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**Using authentic leadership based on the principles of positive
psychology to increase employee engagement in a higher education
setting**

Abstract

This paper aims to identify whether using authentic leadership, based on the principles of positive psychology, can increase employee engagement in the Higher Education sector. Specifically, the research explores the communication factors that link employee engagement with authentic leadership based on the principles of positive psychology.

The research used a case study design within the Faculty of the Creative Industries at Southampton Solent University, now the School of Business, Law and Communication. Using the repertory grid technique (RGT) each participant produced dichotomous constructs to explain their personal world view of course leadership at undergraduate level.

It was found that authentic course leaders demonstrated best practice around the management of change, involvement in big-issues, understanding of personal contribution, empowerment and involvement in every day decisions. Furthermore, the research demonstrated a hypothesised link between authentic leadership, positive psychology, employee engagement and enhanced performance.

The research concluded that the top five communication factors associated with employee engagement were: 'Communicating a clear vision, Trust, Collaboration, Empowerment and the importance of being listened to', with 'Collaboration' being the most important. In addition, it was found that these communication factors were associated with enhanced work role performance, when identified alongside authentic leadership (being 'credible', 'focused' and 'confident'), and the key signature strength 'authenticity' connected with positive psychology.

Keywords: Authentic leadership, Employee Engagement, Higher Education, Positive Psychology, Repertory Grid Technique

Using authentic leadership based on the principles of positive psychology to increase employee engagement in a higher education setting

Introduction

The UK higher education sector is increasingly coming under pressure to offer real value to its students. Since 2012, the reduction in government funding and the increase in student fees has seen prospective students not just focusing on their education, but the 'return on their investment' (Baker 2011:1). In 2015, the government removed student number controls, and potentially in this parliament we could see an increase in student fees.

The return on a student's investment is becoming more transparent through the data provided by the National Student Survey (NSS) results, introduced in 2005 as a 'quality assurance framework' (Swain 2009:1). Professor Peter Finn, Principal of St Mary's University College describes the National Student Survey (NSS) as 'one of the key performance indicators in the university sector' (2010:4). In addition, from 2012, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), who introduced the NSS, also required that universities provide Key Information Set (KIS), course-by-course consumer data (Baker 2011, Swain 2009).

In order, to be able to demonstrate value through this data and offer a distinctive brand promise, universities will require the full engagement of their employees. Smythe (2004:5) defines 'engagement as the process by which people become personally implicated in the success of a strategy, change, transformation, or everyday operational improvement'. To clarify, it is not about coercion but enabling employees to be involved in decision-making that affects their day-to-day lives (Smythe 2007). The MacLeod and Clarke report (2009:3,9) commissioned by the Department for Business found that employee engagement enables two-way conversations between 'leaders and managers, and employees' and that engaged employees give 'willingly of discretionary effort'. In addition, the report argues that employee engagement can be measured and correlated to performance.

Employee engagement is particularly important for post 92 universities, such as Southampton Solent Universityⁱ. As a result of improved student satisfaction levels on the NSS, as well as increases in graduate level employment on the Destination of Leavers in Higher Education survey (DLHE), the University has seen a rise in its university league table position.

The study investigated the implications for the Higher Education sector of using authentic leadership, as a communication strategy, to increase employee engagement with the NSS. The research objective evaluated how authentic leadership, based on the principles of positive psychology builds and enhances on the Engage Group's (2008) 'engagement-plus strategies' to enhance student satisfaction scores.

The Engage Group's (2008) engagement-plus strategies involve adapting change management practices and involving employees in decision-making. The research built on these strategies by evaluating whether the constructs of engagement can be further emphasised through authentic leadership, creating a more positive work place. Furthermore, the positive correlation between engagement and performance was explored (MacLeod and Clarke report 2009:3).

As part of this study it is important to distinguish positive psychology from positive thinking to avoid confusion between the two concepts. Positive thinking is about persuading people that what happens to them is under their own control, whereas, positive psychology is about acquiring knowledge 'to support people who want to live good, long happy and productive lives' (Lewis 2011:3). Lewis argues that positive psychology can lead to a 'new era of organisational understanding and practice' (2011:5). A field of research is investigating the 'characteristics of positive workplaces' and how these organisations allow people to 'flourish' rather than 'merely survive' (Lewis 2011:14). A flourishing or a positive workplace would build and support the practices of employee engagement.

In addition, Gallup's research sees the manager as the core driver of employee engagement (Harter et al 2002). This is further supported by the work of Judge et al (2001 cited in Harter et al 2002: 269) who found that the engagement driver most significantly correlated to performance was 'satisfaction' with the manager. Melcrum (2005:104 cited in Smythe 2007:198) sees the top two management actions for driving engagement as 'communicating a clear vision' and 'building trust in an organisation,' both of which could be within the remit of course leaders at Southampton Solent University.

Avolio and Luthans (2006) cited in Lewis (2011:102) researched the constructs of 'good, positive, or genuine leadership'. Their research concluded that 'authentic leadership' is constructed from the 'positive constructs that elicit genuine, reliable, trustworthy and real' behaviour (Avolio and Luthans 2006 cited in Lewis 2011:102). Avolio (2010) defines authentic leaders as being 'confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, transparent, moral or ethical, as well as future-orientated'; the 'core components being transparent

relationships, internalised morality, adaptive self-reflection and balanced processing' (cited in Lewis 2011:102).

Avolio (2010) concluded that authentic leadership is a 'root function', so whilst authentic leaders can have different styles, their implicit behaviour is defined by their 'values and morality' (2006 cited in Lewis 2011:103). The style of leadership influences the behaviour of managers throughout the organisation (Cook 2008). Potentially, the style of leadership exhibited by senior management within the Facultyⁱⁱ could influence the style of leadership of course leaders, and in turn the course team's type of engagement with students.

The primary research was conducted within the Faculty and investigated whether course leaders, whose undergraduate programmes have a NSS score for overall student satisfaction of 86% or above (Question 22 on the survey), also exhibit traits of authentic leadership. A score of 86% is the Faculty bench mark level for overall satisfaction and correlates with the mean value in the 2005 NSS (SurrIDGE 2006:3).

It is not the remit of this study to identify what causes students to respond in the way that they do to the NSS survey (NSS). The NSS results will only be used to understand which courses within the Faculty have student satisfaction above the benchmark level of 86%. The focus is to explore authentic leadership, based on the principles of positive psychology and the implications for engagement with employees.

Literature review

The review informs the background of the study in terms of the NSS, whilst establishing the context in terms of communication, employee engagement, positive psychology and authentic leadership, in order to identify the gap in research that informed the study.

National Student Satisfaction (NSS) Survey

‘Since its introduction in 2005, the NSS has been subject to extensive debate and discussion’ raising concerns around validity, the ‘relevance of student satisfaction’ as a performance indicator, and the role it plays in league tables (van der Veldon cited in Buckley 2012:4). The debate has been further influenced by the increase of fees and the subsequent ‘promotion of consumerism,’ coupled with the increase in student choice, in the Higher Education sector (Hart & Rush 2007 cited in Buckley 2012:4). The media add to the discussion by describing the NSS as a ‘summative measure of teaching quality,’ and universities management, by using it as a ‘deficit model’ to ‘beat’ failing courses (Buckley 2012:9, 28).

As a key performance indicator in Higher Education, the NSS measures student satisfaction, over six scales and one measure of overall satisfaction (SurrIDGE 2008). All six scales are known to have a ‘positive effect on overall satisfaction’ (SurrIDGE 2006). Based on Keaveney and Young’s (1997) conceptual framework, Hameed & Amjad (2011) found that students with positive university experiences show satisfaction with their educational experience. The factors that influenced student experience were ‘connection with faculty, advising staff, the environment and interactions in the classroom’ (Keaveney and Young 1997 cited in Hameed & Amjad 2011: 66). Key words informing perception of employee performance were: ‘accessibility, reliability, willingness to help, responsive and understanding’ (Keaveney and Young 1997 cited in Hameed & Amjad 2011: 66). It was for these reasons that the NSS overall student satisfaction was chosen as the key performance indicator for the purposes of this study.

Communication

Communication, regarded as a discipline in its own right, is central to organisational life and effective performance (Huczynski & Buchanan 2007). In 1990, the International Association of Business Communication (IABC) commissioned the Excellence study to investigate communication excellence in organisations (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig 2010). As a result of the survey, Grunig-Hunt’s Public Relations Models of communications were defined.

Grunig-Hunt's excellence theory is the two-way symmetric model, based on mutual understanding and dialogue rather than, persuasion as its purpose. Asked whether a communication department can be excellent when the CEO is not, Grunig answers no, expressing that the communications department must have the shared understanding of senior management, in order to produce excellent communication programmes (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig 2010). This study will show that an authentic leader aspires to symmetric communication, involving employees in decision making to produce shared understanding.

Employee engagement

This study investigated how authentic leadership supports employee engagement and specifically builds on the Engage Group's (2008) 'engagement-plus strategies'. The Engage Group, an employee engagement consultancy was commissioned by YouGov to research 'employee engagement practice' in the UK (Engage Group 2008:2). The research found a 'direct relationship between financial performance and the extent employees are engaged to perform' (Engage Group 2008:2). 'Moreover, a new generation of business leaders', potentially supporting the ethos of authentic leadership, 'are far more likely to improve employee engagement by sharing power and decision-making throughout their organisation' (Engage Group 2008:2).

The Engage Group report (2008:9) identified 10 elements of successful employee engagement that distinguished between the 'new world' or 'engagement-plus' elements that are displacing the more traditional 'old world' factors of engagement. The report argues that the 'engagement-plus strategies' are crucial to optimise engagement and demonstrate best practice around the management of change, involvement in 'big-issue' decisions, understanding of personal contribution, empowerment and involvement in 'everyday' decisions (Engage Group 2008:9).

