) extended work into AL process and its impact on behavioral outcomes. Followed by it many researchers across the world contributed significantly into this domain (Strom, 2020; Ahmed, 2024; Hoang, Luu, & Yang, 2025) and confirmed relationship between leader's authenticity and positive organizational outcomes in terms of performance, creativity, commitment and extra role behavior.

In contemporary organizational contexts, creativity has become a crucial driver of innovation and competitiveness. Given this increasing importance, researchers have focused on understanding the role of authentic leadership in fostering creativity among employees. It has been observed that authentic leader provide psychological safety, job autonomy clarity of purpose and expression along with relationship trust with followers/ employees. These organizational imperatives are supportive factors for employee creativity and innovation. However, there is no unanimous consensus on process that leads to employee creativity due to multiplicity of studies and factors involved in the complex relationship. And this knowledge gap is the pressing need for conducting systematic literature review (SLR) on this topic. Thus, present SLR aims to synthesize empirical evidence from the past decade and evaluate how authentic leadership contributes to creative outcomes across diverse organizational settings.

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Using rigorous and scientific process of SLR, present study aims to achieve the following research objectives.

- RO1: To explore the evolution and growth of authentic leadership and creativity research across time, context and publication avenues.
- RO2: To categories research design, methods and key findings in AL and creativity research over the period of time.
- RO3: To study the prevalent mechanism, limitations and suggesting future directions for study.

Paper is structured into many segments. First segment is introduction, second is methodology of the study, followed by analysis, result and discussion. At the end, paper has section on implications, limitation, future directions and conclusion.

2. Background of AL

Various studies have defined AL in different ways. Following table 1 has summarized the more used and accepted definitions.

Table 1 Top five definitions of AL

Author(s)	Year	AL Definitions	Important aspect
Luthans & Avolio	2003	<i>"AL goes beyond traditional leadership in focusing on developing genuine and transparent leader-follower relationships."</i>	Transparent
Gardner et al.,	2005	<i>"Authentic leaders are those who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as aware of their own and others' values, moral perspectives, knowledge, and strengths."</i>	Values, moral perspectives, knowledge, and strengths
Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang	2005	<i>"AL comprises behaviors that draw upon and promote both the leader's and followers' psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate."</i>	Psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate
Avolio & Gardner	2005	<i>"AL refers to a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context."</i>	Psychological capacities
Walumbwa et al.,	2005	<i>"AL is a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate."</i>	Positive psychological capacities

(Source: Prepared by Authors)

Authentic leadership style focuses on culture that prioritizes specific organizational outcomes in terms of creativity, sustainability, commitment and intention to stay. This leadership style has been found to have a significant impact on organizations culture. Number of studies has found that authentic leadership, characterized by leaders' moral values, ethical behavior, and transparency, played a critical role in shaping employees' behavior and creating a responsible culture. Study by Zeb et al., (2020) found that authentic leadership is positively related to innovation, which, in turn, leads to a supportive organizational culture. The study, which surveyed employees from various Bangladeshi organizations, found that leaders who exhibit green authentic leadership behaviors, such as setting a positive example for environmental responsibility and supporting employees in environmentally conscious practices, were more likely to foster an environment of green innovation, which eventually led to the creation of a green culture.

Additionally, a study by Voegtlin and Scherer (2017) found that authentic leadership positively impacts employees' attitudes towards organization's performance.

Authentic leadership is a leadership style that emphasizes the importance of self-awareness, transparency, and ethical behavior. Psychological empowerment refers to employees' feelings of competence, control, and meaningfulness in their work. The relationship between authentic leadership and psychological empowerment has been a topic of interest in organizational research. This literature review will discuss the studies that have explored the impact of authentic leadership on psychological empowerment. Muthén and Muthén (2017) conducted a meta-analysis of 38 studies and

found a significant positive relationship between authentic leadership and psychological empowerment. The findings indicated that authentic leadership behaviors, such as being genuine, transparent, and trustworthy, contribute to employees' sense of empowerment in their work.

3. Methodology

3.1. Search Strategy

The keywords “Authentic Leadership” AND “Creativity” were used to conduct searches across major academic databases including EBSCO (208 articles), Web of Science (281), Emerald (359; 208 journal articles), and JSTOR (13), focusing on publications from the past 10 years. Four databases have been included for search strategy in order to make it more comprehensive. Many previous studies have also suggested for inclusion of more than one database in search strategy of SLR.

