



EXAMINING HOW AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP COULD INFLUENCE WORK ENGAGEMENT, ORGANISATIONAL CITIZENSHIP AND TASK PERFORMANCE IN SPORT

Dr Paul Perkins

*High Performance Coach Development Advisor Australian Institute of Sport
Associate Professor University of Canberra Research Institute for Sport and Exercise*

Background

I was recently involved in a small group discussion that covered a range of topics, including the challenges and demands of high performance coaching. Half way through the conversation, attention turned toward the characteristics of effective high performance coaches and one of the participants (who has an extensive background in sport administration) asked me if I would like to share my thoughts with the group. After giving the matter a bit of thought (whilst enjoying a couple of sips of coffee), I said: *"high performance sport coaching is a highly complex, challenging and multi-faceted task that requires a variety of skills and involves many responsibilities"*. My response must have resonated, or at least intrigued the person a bit because he then asked me what I thought the key role of a high performance coach was. Once again, I took some time to gather my thoughts before saying: *"My great friend and colleague Professor Allan Hahn and I discuss this topic quite a lot and we both believe that one of the primary roles of a high performance coach is effective leadership"*. When asked if I could elaborate on my response, I said: *"Well, if you think about it, coaching can be thought of as a socially constructed pedagogical activity that aims to achieve certain outcomes by developing capabilities and enhancing performance of teams and individuals through goal-orientated practice. So coaches, particularly those who operate at the high performance end of the spectrum, should be seen as unique leaders and enablers of success"*.

This led to a fantastic discussion about the behavioural traits of effective leaders and the influence coaches can have on athlete engagement and performance. However, and as is often the case, the discussion gave me a lot to think about and led to a subsequent review of pertinent research and repeated cycles of introspective self-analysis (i.e., challenging existing beliefs and assumptions). The following attempts to summarise this activity and aims to provide a basis for future discussions and/or personal exploration around the importance of authentic leadership and how it could impact work engagement, organisational citizenship and task performance in sport.



Paul Perkins is an associate Professor at the University of Canberra and a member of the Australian Institute of Sport High Performance Coach Development Team. He is a dedicated, passionate and experienced coach, educator and researcher with an extensive background in the Australian sport sector and a passion for helping others and seeing people succeed. Paul is skilled at, and highly experienced in developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating multi-layered sport-based development initiatives and has a thorough understanding of deductive, inductive and abductive reasoning and how these different processes can be used to draw conclusions, make predictions, and/or construct explanations. Whilst Paul's research has been multi-disciplinary and positioned within the broader societal context, he is currently exploring the benefits of more social and collaborative approaches to coach learning and is interested in contributing to long-term positive outcomes through the use of Australian First Nations methodologies.

A quick look at authentic leadership

As can be seen in the Table below, authentic leadership is a particular approach to guardianship that emphasises transparency, honesty and genuineness. It requires an ability to inspire people, is the single strongest predictor of an employee’s job satisfaction, involves a long-term focus on organisational goals, and consists of the following actions:

- > **Self-awareness:** Assessing weaknesses, strengths and values in order to be more authentic with team members by practicing critical self-reflection, asking for feedback and having awareness of employees’ feelings.
- > **Mission-driven:** Putting the goals of the organisation or the team’s mission in front of their own interests.
- > **Relational transparency:** Remaining honest when sharing thoughts and feelings by offering constructive feedback to team members when necessary and admitting mistakes when wrong.
- > **Long-term focus:** An ability to motivate employees to strive for goals and objectives that may take more time than initially expected and require additional work and patience.
- > **Fair and balanced processing:** Considering opposing opinions by encouraging employees to share their thoughts, feelings and experiences while avoiding potential conflicts.