These 'engagement-plus strategies' are considered to have superseded the more traditional view of achieving engagement through employer advocacy, deserved loyalty to the employer, fairness, motivation and pride. The research showed that organisations that delivered 'on both sets of factors will have more engaged employees, more committed customers and faster growth' (Engage Group 2008:10). The study further explored these strategies and demonstrated the enhancement that authentic leadership can bring to them.

Robinson et al (2004 cited in Smythe 2007: 193) confirm that an employee centric view is central to employee engagement, seeing the key driver as 'feeling valued and involved, which translates to 'involvement in decision making', being listened to, job role

development and a concern for employee 'well-being'. This study builds on this view, by demonstrating how authentic leadership, based on the principles of positive psychology reflect the 'engagement plus-strategies' to support employee engagement.

Positive psychology

Virtuous practices are highly correlated to exceptional performance, where virtuousness is defined as 'trust, optimism, compassion, integrity and forgiveness' and performance as 'innovation, quality, turnover and customer retention' (Lewis 2010:16). Indeed, virtuous practices are reflected in Linley et al's (2010:160) model of 'positive engagement' where 'enjoyment, challenge and meaning' are at the core of organisational practice.

Virtuous practices reflect 'strength based' appraisals and 'appreciative ways of working' (Linley et al's 2010:160). This strength-based approach allows people to be recognised for their strengths whilst freeing them up to acknowledge their weaknesses. Strengths that lead to gratification and 'flow' are described by Seligman (2002) as 'signature strengths', characterised by the belief that the attribute is a core strength that involves excitement and easy learning when first used (cited in Carr 2011:70). The correlation between virtuous practices and performance parallels that of engagement and performance and correlate with the study, in terms of the traits/strengths that were identified in authentic leaders.

A field of research is investigating the 'characteristics of positive workplaces' and how these organisations allow people to 'flourish' rather than 'merely survive' (Lewis 2011:14). A flourishing or a positive workplace would build and support the practices of employee engagement. Active engagement at work involves managers recognising the uniqueness of each employee, enabling them to build a work environment that best fits their talents and strengths (Buckingham & Coffman cited in Lewis 2011). Using talents energises employees, whilst enhancing engagement and improving performance (Buckingham & Coffman cited in Lewis 2011). Energised employees are much more likely to experience 'flow,' a state experienced by people that are so fully 'absorbed in what they are doing that time ceases to matter' (Csikszentmihalyi 2002 cited in Lewis 2011:51). Flow is 'intrinsically motivating' and more likely to be experienced at work when employees have control over their jobs, where developed skills are required to do challenging tasks and where employees have clear goals and 'frequent feedback' (Csikszentmihalyi 2003 cited in Carr 2011:112 & 123).

Linley (2008) identified a 'three-way relationship between strengths, engagement and authenticity' (cited in Lewis 2011:46), where being authentic (true to who we are) facilitates strengths whilst enhancing engagement. Being authentic is good for the

individual, enhancing 'well-being, better health,' reduced stress, enhanced 'relationships, self-esteem, greater happiness, gratitude, emotional intelligence and positive energy' (Lewis 2011:47).

Data from Gallup's Q12, involving '12,157 employees', indicates a positive correlation between strengths and engagement (Linley et al 2010:218). Amongst employees receiving strengths-based feedback, engagement rose by 0.33 compared to employees not receiving the intervention (Linley 2010). In addition, units showed '8.9 percent greater profitability' where managers received strength-based feedback (Linley 2010). These indicators suggest a positive correlation between the Engage Group's (2008) engagement-plus strategies, positive psychology and authentic leadership.

Searching for studies of a similar nature, in the Higher Education sector has resulted in a variety of research associated with wellbeing. Woods (2009:171 & 173) reviewed the influence of 'emotion' where emotion is associated with a 'sense of self-worth' for 'health and wellbeing.' The review interestingly notes, that few studies view universities as 'workplaces' and that the majority focus on student welfare rather than employees (Woods 2009:171 & 173).

Authentic leadership

Based on the principles of positive psychology Avolio et al (2004) and Luthans & Avolio (2003) developed authentic leadership theory (cited in Hsiung (2012:351). Avolio (2004:806) stated that authentic leaders 'act in accordance with deep personal values and convictions, to build credibility and win the respect and trust of followers' (cited in Peus et al 2012:331). Now considered an emerging leadership theory, the theory recognises the challenges represented by 'high pressure and challenging environments' (Avolio 2004:806 cited in Peus et al 2012:331). They state that in order to have a 'sustainable competitive advantage, organisations need authentic leadership'.

Definitions of authentic leadership vary, but all emphasise consistency between leadership behaviour, and their values (Yukl 2010). Additional traits include 'positive leader values, leader self-awareness and a trusting relationship with followers' (Yukl 2010: 344).

Authentic leadership is a 'normative theory that describes ideal leaders for organisations' (Yukl 2010: 344). Authentic leaders have 'high self-awareness about their values, beliefs, emotions, self-identities and abilities' (Yukl 2010:345). In addition, they are seen to have 'positive core values such as honesty, altruism, kindness, fairness, accountability and optimism' (Yukl 2010:345). Indeed, authentic leaders' 'values and convictions' are said to be 'strongly internalised' and not 'superficial reflections of social norms' (Yukl 2010:345).

George (2003) emphasises the need for authentic leaders to empower others supported by Gardner et al's (2005) belief that authentic leaders encourage 'self-determination' enabling followers to fulfil their own needs of 'competence, autonomy' and significance (cited in Yukl 2010:345). This empowerment of followers' increases when leaders are perceived to be 'credible, focused and confident' (cited in Yukl 2010:346). Commitment, in terms of 'social identification' with the organisation and team, is further enhanced when the leader is seen to be 'honest', articulates an 'appealing vision, provides encouragement and models appropriate behaviours' (cited in Yukl 2010:346).

Harter (2002) 'defined authenticity as being true to one self' (cited in Zhu et al 2004:21). An 'authentic person is genuine' (Zhu et al 2004:21) and 'loyal to oneself', meaning that they do not 'act' behaviours but behave in a manner that is true to themselves (Avolio, Gardner, Luthans, May & Walumbwa 2004 cited in Zhu et al 2004:21). The concept of being true to oneself when dealing with followers has developed into 'behavioural integrity the perceived alignment between words and actions' (Simons 2002 cited in Leroy et al 2011: 255).

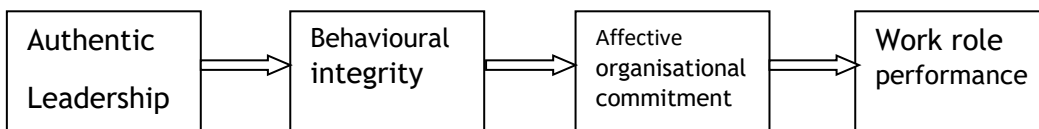
Behavioural integrity and authentic leadership have been considered to form a 'root construct of positive forms of leadership' (Simons 1999 cited in Hannes et al 2011: 255). To be authentic, leadership behaviour must be consistent with both their actions and in what they say and intend to do (Simons (1999) cited in Zhu et al 2004:21). However, they are not the same thing: 'authentic functioning' is 'inward facing, indicating whether one remains true to oneself' whereas behavioural integrity is 'outward facing'; dependent on followers perception of words and action being in alignment (Leroy et al 2011: 256). Simons (2002) said employees' sensitivity to this alignment are affected by their blueprint and assessment of integrity (cited in Simons 2007:650). In addition, Simons (2007:654) found that reduced perception of behavioural integrity was also associated with 'lower trust in management, interpersonal justice perceptions, global satisfaction, affective commitment and intent to stay'. This positive focus on human behaviour identifies the 'strengths that drive performance' placing authentic leadership and behavioural integrity into 'positive organisational scholarship' (Leroy 2011:255).

Authentic leadership has been seen to drive 'organisational commitment, performance and citizenship behaviours through trust and identification in the leader' (Walumbwa et al 2008 cited in Leroy 2011:256). Organisational commitment could arguably be related to employee engagement and is defined as 'positive emotional attachment and identification with the organisation' (Allen & Meyer 1990 cited in Leroy 2011:257). Meyer et al (2004)

further support this by arguing that organisational commitment may represent ‘intrinsic work motivation’ (cited in Leroy 2011:258), which has correlations with the discretionary effort seen in employee engagement.

Leroy et al’s (2011) hypothesised model (Diagram 1) correlates the positive outcomes of organisational commitment and enhanced work role performance with the constructs of authentic leadership and behavioural integrity.

Figure 1: Leroy et al’s (2011) hypothesised model



In addition, Leroy et al (2011:261) found that behavioural integrity increases ‘follower identification with the organisation’ when leaders stay ‘true to themselves’. Furthermore, they found a correlation between authentic leadership and work role performance which was fully utilised when followers demonstrated affective organisation commitment.

This study investigated how authentic leadership, based on the principles of positive psychology supports employee engagement and specifically builds on the Engage Group’s (2008) ‘engagement-plus strategies’. The link between employee engagement and effective ‘employee centric’ leadership is well established (Smythe 2007:193).

Furthermore, the literature established that ‘virtuous practices’ reflect ‘positive engagement’ (Lewis 2010:16 & Linley et al 2010:160). The study goes onto identify the signature strengths/constructs of authentic leadership represented by course leaders in a Higher Education setting.

However, no literature specifically addressing the communication factors that link employee engagement with the constructs of positive psychology and authentic leadership were found or any specific research in this area in the Higher Education sector. This view is confirmed by Woods (2009) who found that few studies focus on universities as work places or indeed employee welfare.

The theory suggests a positive correlation between the Engage Group’s (2008) ‘engagement-plus strategies,’ positive psychology and authentic leadership. In fact, Linley (2008) identified a ‘three-way relationship between strengths, engagement and authenticity’ (cited in Lewis 2011:46). The scene was therefore set for the study to explore the implications for the Higher Education sector of using authentic leadership

based on the principles of positive psychology as a communication strategy to increase employee engagement with the NSS.