3.2. Inclusion Criteria

- Empirical research articles published between 2015 and 2025
- Studies examining the relationship between *Authentic Leadership* and *Creativity*
- Publications in open-access journals
- English-language studies
- Full-text availability

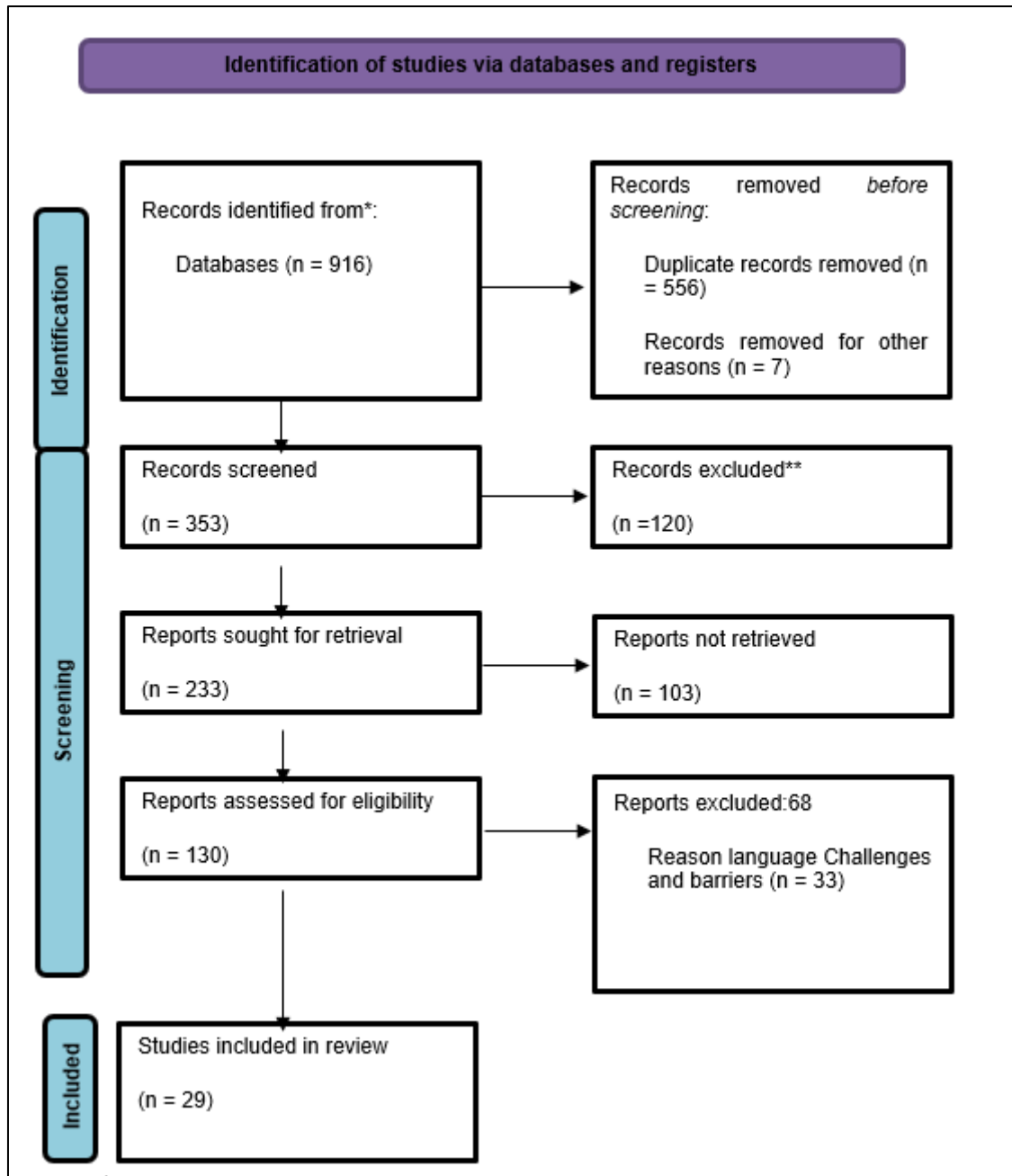
3.3. Exclusion Criteria

- Conceptual or theoretical papers without empirical evidence
- Articles not directly addressing creativity as an outcome variable
- Studies outside leadership or creativity contexts
- Non-English publications
- Conference papers, book chapters, and dissertations

3.4. Selection Results

The initial screening resulted in 916 articles. After removing duplicates and screening titles and abstracts, 856 studies remained. During second screening step only full text articles were selected. A full-text review based on inclusion and exclusion criteria resulted in 29 eligible empirical studies. These studies explicitly examined relationships between authentic leadership and creativity. A PRISMA-style flow chart (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009) was used to visualize the selection process.