Authentic leadership	Traditional approaches
Leads with a purpose	Sets goals and objectives
Underpinned by values and principles	Underpinned by personal agendas
Cultivates long-term relationships	Accumulates transactions
Demonstrates excellence	Imposes power and authority
Models expected behaviour	Assumes people have the opportunities and resources to be successful
Leads with the heart	Leads with ego

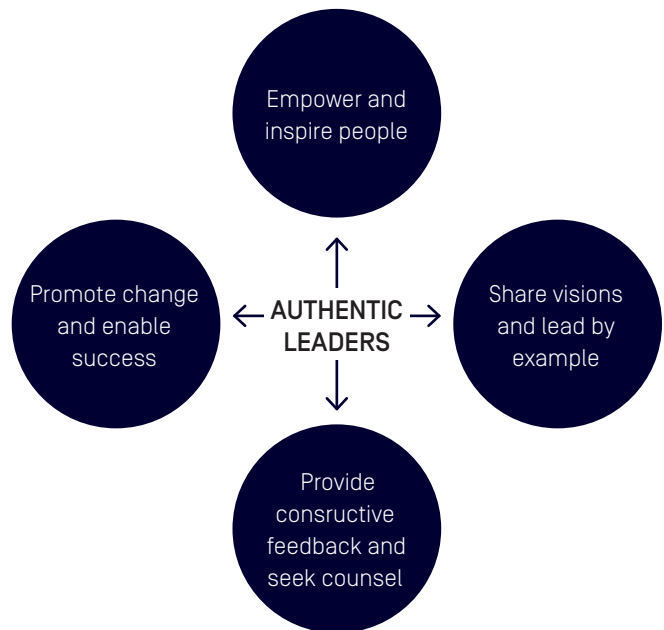
Characteristics of authentic leaders

A scoping review of the literature highlighted that authentic leaders possess certain characteristics that enable them to achieve a wide-range of positive workplace outcomes. These traits are highlighted in the Figure below and include:

- > A commitment to personal growth and development.
- > High levels of self-awareness and emotional intelligence.
- > An acute focus on long-term goals and objectives.
- > Transparency and consistency when dealing with others.
- > An ability to create organised and inspired workforces.

Questions, reflections and critical self-analysis

- > To what extent does the above resonate with you?
- > How do your personal traits, beliefs and actions compare to those listed above?
- > How would the athletes and people you work with describe your approach to leadership?
- > How important is authenticity for team culture and performance?
- > Could you operate with greater authenticity?

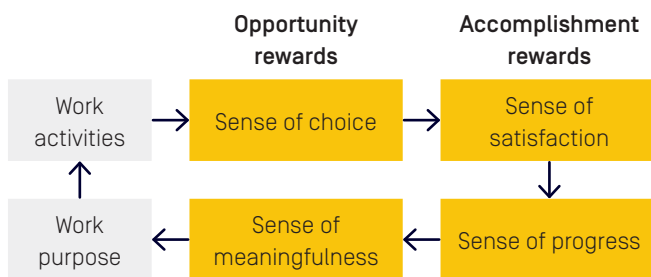


A brief summary of work engagement

In the present context, engagement denotes the degree of connection and enthusiasm a person shows toward their work and organisation. It also indicates an individual's commitment to outcomes and can be demonstrated by the following forms of personal investment:

- > **Cognitive engagement:** The level of focus and engrossment for a job and/or task.
- > **Emotional engagement:** The amount of joy a person demonstrates when performing a particular work-related task.
- > **Physical engagement:** The level of intensity a person applies to a workplace task.

Whilst high levels of engagement is a key factor for productivity and success, it's important to note that people often lose the drive to complete everyday tasks and meet objectives when they feel neglected and/or believe that the organisation they work for does not care about them and its people. The Figure below is intended to show how a sense of purpose can be achieved through engagement in everyday tasks when people have choices, feel valued and are able to make decisions.



The importance of work engagement

High levels of work engagement can produce highly desirable organisational and individual outcomes, including:

- > The creation of optimally functioning workplaces.
- > The development of positive mental states and supportive connections.
- > Improved individual and group performance.
- > More attentive, focused and responsible workforces.
- > Emotionally connected and more enthusiastic team members.
- > The transfer of positive thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

Questions, reflections and critical self-analysis

- > How do you express yourself physically, cognitively and emotionally when performing your role?
- > What changes are required to ensure the highest level of work engagement is achieved by organisation and/or team?
- > How could you better support the athletes and people you work with to ensure they feel highly engaged and have a sense of purpose when performing everyday tasks?
- > How do you currently build a sense of connection with the people you work with?
- > How do you monitor and evaluate your effectiveness to achieve the above tasks?