The research approach

Using a case study research design has allowed the study good access to the School enabled a rich understanding of the organisational context. In addition, the inductive approach enabled the research aim to be the starting point from which the data has been explored. The repertory grid fits with this philosophy as it allows the participants to construe their own meaning, rather than the research exploring theoretical themes.

A mono method of data collection and mixed method of analysis was chosen. The justification for opting for a single data collection method was questioned repeatedly, due to the multi method approach, being 'increasingly advocated by business and management research' (Curran & Blackburn 2001 cited in Saunders et al 2009:151). Justification came from the data collection technique, the repertory grid technique (RGT) that puts the participant in charge, as it is the participant and not the researcher that is doing the construing (Tindall 2011). This fundamental shift from researcher to the participant allows for personal narrative, the voice of the participant to be heard, in a way that 'emphasises the primacy of interaction and social practices' (Butt 2001:76 cited in Tindal 2011:103). The repertory grid is developed from Kelly's (1955) Personal Construct Theory and allowed the participants to develop their own world view of course leadership. Therefore, it was not considered that additional research methods would provide better opportunities to explore the research question or provide more trust-worthy data (Tashakkori & Teddlie (2003) cited in Saunders et al 2009).

Sample

In the case study research design, non-probability judgemental/purposive sampling was chosen. Probability or representative sampling was dismissed, on the grounds that it was impractical to ensure that the sample was representative of the population.

Generalisations about the population on statistical grounds are not valid in purposive sampling; however, as the research is qualitative in nature, this limitation was considered reasonable (Saunders et al 2009). Despite having a sampling frame (the Faculty) it was decided to use purposive sampling, specifically typical case sampling. The benefit of this approach was to gain information rich cases (Neuman 2005 cited in Saunders et al 2009). Eleven employees (coded 1-11) were interviewed from within the Faculty, specifically, two administrators, three senior lecturers, four course leaders and two programme group leaders. The cases were selected for their knowledge and experience of either being a course leader or having direct experience of working with course leaders. The participants were predominately in the 46-55 age band, female, full-time, with six plus years length of service.

Repertory grid technique (RGT) interview

The aim of the RGT is to obtain a unique individual perspective of the participant's reality. A level of subjectivity is part of the research process, as hearing the participant's voice is part of Kelly's Personal Construct Process (Tindall 2011).

Prior to commencing any of the interviews, the Enquire Within software was set up. The purpose was defined 'To explore the communication factors that link employee engagement with authentic leadership based on the principles of positive psychology'. The six elements were then entered (see below) and only one qualifier entered (in terms of how they would run the course), as these would be discussed offline.

The RGT requires an area of interest; for this study the role of course leadership within the Faculty was chosen. The elements need to be 'items of experience' and hence the six elements describing different types of course leader were created (Thomas & Harri-Augstein 1985:99 cited in Tindall 2011:105). Each participant was then asked to think of a course leader from the academic year 2012-13, or if they were struggling 2011-12, that fulfilled the description of the following elements from the participants' own experience:

- Typical course leader
- My ideal course leader
- Effective course leader
- Authentic course leader
- Ineffective course leader
- Inauthentic course leader

Once the participants had privately noted who they were thinking about they were asked to scan down the list of the National Student Satisfaction data. A 'yes' was written next to the element, if the undergraduate degree course that the course leader represented had scored an overall student satisfaction score of 86% and above, or 'no' if the course had scored 85% or below. The participant was then asked to complete the profiling data.

To create a more visual approach to the repertory grid, the six elements were written down on six different cards - if necessary the participant could discreetly write the initials/pseudonym of the course leader they were thinking about onto the appropriate card. The participant was then asked to pick three of the elements (cards), for example typical course leader, my ideal course leader and an ineffective course leader. In order to produce constructs, the participants were then asked to consider how two of the elements were similar, such as the typical and ideal course leader and how the other element, such

as ineffective course leader, was different. It was explained that the RGT was about producing a finite number of dichotomous constructs; to explain this further an example was given, for example A & B are confident and C is unconfident or A & B are effective and C is ineffective.

Each participant was guided through a conversation adapted from Enquire Within's (2005:15) qualifying questions. The participants were asked to think about the elements in terms of the following:

- **Material attributes**
- In terms of how they run the course
- In terms of how they affect people
- In terms of how they relate to staff or students
- **Interviewee's actions regarding the elements**
- In terms of their skills
- In terms of their behaviour
- In terms of their influence on you
- In terms of the demands they place on you
- In terms of your responsibility towards them
- In terms of the approach you have to take towards them
- In terms of your responses to the demands they make
- **Interviewee's feelings regarding the element**
- In terms of how you feel about them
- In terms of the impression they make on you
- In terms of what they feel like to you personally
- In terms of your gut reaction to them

Following the initial overview of the process the participants began to elicit constructs. The constructs were written down on to cards by the participant, with the similarity whether positive or negative on the left, and identified difference written on the right.

As each construct was produced it was entered onto the Enquire Within software, hence recording the order of construct elicitation. In addition, it was considered that it would be useful to have all the constructs on cards when it came to the analysis. Before handing the card to the researcher, the participants also rated the construct high, medium or low in terms of its importance. This information was then also entered onto the Enquire Within software.

In an attempt to elicit more constructs, some laddering, a process to explore down to the participants core beliefs, was undertaken. The participants were encouraged to firstly ladder up by being asked why a particular construct was an important distinction between X & Y. In addition, some laddering down was also under taken, by asking how perhaps

behaviour differs between X & Y. This process didn't prove particularly useful, as most participants felt it interfered with their construct elicitation and generally felt that they had already produced their core constructs.

Once the elicitation of constructs had slowed, the next triad or three elements were selected and the process of elicitation started again until the participant felt that they could no longer elicit any further constructs. The participants were then asked to rank their top five most important constructs on the cards, prior to rating the elements within the Enquire Within software. A five point scale was used where 1 represented that the element was most like the construct pole and 5 represented that the element was least like the construct pole. As the dichotomous constructs don't necessarily represent good/bad, equally the scale does not represent good/bad. The mid-point 3 could be viewed as neutral or that an element swayed between the two poles. An option of N/A was available, but was only used in one of the cases, where the participant had some constructs that were not applicable on both poles to some of the elements.

Analysis of data

The analysis of the data undertook a mixed methods approach involving both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The approach looked at the individual participant grids first and then moved onto grounded theory analysis of constructs, produced across all the interviews. The purpose of the analysis was to both understand and interpret the participant's meaning, as a representative sample.

Grounded theory

To interpret meaning as a representative sample a grounded theory approach was used, where summaries of meanings in individual grids were created by categorising them, by counting the similarities and differences between each category (Jankowicz 2004). This approach was used as it was hoped that the categories would explain the similarities and differences (Schreier 2012). The sample was handled as a whole, with the addition of some differential analysis, between managers, senior lecturers and support staff.

The bootstrapping/open data/ inductive approach was used, where the category system is developed in the course of categorising the constructs (Jankowicz 2004, Schreier 2012). Each individual construct is the unit of coding, expressing meaning in terms of both content and context (Holsti 1965 cited in Jankowicz 2004). Each participant is the unit of analysis. Prior to starting the analysis, each participant's constructs, which were already on cards, was labelled, to reflect both the participant and the order of elicitation. Therefore a card that stated 5:3 reflected participant five's third elicited construct.

Jankowicz's (2004) core categorisation process was used, where each labelled construct, being categorised, was compared (axial coding) with the others in turn, using a thematic approach, allowing the category system to grow organically until saturation was reached (Schreier 2012, Howitt 2013).

Once the categories were identified, and all the constructs allocated to the categories, the results were tabulated. The tabulation, reflected the category, a definition which incorporated the dichotomous nature of the constructs, and the constructs allocated to each category. Once this was done, a sum and absolute frequency of constructs in each category was provided (Schreier 2012). Finally some comparative and differential analysis was conducted, to see how the categories are related and whether there were any differences or similarities, in the allocation of constructs between one sub group and another. The categories were entered into the table in the order that represented the highest sum of constructs in any one category. In addition, some categories were further defined with the introduction of sub categories.

The reliability of the categorisation system was then tested by a fellow researcher, and the category system discussed and revised accordingly. The analysis will be considered valid to the 'extent that it captures what it sets out to capture' (Schreier 2012:175). The aim was to arrive at categories that potentially have 'explanatory power' and can be set against previous theory to potentially explain and predict the communication factors that link employee engagement with authentic leadership based on the principles of positive psychology (Schreier 2012:112). The coding frames 'face validity' will be assessed in terms of its ability to cover the meaning of the material (Schreier 2012).

Key Findings

The study set out to explore the implications for the Higher Education sector of using authentic leadership based on the principles of positive psychology as a communication strategy, to increase employee engagement with the NSS.

The individual grid analysis was followed by inductive grounded theory, to produce summaries of meanings, by categorising the constructs produced by all participants. A full copy of the thematic analysis table can be found below, which identifies the signature strengths/constructs of authentic leadership represented by course leaders in a higher education setting.

Thematic Analysis table for authentic leadership

Key categories in red. Sub categories in blue.

All percentages have been rounded up.

