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# Authentic leadership and its relationships with work engagement and organizational citizenship behaviors in military units: The role of identification as a mediating variable

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## ABSTRACT

The objective of the study is to explore the relationship of authentic leadership with work engagement and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) in military units, measuring the mediating effect of personal identification with the leader and social identification with the military unit. We used the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique to analyze data from a sample of 225 Spanish military troops. The results showed that social identification with the military unit influenced the relationship of authentic leadership with the outcome variables.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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## KEYWORDS

Authentic leadership; social identification; identification with the leader; organizational citizenship behaviors; work engagement

**What is the public significance of this article?**—The present study suggests that authentic leadership positively influences organizational variables (work engagement and OCB) that can affect the performance of military units. Moreover, authentic leadership is positively associated with the soldier's identification with both the leader and the military unit. Our results show that the effect of authentic leadership on soldiers' work engagement and OCB is mediated mainly by social identification with the military unit. This means that authentic leadership exerts its effects on soldiers' work engagement and OCB mainly by enhancing social identification with the military unit.

Currently, the concept of leadership is one of the most researched and discussed topics within the organizational sciences and one of the most interesting topics in the psychosocial field (Yammarino, 2013; Yukl, 2012). In recent years, research on leadership has yielded new theoretical models, which place focus on the ethical and moral values of the leader. These emerging ethical/moral values-based leadership forms include ethical, authentic, and servant leadership (Dinh et al., 2014; Hoch, Bommer, Dulebohn, & Wu, 2018). This interest is due largely to citizens' loss of confidence in their leaders in western countries during the last decade, which was caused mainly by economic and political crisis (Moriano, Molero, & Lévy-Mangin,

2011) and a series of public corporate scandals (Lehmann Brothers, Tyco, Enron) that have emphasized the interest in ethical and moral leader behavior (Hoch et al., 2018).

Considering the great strategic value of leadership, military organizations cannot be immune to these changes (Hitt, Haynes, & Serpa, 2012). The complexity of armed conflict, international deployment, and joint participation of armies from different countries have created the necessity of adapting theoretical leadership models to the cultural changes that have emerged. This is especially the case in military institutions, which have always proved to have deep roots in terms of ethical and moral values; indeed, this can be considered a cornerstone of their identity. As already noted by Bass (1998) in his article about leadership in the U.S. Army by the year 2025, traditional leadership models must be replaced by others that hold to a model in which subordinates increasingly have a more relevant role. Leaders should be responsible for addressing this need.

The objective of this paper is to study the relationship of authentic leadership (an ethical/moral value-based leadership) with work engagement and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) in a sample of Spanish soldiers. Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, and May (2004) propose a theoretical model in which authentic leadership is linked to the attitudes and behaviors of

followers (e.g., work engagement and OCB) through mediating variables such as personal and social identification. In this study, we propose a model in which identification with both the leader and the military unit plays a mediating role in the relationship between authentic leadership, work engagement, and OCB. To our knowledge, this is the first time that this model has been tested in a military setting.

### **Authentic leadership**

Authentic leadership can be defined as a pattern of behavior that inspires and promotes positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate to achieve performance beyond expectations (Valsania, Moriano, & Molero, 2016). It fosters greater self-awareness, internalized morality, balanced processing of information, and transparent relationships between leader and followers (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008). It also integrates concepts of positive psychology applied to organizations (self-efficacy, resilience, optimism, welfare, etc.) and leadership development throughout life (Gil, Alcover, Rico, & Sánchez-Manzanares, 2011). Authentic leadership characteristics promote in leaders the understanding of both themselves and the environment around them, transferring to others a message of coherence and exemplarity based on principles and ethical values. Moreover, authentic leadership involves the alignment of the leader's internal standards with the empowerment of followers to likewise achieve authenticity through the creation of authentic leader-follower relationships (Swain, Cao, & Gardner, 2018). These legitimated follower perceptions of the leader's authenticity would be activated by moral judgments (Sidani & Rowe, 2018). According to Banks, McCauley, Gardner, and Guler (2016), followers tend to express greater satisfaction with their leader when the leader engages in authentic behaviors, which leads us to think that this leadership style creates conditions for increasing confidence between leaders and followers. It helps people to develop their strengths and be more positive. Eventually, it improves the overall performance capability of the organization (Banks et al., 2016), increasing motivation, commitment, and satisfaction of followers through personal identification with both the leader and the organization (Azanza, Moriano, & Molero, 2013; Azanza, Moriano, Molero, & Lévy, 2015; Edú-Valsania, Moriano, & Molero, 2016; Jensen & Luthans, 2006; Moriano et al., 2011).