See below figure 1;



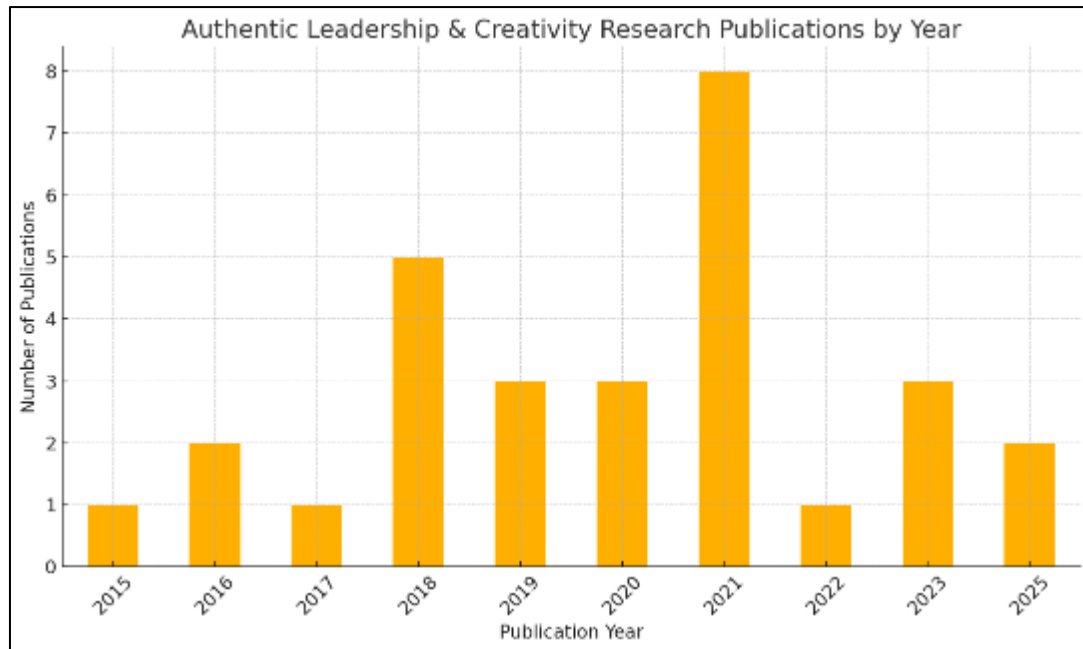
Source: Prepared by author(s) using PRISMA framework (Moher et al., 2009)

Figure 1 Summary of article selection process (PRISMA framework)

4. Results

4.1. Growth in Publications Over Time

The distribution of publications from 2015 to 2025 shows an upward trend in research on authentic leadership and creativity. The peak occurred in 2021, suggesting heightened academic interest in these topics, possibly influenced by post-pandemic organizational restructuring. Prior years show moderate growth with gradual increases in scholarly attention. See figure 2 below;