Category/Definition/Sub categories	Constructs	Sum 100%	Man ager s	Sen. Lect urers	Sup port staff
1. Interpersonal strengths Collaborative, empathetic leader who works with co-operation versus closed door, indifferent leader who fails to seek co-operation	1.5,1.20,1.25,1.26,2.8,3.1,3.2,3.4,3.5,4.5,4.8,4.14,5.4,5.8,5.9,5.16,5.17,5.19,5.20,6.8,6.10,6.20,7.8,7.10,7.12,7.13,8.6,10.7,10.10,10.15,11.3,11.7	32 15%	3 8%	24 16%	5 16%
1.a Collaborative leader Works collaboratively with co-operation versus closed door, no co-operation	1.20,1.26,5.9,5.19,7.10,7.13,10.7,10.10,10.15,11.3,11.7	11 5%	3 8%	8 5%	0 0%
1.b Empathetic leader Works with empathy, care and respect versus works with indifference, and no respect for others	1.5,1.25,2.8,3.1,3.2,3.4,3.5,4.5,4.8,4.14,5.4,5.8,5.16,5.17,5.20,6.8,6.10,6.20,7.8,7.12,8.6	21 10%	0 0%	16 11%	5 16%
2. Professional Professional, responsible, organised individual versus unprofessional, irresponsible, disorganised individual	1.8,1.9,1.13,2.2,2.3,2.11,3.3,3.13,4.4,4.10,5.1,5.6,5.10,5.11,6.5,6.6,6.15,7.1,7.17,8.1,8.9,8.10,8.11,9.11,9.12,10.4,10.8,10.13,11.1,11.13	31 14%	6 16%	19 13%	7 23%
2.a Professional Utterly professional, problem solver, responsible, safe pair of hands versus unprofessional, no answers, irresponsible, unguided missile	2.2,2.3,3.13,3.16,4.10,5.6,5.10,6.5,6.6,6.15,7.17,8.9,8.10,9.12,10.4	18 8%	3 8%	10 7%	5 16%
2.b Detailed organisation	1.8,1.9,1.13,2.11,3.3,4.4,5.1,5.11,	13	2	9	2

Organised and detailed individual versus disorganised and vague individual	7.1,8.1,9.11,10.8,11.1,11.13	6%	5%	6%	7%
3. Leadership traits Strategic visionary, inspirational, credible individual versus demotivating and ignored individual	1.3,1.7,1.11,1.15,1.19,1.21,1.23,3.11,3.12,5.14,6.2,6.18,7.2,7.3,7.4,7.5,7.6,8.12,9.14,10.5,10.6,10.16,10.17,11.2,11.5,11.6,11.12,11.14	28 13%	5 14%	20 13%	3 10%
3.a Leadership characteristics Charismatic, impressive, empowered versus repellent, insignificant victim	1.3,1.11,1.19,3.12,5.14,6.18,8.12,10.16	8 4%	1 3%	5 3%	2 7%
3.b Inspirational Inspirational versus demotivating	1.7,3.11,10.5,11.2,11.5,11.6,11.12,11.14	8 4%	1 3%	6 4%	1 3%
3.c Strategic Visionary, forward thinker versus lost in detail, stuck in status quo	1.15,1.23,6.2,7.2,9.14,10.6,10.17	7 3%	3 8%	4 3%	0 0%
3.d Influence Influential and credible versus ignored and questionable	1.7,3.11,10.5,11.2,11.5,11.6,11.12,11.14	5 2%	0 0%	5 3%	0 0%
4.Cognitive strengths Hard working, proactive, confident, intelligent, innovative individual versus lazy, inactive, switched off individual	1.14,1.24,2.13,4.9,4.15,4.18,4.20,4.23,4.25,4.26,5.5,5.12,5.21,5.22,6.14,8.4,8.5,8.7,9.5,9.7,9.10,9.17,11.8,11.10,11.11	25 12%	4 11%	18 12%	3 10%
4.a Proactive Confident, active, passionate versus unconfident, inactive, switched off	1.14,1.24,2.13,4.15,4.23,4.25,4.26,5.21,5.22,6.14,9.7,9.10,9.17,11.11	14 6%	3 8%	11 7%	0 0%
4.b Collaborative Collaborative versus un collaborative	4.9,4.18,4.20,5.5,5.12,8.4,8.5,8.7,9.5,11.8,11.10	11 5%	1 3%	7 5%	3 10%
5. True to oneself	1.1,1.2,1.10,1.18,2.14,4.3,4.6,4.1	23	2	21	0

Authentic, genuine, open and trustworthy versus compliant, fake, closed and dishonest	1,4.12,4.16,4.17,5.3,5.13,6.9,6.13,6.16,6.21,6.24,6.30,7.18,9.4,9.18,11.9	11%	5%	14%	0%
5.a Authentic Authentic versus fake	1.1,1.2,1.10,1.18,4.3,4.11,4.16,4.17,5.3,6.16,6.24,6.30,9.4	13 6%	1 3%	12 8%	0 0%
5.b Trust Trustworthy, open and honest versus dishonest, strategic and closed	2.14,4.6,4.12,5.13,6.9,6.13,6.21,7.18,9.18,11.9	10 5%	1 3%	9 6%	0 0%
6. Engagement Staff and student focused versus unengaged	1.12,1.16,2.4,2.15,3.6,3.7,3.8,3.9,3.18,4.2,4.19,6.3,6.4,6.11,6.12,6.27,6.28,6.29,7.9,7.16,9.16	21 10%	1 3%	15 10%	5 16%
6.a Engagement Listens, engages and involves team versus stonewalls and goes it alone	1.12,1.16,2.4,2.15,3.8,3.9,3.18,6.11,6.12,6.27,6.28,6.29,7.9,7.16,9.16	15 7%	1 3%	11 7%	3 10%
6.b Student focused Student focused versus goal focused	3.6,3.7,4.2,4.19,6.3,6.4	6 3%	0 0%	4 3%	2 6%
7. Work role characteristics Conscientious and efficient versus lazy and chaotic	1.4,1.6,1.17,1.22,2.7,4.24,5.2,5.7,5.15,6.1,6.25,6.26,7.11,8.3,10.1,10.11,10.12,10.18	18 8%	4 11%	13 9%	1 3%
8. Emotional strengths Passionate, and calm with good student rapport versus disengaged, unreasonable and dismissive of students	2.12,3.19,4.1,5.18,6.19,7.7,7.15,9.6,9.9,9.13,9.15,10.2,10.9	13 6%	6 16%	6 4%	1 3%
8.a Calm Calm with good sense of humour versus unreasonable with no sense of humour	2.12,5.18,6.19,7.15,9.6	5 2%	1 3%	4 3%	0 0%
8.b Passion Passionate versus dispassionate	3.19,4.1,7.7,10.9	4 2%	1 3%	2 1%	1 3%

8.c Student rapport Supportive of students versus dismissive of students	9.9,9.13,9.15,10. 2	4 2%	4 11%	0 0%	0 0%
9. Competence Industry and academic knowledge and skills with a clear sense of work role versus inadequate skills, inexperienced in field with a poor sense of work role	3.17,3.14,3.15,3. 10,4.13,6.7,6.17, 7.14,8.8,9.2,9.3, 9.8,11.4,	13 6%	3 8%	5 3%	5 16%
10. Behavioural characteristics Positive characteristics versus detrimental characteristics	2.5,2.6,2.9,2.10, 6.23,9.1,10.14	7 3%	2 5%	5 3%	0 0%
11. Communication factors Effective communication versus inadequate communication	4.7,4.21,4.22,6.2 2,8.2,10.3	6 3%	1 3%	4 3%	1 3%
12. Just is Male versus female	2.1	1 1%	0 0%	1 1%	0 0%
Total constructs		218	37	152	31
Total percentages		102%	100%	101%	100%

Positive psychology

Lewis (2011:15) states that a ‘positively deviant’ organisation focused on developing ‘exceptional performance’, is highly correlated to organisations that exhibit virtuous practice. Virtuous practices are identified as ‘trust, optimism, compassion, integrity and forgiveness’ (Lewis 2010:16). The thematic analysis category five, ‘True to oneself’, which accounted for 11% of the constructs, was defined as ‘authentic, genuine, open and trustworthy versus compliant, fake, closed and dishonest’. Interestingly, this category was not reflected by the support staff, accounting for 0% of their constructs, whereas, it accounted for 14% of senior lecturer constructs, as opposed to only 5% of managerial constructs. Two subcategories were identified in category five, 5a: ‘Authentic’, defined as, ‘authentic versus fake’ and 5b: ‘Trust’, defined as ‘trustworthy, open and honest versus dishonest, strategic and closed’. These constructs clearly identify with virtuous practices and given their link to exceptional performance could be key indicators of exceptional performance on the NSS.

Cameron (2009) sees an affirmative bias towards ‘strengths, capabilities and possibilities’ rather than ‘threats, problems and weaknesses’, reflecting bi- polar constructs, which

lead to an abundant culture (cited in Lewis 2010:17). The thematic analysis identified three categories of key strengths: category one, 'Interpersonal', four, 'Cognitive' and eight, 'Emotional strengths'. These categories represented 15%, 12%, and 6% respectively, or 33% of the total number of constructs produced. An affirmative bias is a key indicator of an abundant culture correlating with high levels of performance on the NSS.

'Interpersonal strengths', category one, confirms an affirmative bias and represents the largest category of constructs. It is defined as 'collaborative, emphatic leader who works well with co-operation versus closed door, indifferent leader who fails to seek co-operation'. These constructs represented 16% of the constructs produced by senior lecturers and support staff, as opposed to only 8% of constructs produced by managers. Additionally, two subcategories were identified in category one, 1a: 'Collaborative leader', defined as 'works collaboratively with co-operation versus closed door, no co-operation' and 1b: 'Empathetic leader', defined as 'works with empathy, care and respect versus works with indifference, and no respect for others'. Interestingly, this sub category was not represented by managerial constructs.

'Cognitive strengths', category four, represented 12% of constructs correlates with an affirmative bias and is defined as 'hard working, proactive, confident, intelligent, innovative individual versus lazy, inactive, switched off individual'. These strengths were closely recognised across the three sub groups, management, senior lecturer, and support staff, representing 11%, 12% and 10% of constructs respectively. Two subcategories were also identified, 4a: 'Proactive', defined as 'confident, active, passionate versus unconfident, inactive, switched off' and 4b: 'Collaborative', defined as 'collaborative versus un collaborative'.

Furthermore, Cameron's (2009) abundant culture was identified in category nine, 'Competence', reflecting capabilities as an affirmative bias. Competence reflected 6% of constructs, and 16% of support staff's constructs. Competency was defined as 'industry and academic knowledge and skills with a clear sense of work role versus inadequate skills, inexperienced in field with a poor sense of work roles'. It is highly likely that an affirmative bias in terms of competence would confirm an abundant culture in terms of high performance on the NSS.