Walumbwa et al. (2008) identified four dimensions of authentic leadership: balanced processing (objective analysis of relevant data for decision-making), internalized morality (being guided by internal moral

standards used to regulate behavior), relational transparency (presenting oneself authentically, sharing information openly, and showing feelings appropriate to the situation), and self-awareness (understanding one's strengths and weaknesses and the sense that each one gives about the world). Recent research shows that authentic leadership is positively related to several important organizational outcome variables such as collective psychological capital, job satisfaction, followers' satisfaction with their leaders, organizational citizenship behaviors, trust, organizational commitment, and job performance (Banks, Gooty, Ross, Williams, & Harrington, 2018; Banks et al., 2016; Clapp-Smith, Vogelgesang, & Avey, 2009; Hoch et al., 2018; Jensen & Luthans, 2006; Moriano et al., 2011; Swain et al., 2018).

There is not much research about authentic leadership models applied to the Armed Forces. Using military and armed corps sample groups, García-Guiú (2014) assessed variables such as group cohesion, social identification, and group power and justice. Positive relationships were found between these elements and transformational and authentic leadership styles (Banks et al., 2016; Hoch et al., 2018).

### **Work engagement**

Engagement is a positive affective state of wholeness in work settings. It is relatively persistent and characterized by vigor (high energy levels and activation), dedication (enthusiasm, pride, and inspiration at work), and absorption (concentration at work, feeling that time passes quickly; Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). More than a specific or temporary condition, engagement refers to a cognitive and affective state persistent over time, which is not focused on a particular object or an exclusive behavior (Salanova, Bresó, & Schaufeli, 2005). Bakker (2011) differentiates work engagement from job satisfaction in that it combines high work pleasure (dedication) with high activation (vigor, absorption). From this we can conclude that engagement components correspond to the description of a clearly motivational construct due to its elements of activation, energy, effort, and persistence and its aim of achieving objectives. In summary, employees who are engaged in their work find it energizing; they experience a sense of pride in what they do, time at work passes quickly, and they have a sense of personal fulfillment (Biggs, Brough, & Barbour, 2013; Salanova, Llorens, & Schaufeli, 2011).

Leadership is regarded as one factor that contributes significantly to the promotion of work engagement

(Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). Hockey and Ley (2010) suggest that to heighten the level of employee engagement, effective leadership is an essential prerequisite for (and even a possible link to) organizational performance. According to Hannah, Sumanth, Lester, and Cavarretta (2014), positive leadership forms focus on leader behaviors and interpersonal dynamics that increase followers' confidence and result in positive outcomes beyond task compliance such as motivating followers to go beyond expectations, positive self-development, and prosocial behaviors (Hoch et al., 2018). In particular, authentic leaders enable followers to experience work engagement by recognizing their individual differences and complementary talents, helping them to build on strengths that increase their own level of engagement (Swain et al., 2018). It helps them to discover their own talents and enriches their work, giving them the opportunity to develop relationships of mutual cooperation and experience high levels of satisfaction and well-being in work environments (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005).

Based in the aforementioned theoretical and empirical arguments, we propose the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1:** *Authentic leadership will be positively related to work engagement.*

### Organizational citizenship behaviors

Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCB) can be defined as individual and voluntary behaviors that are not directly or explicitly defined in the formal reward system and, over time, promote effectiveness and efficiency in the running of organizations (Organ, 1988). They are actions that go beyond the requirements of the job. People perform them because of a personal desire rather than a formal duty; they are not a fixed job requirement or a role that workers are obligated to play. In addition, it has been revealed that employee behaviors that extend beyond specified role definitions lead to more positive results (Mohanty & Rath, 2012).

OCB will largely be based on the terms of trade the employee has with the organization, especially with the formal leader, with the perceptions of justice about the organization and the degree of job satisfaction realized. The exchange relationship between the leader and the OCB has been strongly supported across various investigations (Edú, Moriano, Molero, & Topa, 2012; Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000).