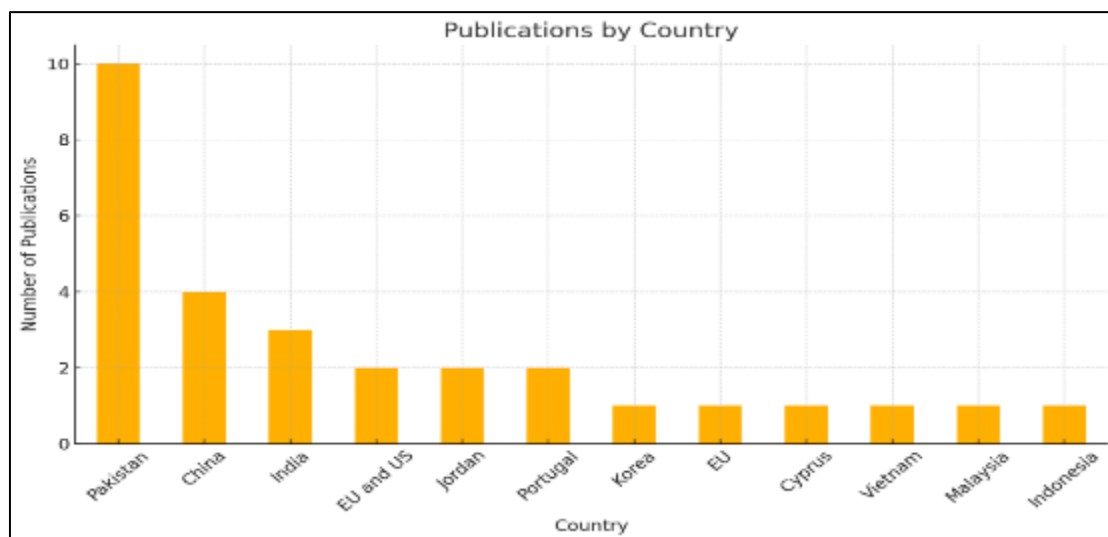


(Source: Prepared by Authors)

Figure 2 Publication frequency by year

4.2. Publications by Country

Pakistan emerged as the most dominant contributor in this research domain, producing the highest number of studies. This reflects the nation's growing emphasis on people-centric leadership approaches within rapidly evolving economic environments. Many of these studies appear in reputable international journals, highlighting Pakistan's increasing academic engagement and recognition. The country's emerging economy places authentic leadership at the center of creative and adaptive organizational strategies. See figure 3 below;



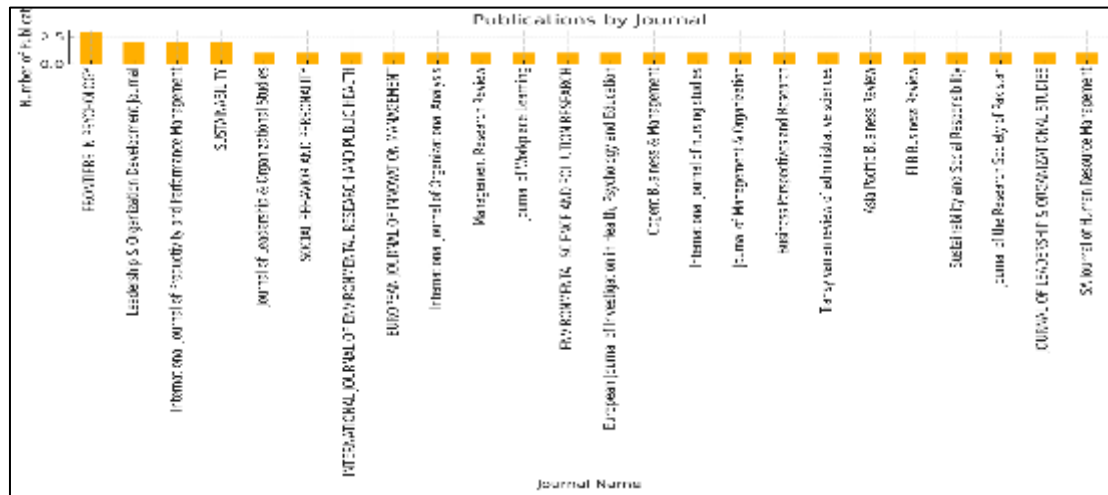
(Source: Prepared by Authors)

Figure 3 Publication count by country/context

4.3. Publications by Journals

Frontiers in Psychology was the leading journal publishing research on authentic leadership and creativity. Its broad interdisciplinary scope and strong focus on psychological mechanisms make it a natural fit for studies linking leadership, employee motivation, and innovative behavior. The journal's open-access format and timely publication

processes further contribute to its popularity among researchers examining leadership–creativity dynamics. See figure 4;



(Source: Prepared by Authors)

Figure 4 Publication count as per journals

4.4. Summary of Selected Studies

A total of 29 empirical studies using primarily quantitative and SEM-based designs were reviewed. These studies span diverse countries including Pakistan, China, India, Portugal, Cyprus, Jordan, Vietnam, and Indonesia, and cover multiple sectors such as healthcare, education, banking, SMEs, corporate firms, and service industries. See table 2 below;

Table 2 Summary of research articles included in SLR

No.	Author(s) & Year	Country / Context	Sample Sector /	Method	Mediators / Moderators	Key Findings
1	Sumanth et al., 2023	EU & US	Corporate employees	Survey + SEM	LMX, Proactive Orientation	Authentic leadership enhances creativity by strengthening LMX and proactive behavior.
2	Rehman & Zeb, 2023	Pakistan	Organizational staff	Quantitative SEM	Green psychological climate	Authentic leadership stimulates green creativity via positive psychological environment.
3	Duarte et al., 2021	EU (Business Sector)	Service employees	SEM	Affective commitment	Leadership promotes creativity through affective commitment pathways.
4	Meng et al., 2016	China	Corporate teams	SEM	Positive team atmosphere	Team climate mediates leadership effects on creative output.
5	Jung et al., 2021	Korea	Organizational employees	SEM	Org. learning culture	Learning culture moderates relationships to innovative behavior.
6	Khan et al., 2021	N/A (general context)	VUCA environment	SEM	—	Authentic leadership important for innovation in uncertain business conditions.