Flow in terms of positive psychology is seen as intrinsically motivating and is more likely to be experienced when employees have control over their job, have clear goals and receive frequent feedback (Csikszentmihalyi (2003) cited in Carr 2011). The constructs produced across all subgroups made no reference to feedback or the setting of clear goals. Clear goals and feedback could potentially be addressed through the University appraisal

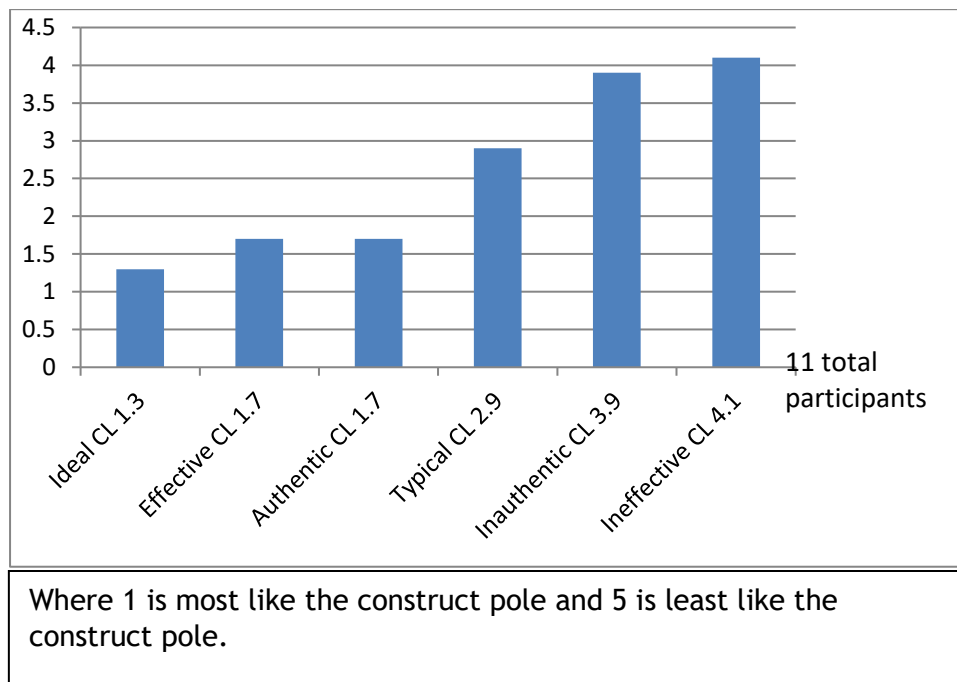
system. However, the thematic analysis did pick up on several categories that relate to employees having control over their jobs: 'Interpersonal strengths', specifically the 'Collaborative leader', 'Cognitive strengths', and 'Engagement'. The key emphasis was being one of collaboration and involvement, in terms of working together, giving the employee a sense of control over their job.

Woods (2009) notes that few studies view universities as work places, with the majority of studies focused on student rather than employee welfare. As a consequence, there is little prior higher education literature against which to place the thematic analysis. However, it can be justifiably argued that employee wellbeing is of importance to the sector, given the Health and Safety executive taking the sector to account for imposing unacceptable levels of stress (Woods 2009). The research has clearly identified three key strengths in the 'Interpersonal', 'Emotional' and 'Cognitive' categories, which when combined with being 'True to oneself' and 'Engagement', authenticate Linley's (2008) three-way relationship between strengths, engagement and authenticity, where being authentic facilitates strengths, whilst enhancing engagement. Course leaders that exhibit authenticity are therefore more likely to facilitate strengths amongst the course team, potentially leading to a greater level of employee engagement, ultimately leading to increased levels of student satisfaction on the NSS.

Authentic Leadership

Based on the principles of positive psychology Avolio et al (2004) and Luthans & Avolio (2003) developed the emerging leadership theory, authentic leadership. Authentic leaders 'act in accordance with deep personal values and convictions, to build credibility and win the respect and trust of followers' (Avolio (2004:806) cited in Peus et al 2010:331).

Average rating of constructs for each element/course leader across all 11 participants

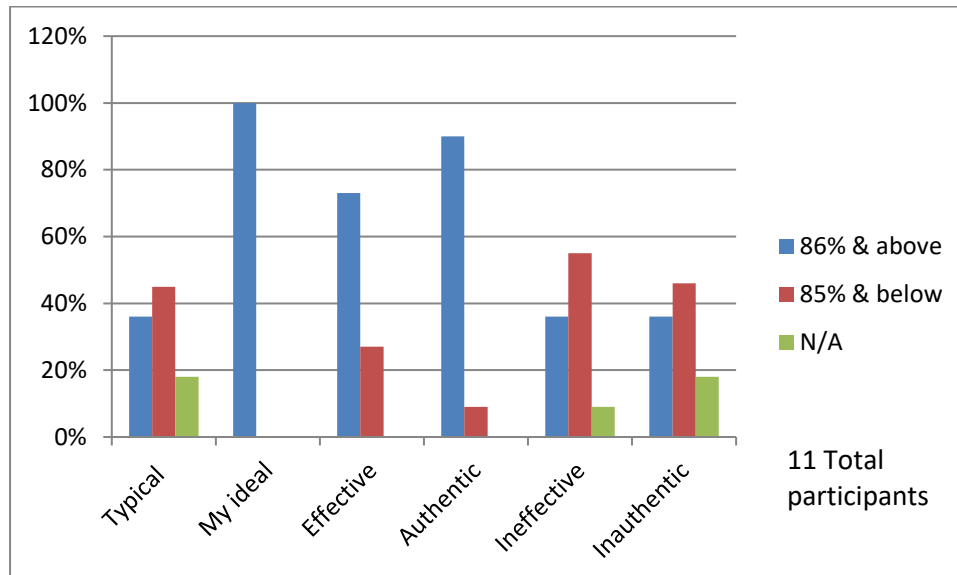


The above graph demonstrates that the ‘ideal course leader’ scored the lowest score across all the constructs for all 11 participants. As the ranking is in relation to the positive end of the bi-polar construct, this strongly indicates that an ‘ideal course leader’ is perceived to ‘act in accordance with deep personal values and convictions, to build credibility and win the respect and trust of followers’ (Avolio (2004:806) cited in Peus et al 2010:331). This is further emphasised with the ‘effective and authentic course leader’ scoring a credible 1.7. The ‘typical course leader’ sits unsurprisingly in the middle of the bi-polar constructs at 2.9. The results are further substantiated in terms of the merits of authentic leadership with the ‘inauthentic course leader’ scoring 3.9, only 0.2 away from the average score for the ‘ineffective course leader’ at 4.1.

The most frequent pairings of the elements/course leaders combined with the average ratings of the constructs strongly indicate that an ‘ideal course leader’ is considered to be very similar to an ‘effective and authentic course leader’. Avolio (2004:806) states that in order to have a ‘sustainable competitive advantage, organisations need authentic leadership’ (cited in Peus et al 2012:331). Walumbwa et al (2008:89) substantiate this by finding a positive correlation between ‘authentic leadership and supervisor-rated performance’. This link to effective performance is clearly aligned to the outcomes of this research with the ‘ideal, effective and authentic course leaders’ clearly outperforming the ‘typical, ineffective and inauthentic course leaders’ by more consistently scoring 86% and above student satisfaction on the NSS (figure 11). Furthermore, the ideal course leader,

which mirrors the authentic leader, consistently scored the faculty benchmark level of 86% or above student satisfaction.

NSS outcomes for the six types of elements/course leaders, where 86% and above is the faculty benchmark for student satisfaction.



Having established the correlations between authentic course leadership and effective performance on the NSS, it is clearly important to further analyse the communication factors that correlate with authentic leadership. Definitions of authentic leadership vary but all emphasise consistency between leadership behaviour and their values (Yukl 2010). Authentic leadership is seen as a normative theory that describes ideal leaders for organisations (Yukl 2010). Yukl articulates that authentic leaders are seen to have ‘positive core values, such as honesty, altruism, kindness, fairness, accountability and optimism’ (Yukl 2010:345).

The thematic analysis resonates with the concept of core values, with honesty and fairness reflected in category five, ‘True to oneself’, and more specifically in 5b: ‘Trust’, defined as ‘trustworthy, open and honest versus dishonest, strategic and closed’. In addition, kindness is seen in category one, ‘Interpersonal strengths’, with a specific mention in 1b: ‘Empathetic leader’, defined as ‘works with empathy, care and respect versus works with indifference, and no respect for others’.

Furthermore, the analysis identifies with Yukl’s ‘accountability’ in category two, ‘Professional’, defined as ‘professional, responsible, organised individual versus unprofessional, irresponsible, disorganised individual’ which accounts for 8% of constructs. The correlation is empathised in 2a: ‘Professional’, defined as ‘utterly professional, problem solver, responsible, safe pair of hands versus unprofessional, no answers,

irresponsible, unguided missile'. Interestingly, of the constructs produced by the support staff, Professional, accounts for 23% of their constructs, perhaps reflecting their wish to work with course leaders that reflect these characteristics.

Of Yukl's (2010) remaining core values, optimism and altruism do not directly feature in the analysis. However, the core values identified in terms of 'interpersonal, emotional and cognitive strengths' may well correlate with an altruistic individual. Furthermore, the 'Leadership traits' in category three, accounting for 13% of constructs, may resonate with the characteristic optimism, in terms of an authentic leader that is 'charismatic, impressive, empowered, inspirational and visionary' may well also exhibit 'optimism'. Additionally, optimists experience 'positive emotional states' (Khan 2010:169) that may be indirectly perceived from the 'cognitive, interpersonal and emotional strengths' identified in the analysis.