Considering the characteristics of authentic leadership, it is plausible to think that it will facilitate fairness

and openness in the work environment and have direct effects on employee attitudes. High levels of satisfaction, trust, conviction, and preparation for performing different behaviors from the usual work roles will be produced (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). These variables should have a direct and significant effect on OCB values. In this sense, Organ et al. (2006) already showed that employees who had a more honest and trusting relationship with their bosses or supervisors showed higher levels of OCB; this could exert a mediating effect on the relationship of the identification of supporters toward their leaders (Walumbwa et al., 2008). The positive relationship between authentic leadership and the OCB has already been tested in non-military groups (Azanza et al., 2013; Edú et al., 2012; Wong & Laschinger, 2013), outperforming other leadership models when predicting group level performance and followers' OCB (Banks et al., 2016). This gives us the theoretical and empirical basis to formulate the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2:** *Authentic leadership will be positively related to OCB.*

### Personal identification with the leader

This concept refers to the process by which the beliefs of an individual about a person, in this case about the leader, become self-referential (Kark & Shamir, 2002). In personal identification, a part of the identity of the individual will be directly associated with the leader, conditioning in part the development of the self-concept in relation to the similarity of his/her values with the leader. For instance, Bartone (2006) suggests that leaders high in hardiness might influence subordinates to think and behave in more hardy or resilient ways. Wang, Sui, Luthans, Wang, and Wu (2014) maintain that followers under authentic leadership tend to attribute exceptionally strong positive qualities to the leaders, internalize their values and beliefs, and behave consistently with them.

We find significant examples of the importance of personal identification with the leader in theoretical models such as charismatic leadership and transformational leadership (Zhu, Wang, Zheng, Liu, & Miao, 2012). On the other hand, models that share some basic postulates with authentic leadership respect the importance of a type of leadership that goes beyond the leader-follower relationship. Here, leaders are able to engage the thoughts, values, and self-concepts of the followers, making it possible to establish a shared vision and a common goal. Shamir, House, and Arthur (1993) suggest that transformational-charismatic leaders transform followers' self-concepts, building on them as a personal and social

identification in which they share both the objectives and goals of the leader and organization. Trust in the relationship between leaders and followers is established through a deep sense of personal identification by the follower with the leader and his/her values, goals, and visions (Shamir, Zakay, Brainin, & Popper, 1998).

Drawing on previous theoretical models and seeing the similarities that authentic leadership can have with them, we can assume that authentic leaders also encourage personal identification in their followers through the transmission of moral and ethical values, honesty, integrity, transparency, and above all, leading by example. In this sense, Luthans and Avolio (2003) indicate that authentic leaders are guided by a set of values oriented to correct action and leading followers to be largely identified with them and the organization (Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005). This argument leads us to formulate the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3:** *Authentic leadership will be positively related to personal identification with the leader.*

Walumbwa et al. (2008) corroborated the positive relationship between identification with the leader and authentic leadership. In our investigation, we will go further in the relationship between personal identification with the leader and authentic leadership. It is our goal to determine whether such identification acts as a mediating variable between authentic leadership and work engagement as well as with OCB. Authentic leaders display a high degree of integrity, have a deep sense of purpose, and are committed to their core values. As a result, they promote a more trusting relationship in their work groups. This translates into several positive outcomes such as organizational commitment and work engagement (Hassan & Ahmed, 2011). According to Hoch et al. (2018), promoting identification with the leader could contribute to developing work engagement and engendering positive attitudes such as job satisfaction or OCBs. Our goal is to determine if leaders in a military environment, through their ethical, moral, and transparent behaviors, favor the increase of personal identification in supporters and whether such identification results in a higher level of work engagement or increase in the OCB. In other words, we aim to examine to what extent the influence of Al on work engagement and OCB takes place through personal identification with the leader. Therefore, we formulate the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 4a:** *The influence of authentic leadership on work engagement will be mediated by personal identification of the followers with the leader.*

**Hypothesis 4b:** *The influence of authentic leadership on OCB will be mediated by personal identification of the followers with the leader.*

### **Social identification with the military unit**

According to social identity theory, a person's self-concept consists of a personal identity (individual attributes, abilities, and past experience) and a social identity (salient group classifications and characteristics such as group attributes, processes, and composition; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1985). Research suggests that both personal and social identities are important because they influence the self-esteem and self-worth of individuals (Tse & Chiu, 2014).