7	Gao et al., 2021	China	SMEs	SEM	CSR involvement	CSR and AL jointly enhance workplace innovation.
8	Laguna et al., 2019	EU (3 countries)	Multilevel organizational sample	Multilevel SEM	—	AL significantly predicts employees' innovative behavior across nations.
9	Hu et al., 2018	China	Corporate workforce	SEM	Psych. capital & compassion	Positive mechanisms enhance proactive behaviors and creativity.
10	Groselj et al., 2021	EU & US	Private sector	SEM	Psychological empowerment	Empowerment moderates AL effects on innovation.
11	Semedo et al., 2017	EU	Organizational employees	SEM	Happiness	Happiness mediates creativity outcomes.
12	Zeb et al., 2020	Pakistan	Work teams	SEM	Knowledge sharing	AL influences creativity through knowledge-sharing behaviors.
13	Lei et al., 2021	China	Organizational teams	Multilevel SEM	Team dynamics	AL enhances creativity at both individual and team levels.
14	Imam et al., 2020	Pakistan	Corporate employees	SEM	Empowerment & supervisor commitment	These mechanisms transmit leadership effects to creativity.
15	Alzghoul et al., 2018	Jordan	Corporates	SEM	Workplace climate	Climate strengthens creativity and performance under AL.
16	Chaudhary & Panda, 2018	India	Employees	SEM	Meaningfulness, safety, engagement	Psychological states mediate creativity outcomes.
17	Ribeiro et al., 2020	Portugal	Corporate sector	SEM	Affective commitment	Leadership enhances creativity via employee commitment.
18	Ribeiro et al., 2018	Portugal	Organizations	SEM	OCB + creativity	AL improves performance via discretionary behaviors.
19	Anwar et al., 2020	Pakistan	Health sector	SEM	Leadership + Creativity	Psychological resources explain creativity outcomes.
20	Rashid et al., 2019	Pakistan	Organizations	SEM	Psychological capital	PsyCap mediates innovation influence.
21	Malik et al., 2016	India	Nursing sector	Survey	—	AL positively influences nursing staff creativity.
22	Mubarak & Noor, 2018	Pakistan	Project-based firms	SEM	Work engagement & empowerment	Dual mediating chain enhances creativity.
23	Yikilmaz & Sürücü, 2023	Cyprus	Organizations	SEM	LMX	LMX mediates leadership-creativity relationship.

24	Sengupta et al., 2021	India	Start-ups	SEM	Engagement & proactivity	AL boosts creativity in entrepreneurial contexts.
25	Ahmad et al., 2015	Pakistan	Higher education	SEM	Intrinsic motivation & mood	Teaching creativity is strengthened via motivational pathways.
26	Phuong & Takahashi, 2021	Vietnam	Service organizations	SEM	Psych. contract, subcultures	Context moderates creativity outcomes.
27	Hanaysha, 2022	Malaysia	Higher education	SEM	OCB	Transformational + authentic leadership drive creativity.
28	Al Sarayreh et al., 2025	Jordan	Commercial banks	SEM	—	AL significantly enhances creativity in banking workforce.
29	Siswanti & Muafi, 2025	Indonesia	Organizations	SEM	Motivating language	Leadership communication moderates innovation outcomes.

(Source: Prepared by authors)

5. Discussion

The studies reviewed consistently indicate that Authentic Leadership enhances creativity, but the relationship is rarely direct. Instead, creativity is shaped through both psychological mediators and contextual moderators.

5.1. Mediating Mechanisms

The SLR highlights several psychological and social mediators through which authentic leadership influences creativity:

- Psychological capital (e.g., hope, resilience, optimism)
- Affective commitment
- Intrinsic motivation and mood
- Knowledge sharing behaviors
- Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB)

These mediators demonstrate that authentic leaders influence creativity by nurturing employees' psychological states, motivation, and willingness to engage in creative behaviors.