Empowerment of authentic leaders is seen to increase when they are perceived to be 'credible, focused and confident' (Yukl 2010:346). This directly correlates with the analysis findings, where 'credibility' was evidenced in the 'Leadership traits' and specifically in subsection 3d: 'Influence' defined as, 'influential and credible versus ignored and questionable'. Focused was a key term in category six, 'Engagement', which accounted for 10% of constructs and was defined as 'staff and student focused versus unengaged'. Finally, confidence was seen in category four, 'Cognitive strengths', and in subsection 4a: 'Proactive', defined as 'confident, active, passionate versus unconfident, inactive and switched off'. Additionally, having confidence helps authentic leaders stay true to themselves whilst enabling others to 'recognise their own capabilities' (Khan 2010:169). This is a direct confirmation of Yukl's findings and potentially highlights the key communication factors exhibited with being an authentic leader. Furthermore, Khan (2010:169) links confidence to a leader's self-efficacy and resultant performance on other behavioural constructs, such as 'job satisfaction, goal setting, conscientiousness and feedback'.

Harter (2002) defined authenticity as being 'true to oneself' (cited in Zhu et al 2004:21), which directly resonates with category five, 'True to oneself', defined as 'authentic, genuine, open and trustworthy versus compliant, fake, closed and dishonest'. This supports Lewis's (2011) positively deviant organisations that exhibit exceptional performance through virtuous practices. This direct correlation between positive psychology and authentic leadership indicates that authenticity is a potentially significant communication factor. Indeed, Simons (1999) sees behavioural integrity and authentic leadership as a 'root construct of positive forms of leadership' (cited in Hannes et al

2011:255) and is confirmed by Leroy (2011:255) placing them into ‘positive organisational scholarship’.

Furthermore, 21 out of the 23 constructs representing being ‘true to oneself’ were produced by the senior lecturers, indicating how important they view authenticity. Participant four, a senior lecturer, who produced six constructs in this category representing 23% of their constructs, ranked an ideal and authentic course leader, as a one, against all their 26 constructs, confirming that their ideal course leader is an authentic course leader.

In fact, all participants had similar correlations between an ideal and authentic course leader except participants seven and ten. The similarity index of participant seven, a senior lecturer, combined authentic with a typical and ineffective course leader which was similar to participant ten, a manager, who combined authentic with ineffective. Participant seven’s, similarities, combined inauthentic with effective and participant ten’s, combined inauthentic with a typical course leader. Whilst this does not support Lewis’s (2011) view, it is interesting to note that these participants do not view authentic leaders as exhibiting exceptional performance.

However, Avolio (2004:806) states that in order to have a ‘sustainable and competitive advantage, organisations need authentic leadership’ (cited in Peus et al 2012:331). As a measure of teaching quality (Buckley 2012), the NSS has been shown to increase where course leaders exhibit authentic leadership. Furthermore, authentic leadership has been seen to drive ‘organisational commitment and citizenship behaviours through trust and identification in the leader’ (Walumbwa et al 2008 cited in Leroy 2011:256). This enhancement to organisational commitment and citizenship behaviours through authentic leadership supports and endorses the principles of employee engagement.

Employee engagement

Employee engagement sits within the discipline of Communication where communication is seen as central to organisational life and effective performance (Huczynski & Buchanan 2007). In 1990, the International Association of Business Communication, (IABC) commissioned the Excellence study that resulted in Grunig-Hunt’s excellence theory, ‘two-way symmetric communication’. The emphasis of the model is that communication is based on mutual understanding and dialogue rather than persuasion as its purpose. The thematic analysis clearly highlights the importance of collaboration, in ‘Interpersonal strengths’, ‘Collaborative Leader’, ‘Cognitive Strengths’, subcategory, ‘Collaborative’, and ‘Engagement’ where employees are involved in the dialogue and mutual

understanding of organisational life resulting in increased performance, such as course leaders that consistently achieve the Faculty benchmark for student satisfaction. It is this dialogue or interaction that informs the subjectivist's view that employee engagement is a result of organisational interaction.

The link between engagement and leadership is well established. Melcrum (2005) found that the top four drivers of engagement were 'senior leadership 28%', 'direct supervisor 20%', 'belief in the company direction 10%', and a 'people centric culture 7%' (cited in Smythe 2007:195). The analysis identifies the importance of leadership traits in category three and the NSS results identify that courses with authentic course leaders more consistently demonstrate student satisfaction at the Faculty benchmark level of 86% or above.

Robinson et al's (2004) key drivers for an employee centric view confirm Melcrum's (2005), and articulates the need for 'involvement in decision making', 'being listened to', 'job role development and a concern for employee 'well-being' (cited in Smythe 2007:193). The analysis confirms the importance of involvement in decision making and being listened to, in category six, 'Engagement', and specifically in subsection 6a: defined as 'listens, engages and involves team versus stonewalls and goes it alone'. The thematic analysis does not identify job role development, but does identify the need for employee well-being in category 1b: 'Empathetic leader', defined as 'works with empathy, care and respect versus works with indifference, and no respect for others'. This employee centric view is reflected in Lewis's (2011:15) virtuous practices, where a positively deviant organisation demonstrates 'trust, optimism, compassion, integrity and forgiveness' to enhance an employee's well-being. These constructs of virtuous practice, informed by positive psychology, are exhibited by authentic leaders and contribute to employee engagement.

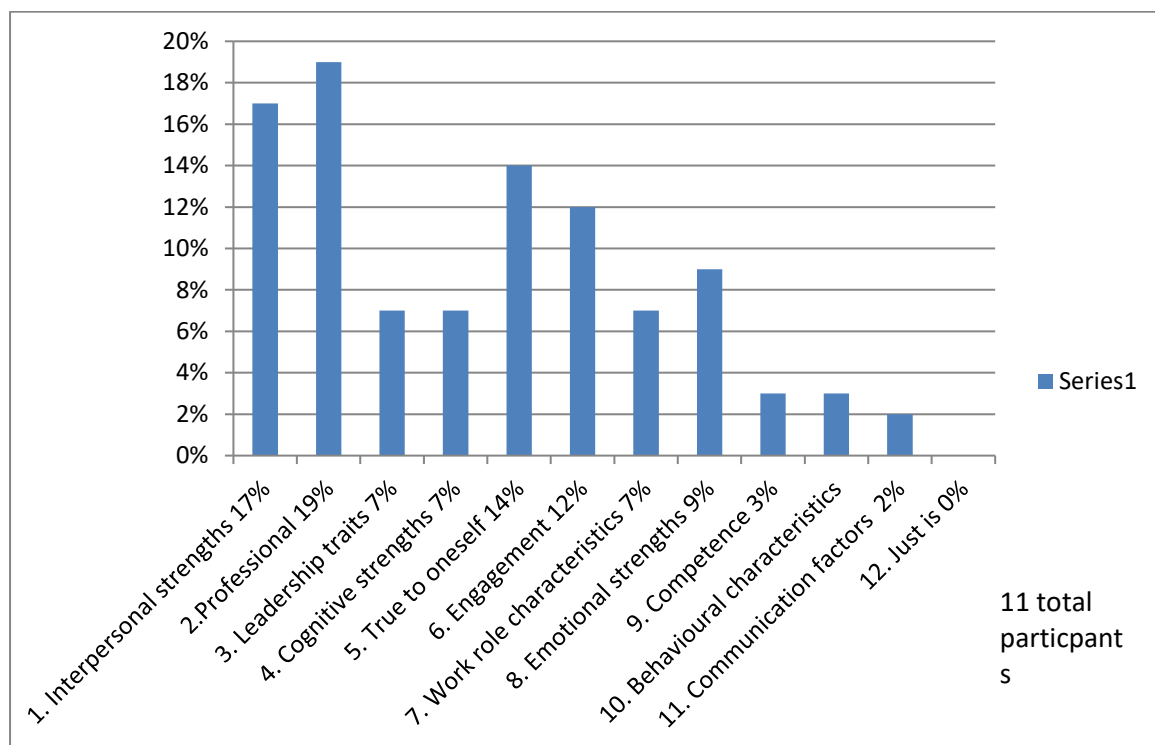
Employee well-being is fundamental to employee engagement (Robinson et al 2004 cited in Smythe 2007:193), and Seligman's (2002:3) positive psychology where experiences lead to 'well-being and satisfaction'. So whilst these constructs do not inform the thematic analysis, they do inform the bank of knowledge of leadership behaviours that undermine the credibility, respect and trust of potential leaders (Avolio 2004 cited in Peus et al 2012:331).

The Synopsis FAME model of effective leadership concentrates on four key communication skills, 'Focus, Articulate, Model and Engage' (Walters & Norton 2007:16). These communication factors reflect Bennis and Thomas (2002), who found that an essential element of effective leadership was integrity, demonstrated through 'consistency of moral

behaviour with espoused values’ (cited in Yukl 2010:331) and reiterated by Yukl’s (2010) positive core values, which have been demonstrated to correlate with the thematic analysis, ‘Being true to oneself, Empathetic leader and Professional’. Furthermore, Walters & Norton (2007) viewed that to ‘engage’ meant to engage through involving and showing people how they fit into the bigger picture. Involvement is fundamental to category six, Engagement, and reflected Melcrum’s (2005) employee centric view.

The Synopsis FAME model is further substantiated by the participants’ ranking of their top five most important constructs. The above categories were the most represented in the participants top five, (see figure 13) with category two, ‘Professional’, coming in top representing 19% of the top five categories, category one, ‘Interpersonal strengths’, second, at 17%, category five, ‘True to oneself’ third at 14% and category six, ‘Engagement’ 12%, the fourth most significant. This demonstrates that the behaviours of authentic leadership, based on the principles of positive psychology, do indeed articulate those of engagement.

Participants’ top five most important constructs



Melcrum’s (2005) top two senior management actions for driving engagement were communicating a clear vision and building trust in an organisation (cited in Smythe 2007). Trust is correlated to Lewis’s (2011) virtuous practices and Zhu et al’s (2004) psychological empowerment in the positive psychology field and is known to enhance organisational

commitment, in terms of engagement. Trust in the thematic analysis was found in category five, 'True to oneself', which represented 11% of constructs, and in Avolio's (2003) deep personal values of authentic leadership. Trust is therefore a communication factor that links employee engagement with the constructs of positive psychology and authentic leadership.