According to Van Dick (2004), the more a person is defined as a member of a group in an organization (team, profession), the more their attitudes and behaviors will be guided by that group membership. Identification with the group will indicate how membership has engaged the self with its members. Sharing a particular group identity will generate greater cooperation within the group and will make group motivations predominate against the individual (Wenzel, 2002). In addition to Van Knippenberg and Van Schie (2000), identification with the working group will be stronger than others and will help greatly in predicting organizational outcomes, such as satisfaction, commitment and work motivation (Lisbona, 2010). In this sense, Griffith (2002) found that soldiers' experience of supportive leadership and cooperative relations helped build their identification with the unit, lessened the likelihood of their leaving the unit and the Army, and enhanced their perceptions of combat readiness.

Regarding the influence of leadership style, Gaviria (2011) notes that a good leader is beneficial to the group. He/she helps to achieve common goals by influencing the process of decision making toward the most suitable option, maintaining harmony within the group, handling conflicts that arise among its members, and guiding and protecting it against external threats. One of the missions of the leader must be to build a positive group identity among members of the group (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011). In the military field, researchers point out the importance of promoting collective identity and fostering shared group values, which allows for maintenance of discipline and power within the units (Shamir, Zakay, Brainin, & Popper, 2000).

Therefore, we think that authentic leaders will facilitate the social identification process among



members of the working group, creating common goals based on the importance of moral values and expressing high levels of honesty and integrity in their relationships with followers (Avolio et al., 2004). This aspect leads us to formulate the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 5:** *Authentic leadership will be positively related to social identification with the military unit.*

As in the case of personal identification with the leader, in our study we want to observe to what extent identification with the working group can mediate in the relationship between authentic leadership, work engagement, and OCB, respectively. We can find research evidence for a positive relationship among identification with working group and extra-role behaviors, job satisfaction, job involvement, and job motivation (Azanza et al., 2015).

According to Van Dick (2004), identification with the working group will be reflected in the individual in greater job satisfaction, increased motivation, and greater physical and emotional well-being; this will likely have a positive direct effect on work engagement. On the other hand, we must consider the consequences of membership for the organization, where one of the expected results of group identification will be an increase in extra-role behaviors or personal initiatives. This leads us to assume that it will have a positive relationship with OCB, which would be in accordance with Banks et al. (2016), who claim that those variables that reflect a collective focus (OCBs and group performance) are more strongly related to authentic leadership than other theoretical models. In this sense, Edú-Valsania et al. (2016) found that authentic leadership was closely related to an identification with the working group, stimulating extra-role attitudes and knowledge-sharing behaviors within a team innovation climate. Therefore, following our research approach, and having no record of previous studies where the mediator role of identification with the working group relative to authentic leadership had been checked, we set the following assumptions:

**Hypothesis 6a:** *The influence of authentic leadership in work engagement will be mediated by social identification with the military unit.*

**Hypothesis 6b:** *The influence of authentic leadership on OCB will be mediated by the by social identification with the military unit.*

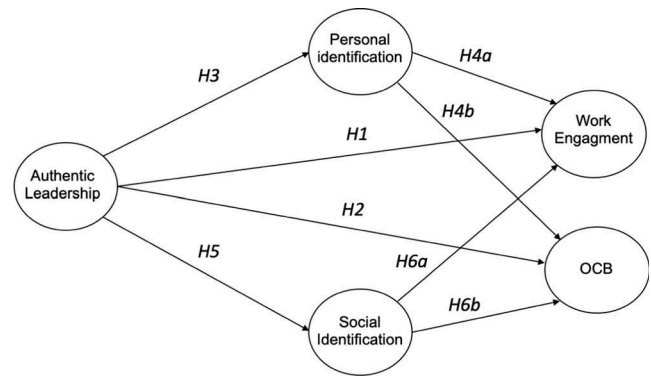


Figure 1. Theoretical model and hypotheses.

The six hypotheses formulated can be visualized in the theoretical model shown in Figure 1, which will be subjected to empirical testing.