General outline of organisational citizenship behaviour

Organisational citizenship refers to an employee's willingness to go above and beyond what is expected of them by performing a range of positive actions that benefit their co-workers and organisation even though these tasks are not explicitly mentioned in their job description. Individuals who engage in this type of behaviour do all they can to help ensure their work environments run smoothly and effectively by supporting the social and psychological needs of their colleagues. However, it should be noted that in most cases displays of **this type of behaviour** in non-sporting workplaces do not usually involve a formal reward system but still produce an increase in productivity and effectiveness, which results in achievement of outcomes that can be difficult to quantitatively measure.

Types of organisational citizenship behaviour

Studies focused on organisational citizenship have found that the following behaviours can increase the effectiveness of group members and contribute to positive workplace outcomes.

- > **Altruism:** Deciding to help someone without expecting anything in return, which can create something known as "helper's high" (i.e., people experiencing a sense of happiness at work by helping others). Fortunately, it appears altruism is contagious and displays of the behaviour often encourages others to engage in altruistic actions.
- > **Courtesy:** Being polite and considerate of others.
- > **Sportsmanship:** Deciding to remain cheerful and positive even in the face of adverse and/or frustrating circumstances.
- > **Conscientiousness:** Going to work early, deciding to stay late and doing more than expected.
- > **Civic virtue:** Representing your organisation in a good way.

Advantages of organisational citizenship

It has been reported that people who practice **organisational citizenship behaviour** believe that their work is much more meaningful and tend to have greater levels of job satisfaction. This appears to be the result of having more control over certain situation (greater autonomy), perceptions of being valued and respected, and having opportunities to encourage and help others. Interestingly, and perhaps of most significance for coaches is the idea that people who experience meaningfulness at work are more likely to contribute to the development of enthusiastic and collaborative workplaces and the creation of vigorous and empowered teams.

Questions, reflections and critical self-analysis

- > How would you describe your organisation's approach to citizenship behaviour?
- > What can you do to promote organisational citizenship within your teams?
- > How do you currently reward displays of the above traits and behaviour?
- > Can the above information help shape new practices and support the development of new cultures and markers for success?

Overview of task performance

Task performance refers to the effectiveness in which an employee or group of workers perform a particular task. It involves the following analysis.

- > How can this task be completed in the best possible way?
- > Are there any constraints?
- > What are the expected outcomes?
- > What specialised skills are required to complete the task?
- > What are the roles and responsibilities of team members?

Effects of organisational culture and leadership on task performance

Research focused on workplace effectiveness shows that authentic and democratic leadership, autonomy, openness, trust, flexible work arrangements and supportive work cultures are the main factors that contribute to positive task performance outcomes. Conversely, and worthy of note, is that in most cases authoritarian leadership has a negative influence on performance and workforce retention. According to power dependence theorist, the above can be explained through a process known as **leader-member exchange** (i.e., the attitudes and behaviours of workers depends on how they are treated by their leader).

Questions, reflections and critical self-analysis

- > Can the above be of any use to you and your work?
- > How would you describe the culture of your organisation and/or teams?
- > How is your leadership style influencing team performance and organisational culture?
- > How is task performance currently measured?
- > What additional support is required to ensure all tasks are completed in the best possible way?
- > How do you deal with leader-member exchange?
- > How do you utilise existing assets and resources (e.g., individual skills, experiences, attributes, proficiencies and motivations)?

Concluding thoughts

This artifact has been prepared and shared to help demonstrate the power of connection. It summarises the importance of authentic leadership and considers how it can influence work engagement, organisational citizenship and task performance across different settings and workplaces. It is hoped (in an incidental way) that the information encourages further discussions and personal investigations of the topics raised.

Something to consider

*"I have come to a frightening conclusion.
I am the decisive element in the learning environment.
It is my approach that will affect the outcomes.
It is my behaviour that will set the mood.
As the coach, I can make the lives of the people I work with miserable or joyous.
I can be a tool for resentment or an instrument of inspiration.
I can humiliate or humour; hurt or heal.
In all situations, it is my response that decides whether an issue will escalate or de-escalate and if a person is humanised or de-humanised"*

- Adapted from the work of Dr Haim Ginott.