5.2. Moderating Factors

Several moderating variables strengthen or shape the AL–creativity relationship:

- Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) enhances relational dynamics.
- Learning culture supports innovative thinking in organizational environments.
- Psychological empowerment increases employees' confidence in expressing creative ideas.
- Positive team climate fosters shared support for innovation.

These moderators emphasize that authentic leadership alone is not sufficient; instead, creativity requires supportive structures and relational conditions.

5.3. Sectorial and Contextual Insights

Findings show that authentic leadership is effective across multiple sectors such as healthcare, education, SMEs, banking, and corporate environments. Emerging economies—such as Pakistan, China, and India—feature prominently,

suggesting that authentic leadership may be particularly influential in environments experiencing rapid change, development, or resource constraints.

5.4. Theoretical Contributions

The studies align strongly with:

- Social Exchange Theory (SET): Employees reciprocate authentic leaders' ethical conduct with trust, engagement, and creativity.
- Positive Organizational Behavior (POB): Authentic leadership builds psychological resources that foster creativity.
- Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory: Authentic leaders provide essential psychological and relational resources that enable creativity under workplace demands.

These theoretical perspectives collectively show that creativity emerges from a combination of leadership support, employee motivation, and positive interpersonal relationships.

5.5. Synthesis of Findings

Overall, authentic leadership enhances creativity through psychological empowerment, relational exchange, motivational pathways, and supportive climates. Creativity thrives when authentic leadership is paired with:

- positive work environments
- psychological safety
- learning-oriented cultures
- strong interpersonal trust

Thus, both leadership style and contextual factors act as multidimensional drivers of creative performance.

6. Limitations and Future Directions

Every study has certain limitations, so thus present study has. And it is important to discuss, few important limitations. First, this SLR has time frame from 2015-2025 (10 Years) only. There may be certain important articles published before 2015 on AL and creativity. Conceptual research articles, non-English research articles have been removed through exclusion criteria, might impact the important and substantial findings. Based on these limitations, further studies can include non-English research articles for improved coverage of studies. Time frame can also be increase to understand the more broad evolution of AL and its impact. Other variables (commitment, intention to stay, extra role behavior etc.) can also be studies with creativity to make it more comprehensive. Theory specific SLR can also been perform to understand AL process and its impact of organizational outcome. Certain boundary conditions such as psychological, relational and contextual factors that impact this AL and creativity relation can also be studies through SLR.

Additionally, in AL research domain, more longitudinal and experimental research work is needed to understand process and role of mediator/ moderators. Difference in culture, industry, and sector can also be studies to improve the predictability of AL process and its impact.

7. Conclusion and Implications

This SLR holds significant contribution for policy makers, strategist and researchers. Theoretically, this study positioned AL as one of the prominent and significant antecedents of creativity among all. However, with AL there are many other factors played their role in shaping the employee overall creativity. Therefore, researcher can use multilevel modeling to enhance further understanding of individual, organizational and contextual factors in the creativity theories to extend its predictability. Additionally, study also shows few boundaries for AL and creativity relation, indicating that leader's authenticity not necessarily guarantees positive organizational outcomes (such as creativity in this case). Thus it would be interesting to see if these boundaries or conditions are applicable in universal pattern or situation specific. Practically, these finding can help in leadership development programs, promoting organizational creativity & sustainability, and retaining the strategic employees by improving commitment. HR manager can use authenticity of leader as performance appraisal measure, job autonomy, ethical decision making, reducing employee turnover, generating commitment-based culture.

Thus, SLR concludes that authentic leadership plays a significant role in promoting creativity across various organizational contexts. However, the relationship is predominantly indirect and relies heavily on mediators and contextual moderators. The studies reviewed highlight that authentic leadership creates psychological and relational conditions necessary for creativity, aligning with major theoretical frameworks such as SET, POB, and JD-R.

Future research should focus on longitudinal designs, cross-cultural comparisons, and the dynamic interaction between leadership and organizational climate. Understanding these mechanisms will deepen insights into how authentic leadership can effectively nurture creativity in diverse workplaces.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Author Contribution

Shalini Shukla has contributed to idea generation, conceptual framework, and structuring of the paper. Hera Fatima Iqbal has contributed for data collection, interpretation and writing section. Ila Pandey has helped with proof reading and editing of the paper.

Data availability

Data can be made available on reasonable request.

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