In addition, Melcrum (2005) identified the importance of communicating a clear vision to drive engagement. Seligman (2002) describes positive psychology as having positive thoughts about the future and the thematic analysis, in category three, 'Leadership traits', subcategory 3c: 'Strategic', defined as 'visionary, forward thinker versus lost in detail, stuck in status quo' confirms the importance of communicating a clear vision. This is further supported by the Engage Group's (2013:4) white paper on Engaging Leadership, which states that leadership is changing, and that leaders will need a 'powerful vision to inspire confidence and commitment'.

The Engage Group report (2008:9) identified the 10 elements of successful employee engagement that moved away from the traditional factors of engagement, around employee advocacy, loyalty, fairness, motivation and pride. The thematic analysis identifies with this view, in terms of 'fairness' in category 1b: 'Empathetic leader' defined as 'works with empathy, care and support versus works with indifference, and no respect for others' and 'motivation' in category 3b: 'Inspirational', defined as 'inspirational versus demotivating'. However, the thematic analysis does not collaborate with employee advocacy, loyalty and pride, suggesting that the participants did not acknowledge the more traditional view of engagement.

In order to have flow, in terms of positive psychology, motivation needs to be intrinsically motivating, and for that to happen Csikszentmihalyi (2003 cited in Carr 2011) argues that an employee needs to have control over their job which would more closely reflect the Engage Group's (2008) engagement-plus strategies.

The Engage Group's (2008) new world or engagement-plus strategies are considered to have superseded the traditional view and to be crucial to optimise engagement and demonstrate best practice around the management of change, involvement in 'big-issue' decisions, understanding of personal contribution, empowerment and involvement in 'everyday' decisions.

The thematic analysis acknowledges the new world communication factors around involvement with three of the categories, representing 37% of constructs, supporting the need for collaboration. The three categories, 'Interpersonal strengths', 'Cognitive

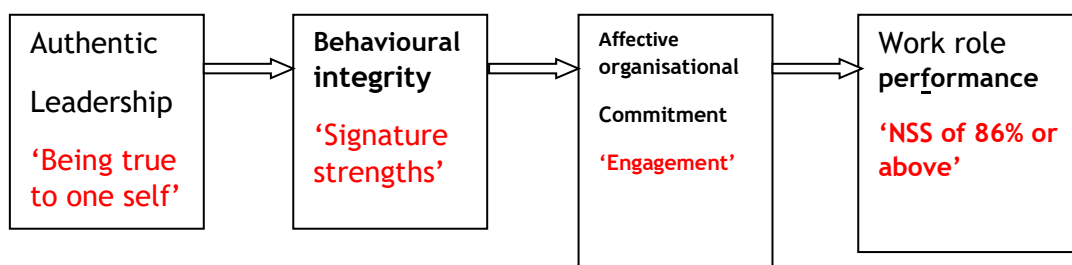
Strengths' and 'Engagement', represent significant correlation with best practice around the need for involvement and understanding in the decisions that affect employees working lives.

Furthermore category three, 'Leadership traits', recognises the need for empowerment in subcategory 3a: 'Leadership characteristics', representing 4% of constructs and defined as 'charismatic, impressive, empowered versus repellent, insignificant victim'. Whilst the subcategory is only 4% of constructs the Leadership characteristics category is the third most significant category at 13% of constructs, acknowledging the need for 'strategic visionary, inspirational and credible' leadership practices to support best practice around the management of change.

Collaboration and empowerment are identified as communication factors of engagement, in the Engage Group report (2008). The model of 'positive engagement', Linley et al's (2010:160) 'enjoyment, challenge and meaning', reflects collaboration and empowerment in terms of Lewis's (2010) virtuous practices. Virtuous practice in positive psychology identifies with the best practices of engagement around the management of change and the need for psychological empowerment (Zhu et al 2004). These communication factors focus on behavioural integrity that places authentic leadership into the positive organisational scholarship (Leroy 2011).

Leroy et al's (2011) hypothesised model correlates the positive outcomes of organisational commitment and enhanced performance with the constructs of authentic leadership and behavioural integrity. This model resonates with the outcomes of this research, where the communication factors of behavioural integrity, 'collaboration and empowerment', are influenced by authentic leadership, being 'true to oneself', which in turn affects organisational commitment, in terms of 'Engagement' resulting in increased work role performance, where authentic course leaders achieve the Faculty benchmark level of student satisfaction on the NSS of 86% or above. In fact, behavioural integrity can be viewed as behavioural characteristics, reflecting the positive psychology view of signature strengths (Seligman 2002).

Figure 14: Leroy et al's (2011) hypothesized model with the research outcomes in red.



As a measure of work role performance the NSS has been subjected to extensive debate around the relevance of student satisfaction as a performance indicator (van der Veldon cited in Buckley 2012). The NSS measures overall student satisfaction (SurrIDGE 2008) and has been shown in this research to correlate with authentic leadership, where course leaders who are perceived to be authentic more frequently meet the Faculty bench mark level of 86% or above. Hameed & Amjad (2011) found that students with positive university experiences show satisfaction with their educational experience. This mirrors the scientific perspective of positive psychology where Carr's (2011:1) 'happiness and well-being' are informed by positive traits, such as the positive 'Interpersonal, Cognitive and Emotional strengths' found in the thematic analysis, and 'Engagement' in interesting activities and the development of positive 'Authentic' relationships.

The University of Bath found that the more the student voice is heard, the more overall satisfaction they experience (van der Veldon cited in Buckley 2012). The thematic analysis identifies with this where category six, 'Engagement', representing 10% of constructs was defined as 'staff and student focused versus unengaged'. In addition, category six, subcategory 6b: 'Student focused', defined as 'student focused versus goal focused' is potentially aligned to student satisfaction. Furthermore, category eight, 'Emotional strengths' in subcategory 8c: identifies 'Student rapport', defined as 'supportive of students versus dismissive of students'. The research has shown that authentic course leaders more consistently achieve the Faculty benchmark level of student satisfaction. This correlation between positive psychology and student satisfaction and the influences of authentic leadership potentially has wide implications for the higher education sector.

Conclusion

The study evaluates the strategic implications for the Higher Education sector of using authentic leadership based on the principles of positive psychology as a communication strategy to increase employee engagement with the National Student Survey.

Specifically the conclusions will address the research aim, which was to explore the communication factors that link employee engagement with authentic leadership based on the principles of positive psychology.

The study has examined the communication factors that link employee engagement with the constructs of positive psychology and authentic leadership and concludes that positive psychology and authentic leadership build on the principles of employee engagement.

Positive psychology at its most simplest is about creating an organisational environment that supports optimal functioning (Linley et al 2010), whereas authentic leadership based on the principles of positive psychology is about deep personal values (Avolio 2004). To enhance employee engagement, the communication factors associated with optimal functioning must be reflected in the behaviours or deep personal values of authentic leaders. The study found that combining the constructs of positive psychology and authentic leadership has the potential to authentically engage employees through involving them in the big-issues that affect their daily working lives. The research views that to achieve optimal functioning it is no longer just about leadership competence, evidenced in category nine, 'Competence', but about leaders behaving with credibility, category three, 'Leadership traits', whilst having concern for employee welfare, as seen in category one 'Interpersonal strengths', where the subcategory 1b: 'Empathetic Leader', is described as 'works with empathy, care and respect versus works with indifference, and no respect for others'.

In addition a direct correlation between authentic leadership behaviours and enhanced performance on the NSS was found. Authentic leadership behaviours could potentially sustain enhanced performance (Avolio 2004 cited in Peus et al 2012:331), with the NSS. The study found that authentic course leaders achieved the Faculty benchmark level of student satisfaction of 86% or above, by reflecting the virtuous practices of positive psychology, evidenced in category five, 'True to oneself' that are required to enhance employee psychological empowerment (Lewis 2010, Linley et al 2010), shown in category 3a: 'Leadership characteristics', and thus maintain employee engagement with the NSS. This leads the research to conclude that 'authenticity' is a key communication factor that links exceptional organisational performance with virtuous leadership practices.

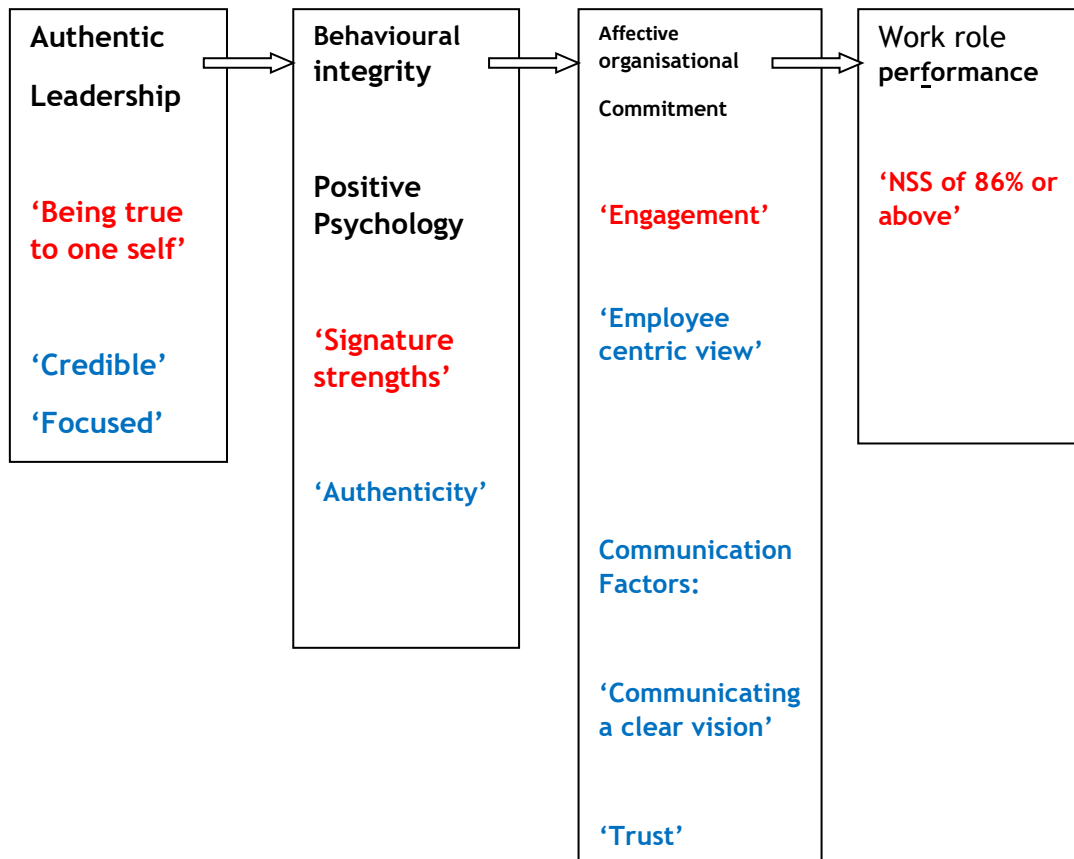
Authentic leaders sustain positive psychologies' virtuous practices (Lewis 2010), evidenced in research category five 'True to oneself', through exhibiting their core values whilst consistently demonstrating behavioural integrity (Simons 1999). This combination of behaviours recognises one of the key drivers of employee engagement, an employee centric view (Robinson et al 2004). An employee centric view, reflected in category six, 'Engagement' is argued here to confirm an affirmative bias (Cameron 2009), reflected in three of the research categories, category one, 'Interpersonal', category four, 'Cognitive' and category eight, 'Emotional strengths' towards an abundant culture (Cameron 2009 cited in Lewis 2010). The research concludes that the key communication factor that reflects an abundant culture, in terms of positive psychology, is 'authenticity'. In order to sustain an affirmative bias towards an abundant culture, authentic leaders need to be consistently authentic whilst reflecting the key communication factors of being credible (category three, 'Leadership traits'), focused, (category six, 'Engagement') and confident, (category four, 'Cognitive strengths') (Yukl 2010). These key communication factors reflect the constructs that tie the principles of authentic leadership to the scholarship of positive psychology. It is these specific communication factors that the research concludes reflect an enhanced organisational commitment, towards driving employee engagement.

Furthermore, these communication factors collaborate with Leroy et al's (2011) hypothesised model by building on the theory and showing not only how the constructs of positive psychology influence the principles of authentic leadership, which in turn affect employee engagement, but how the communication factors support this hypothesised model to result in enhanced work role performance.

Figure 15: Leroy et al's (2011) hypothesized model

Research outcomes from the thematic analysis in red

Research communication factors in blue.



Additionally, the research has identified the key communication factors, as seen in the above figure, that link employee engagement, specifically an employee centric view, to the constructs of positive psychology and authentic leadership, namely 'Communicating a clear vision, Trust, Collaboration, Empowerment' and the importance of 'Being listened to'. The first of these top five communication factors, 'Communicating a clear vision', identified in category three, 'Leadership traits', endorses both Melcrum' (2005) and the Engage Group's white paper on Engaging Leadership (Engage Group 2013:4), which states that leaders need a 'powerful vision to inspire confidence and commitment'. This in turn links back to Seligman's (2002) view of the importance of positive thoughts about the future.

The second communication factor 'Trust' is correlated with Lewis's (2011) virtuous practices and Zhu et al's (2004) psychological empowerment and is known to enhance organisational commitment in terms of engagement, as evidenced in category five, 'True

to oneself' and in Avolio's (2003) deep personal values of authentic leadership. Trust is therefore a communication factor that links employee engagement with the constructs of positive psychology and authentic leadership.

The third communication factor 'Collaboration' has been previously identified as significant in the Engage Group's report (2008) engagement-plus strategies. Collaboration was identified within three of the research categories representing 37% of the participant constructs. The research concludes that 'Collaboration' with employees, in terms of working collaboratively to involve employees with the big-issues that affect their daily lives is the most important communication factor to emerge from this research.

The fourth communication factor 'Empowerment' was identified in category three, 'Leadership traits' and supports the Engage Group's (2008) 'engagement-plus strategies' and Linley et al's (2010) model of positive engagement. Furthermore, the link with positive psychology is reflected in terms of empowerment in Lewis's (2010) virtuous practices.

The final communications factor in the top five most significant constructs, identified in category six, 'Engagement', to influence affective organisational commitment and in turn performance, is 'Being listened to'. Melcrum (2005) substantiates the importance of 'Being listened to' alongside the need for 'involvement in decision making' supported by a concern for employee well-being (cited in Smythe 2007:193).

Key contribution of research

The research views the Higher Education sector to be a work place, and considers the findings to be significant to the sector, not just in terms of enhanced performance but in terms of employee welfare. The research concludes that in order to achieve enhanced employee engagement, the communication factors, associated with employee engagement: 'Communicating a clear vision, Trust, Collaboration, Empowerment and the importance of 'Being listened to', must exist alongside the communication factor identified for positive psychology, 'Authenticity' and the communication factors for authentic leadership, 'Credible, Focused and Confident', in order for the organisation to see an increase in work role performance.

The research has concurred with the shift away from the traditional Engage Group's (2008:9) employee engagement factors around 'employee advocacy, loyalty, fairness, motivation and pride' towards the Engage Group's (2008) 'engagement-plus strategies', which reflect the communication factors 'Collaboration and Empowerment' that demonstrate best practice around the management of change, involvement in 'big-issue' decisions, understanding of personal contribution, empowerment and involvement in 'everyday' decisions.

The research builds on this theory by articulating, through Leroy et al's (2011) hypothesized model, how the best practices of employee engagement demonstrated by the communication factors stem from the principles of positive psychology and authentic leadership. The research concludes that to enhance the Engage Group's (2008) 'engagement-plus strategies', to demonstrate increased affective organisational commitment, resulting in enhanced student satisfaction scores, leadership behaviour must be based on the principles of positive psychology, 'Signature strengths', whilst also exhibiting the constructs of authentic leadership, 'Being true to oneself'.

Furthermore the study found a direct correlation between authentic leadership behaviours and enhanced performance on the NSS. The authentic course leader was found to reflect the positive end (1.7) of the construct poles and to frequently (90% of the time) achieve the Faculty bench mark for student satisfaction of 86% or above. The authentic course leader was seen to outperform both the effective course leader by 17% and the typical course leader by 54%. Only the ideal course leader outperformed the authentic course leader by achieving the Faculty benchmark for student satisfaction 100% of the time.

The research concludes that the leadership style of course leaders achieving overall student satisfaction of 86% reflects authentic leadership whilst also utilising the

engagement-plus strategies. Furthermore, the research has concluded that to achieve affective organisational commitment to sustain employee engagement with the NSS survey and maintain 86% or above student satisfaction, Leroy et al's (2011) hypothesized model should be adopted.

Limitations of research

The study was based on the phenomenon of social constructionism with no 'external reality' Saunders et al (2009:113), a limitation of which is that the research potentially cannot be considered 'widely generalisable' outside of the context of the university (Saunders 2007 cited in Flowers 2009:3). However, the researcher does consider that whilst the participants' view will have been informed by their experiences at the university, the constructs produced and the implications for the engagement-plus strategies can be viewed as robust outside of the university. This rationale is based on the fact that the research outcomes, whilst interesting, are generally unsurprising, having compared with previous research findings.

Additionally, the outcomes of the research in places have been converted to graphical representation which relied on converting the participant outcomes into percentages. Whilst claims have been made from these representations they cannot be considered statistically sound, due to the very small sample size used. The sample size however was considered justifiable in terms of the inductive approach and purposive sampling that was undertaken (Saunders et al 2009). Furthermore, Thomas and Baas (1992) conclude that this scepticism is unwarranted 'due to the limited number of distinct viewpoints that exist on any particular topic' (cited in Van Exel 2005: 3).

A further limitation was the single case study approach, which, whilst justified in the methodology, has not enabled the last stage of the grounded theory process to be completed, where findings are explored at another research setting (Howitt 2013).

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Biographical Note

Sally Holland is a senior lecturer and course leader at Southampton Solent University. Sally successfully completed an MProf, with distinction in Professional Development in 2014 where she completed a dissertation on 'Using authentic leadership, based on the principles of positive psychology, as a communication tool to increase employee engagement with the National Student Survey'. Prior, to moving into Higher Education Sally was an Internal Communications manager at Virgin Media and is currently the university link tutor for the accreditation partnership with the Institute of Internal Communication. She continues to have a research interest with in the internal communications arena, and is currently undertaking a post graduate certificate in research prior to registering for a PhD in October 2016, where she plans to undertake research into psychological resilience.

End Notes

ⁱ The research was conducted at Southampton Solent University within the Faculty of the Creative Industries. Southampton Solent University is a post-1992 university, having gained its university status in 2005. The university is 'dedicated to academic excellence, social justice and the integration of theory and practice' (Southampton Solent University 2013: The University). Its courses have a strong vocational bias, with an emphasis on placing employability at the heart of the curriculum. It has a city centre campus, and at 2011-12 enrolment, 10,988 students (Southampton Solent University 2013: Facts and Figures). The university has 1455 employees distributed across the central functions and the three faculties (Cognos Report 2012).

ⁱⁱ The Faculty of the Creative Industries (FCI) was the largest faculty within the university comprising 5000 students (2011-12 enrolment (cited in Southampton Solent University 2013: Facts and Figures)) and 431 employees (Cognos Report 2012). The Faculty was comprised of five schools which together offer 68 undergraduate courses. In 2016 the Faculty structure was disbanded in favour of Schools.