## Method

### Sample

A sample of 225 Spanish soldiers volunteered to participate in the study. The majority (74.7%,  $N = 168$ ) were men, and 25.3% (57) were women; the mean age was 29.58 years ( $SD = 5.26$ ). The average time serving in the Army was 8.64 years ( $SD = 4.85$ ), while the average time as subordinates of the same leader was 4.83 years ( $SD = 2.63$ ). All of them were members of the 11th Engineering Specialties Regiment (REI 11 by its Spanish acronym), with the mission of building military constructions and defenses. Most of the time they train to be deployed abroad in operational theaters, although they also participate with other Spanish units in military joint and combined maneuvers or exercises.

## Measures

### Authentic leadership

To assess this variable, we used the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) originally developed by Walumbwa et al. (2008) and validated in Spain by Moriano et al. (2011). The ALQ measures four dimensions of leadership: relational transparency (three items, e.g. "My leader says exactly what he or she means"), internalized moral perspective (three items, e.g. "My leader demonstrates beliefs that are consistent with actions"), balanced processing (three items, e.g. "My leader solicits views that challenge his or her deeply held positions"), and self-awareness (four items, e.g. "My leader seeks feedback to improve interactions with others"). Responses were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always).

### **Work engagement**

This variable was measured by the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), which assesses three basic dimensions of engagement: vigor (three items, e.g. “At my work, I feel that I am bursting with energy”), dedication (three items, e.g. “I am proud of the work that I do”), and absorption (three items, e.g. “I get carried away when I’m working”). For this study, we used the Spanish short version of the questionnaire by Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova (2006). This instrument is composed of nine items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (every day).

### **Organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB)**

To assess this variable, we used the scale of Dávila and Finkelstein (2010) tailored to the Spanish population from the original designed by Lee and Allen (2002). This allowed us to measure both OCBI (organizational citizenship behaviors aimed at individuals who are part of the company) and OCBO (organizational citizenship behaviors aimed at improving the functioning of the organization). The questionnaire consists of 16 items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always).

### **Personal identification with the leader**

We used four items that were similar to those used for the measurement of social identification, but in this case, the items focused on the leader of the military work team. These items (e.g., “I identify personally with my leader or team leader”) were previously used to measure identification with the leader by Shamir et al. (1998). Soldiers were asked to report their personal identification with their team leader using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

### **Social identification with the military unit**

Six items were adopted from the Spanish version (Topa, Moriano, & Morales, 2008) of the identification measure developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992), which is one of the most widely used measures of organizational identification (Haslam, 2001). Following Van Knippenberg and Van Shie’s (2000) procedure, items were modified to measure participants’ social identification with their own work team instead of identification with the whole organization (e.g., “I view the success of my work team as my own success”). Responses to these items were given on a 7-point agreement scale ranging from 0 (*do not agree at all*) to 6 (*totally agree*).

### **Procedure and data analysis**

The questionnaires were completed by the participants while they were waiting to receive a regular medical examination. The instruments were individually delivered to the respondents, informing them of their voluntary participation in the study as well as adherence to anonymity and confidentiality of the data. Average time for completion of the questionnaires was 15 minutes.

We applied Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test our hypotheses using the IBM SPSS AMOS 22 software. SEM is a statistical methodology that takes a (confirmatory) hypothesis testing approach to the multivariate analysis of a structural theory bearing on some phenomenon (Byrne, 2001). Further, SEM is an appropriate method for analyzing the model’s relationships (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). The analyses were carried out using the matrix of the original data as input and the maximum likelihood procedure. We followed the two-step approach to SEM (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) in which construct validity was assessed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) followed by a comparison of a sequence of nested structural models.

Diverse indices were reported to test the goodness of fit of the model (Kline, 2015) such as the chi-square statistic ( $\chi^2$ ), the value of which should be non-significant ( $p > .05$ ) in order to indicate that the proposed model fits the data. Due to the sensitivity of the chi-square statistic to sample size and deviations from normality of the data, other absolute fit indices were proposed such as the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), which is a measure of model discrepancy by degrees of freedom, the value of which should be lower than .05 to indicate a good fit. Likewise, we used the relative Comparative Fit Index (CFI) for which the threshold value is .90 to indicate that the proposed model is a good fit. In addition, the SRMR was used, the value of which should be below .08 to indicate a reasonably good fit.

For multiple mediation analysis, the SPSS macro PROCESS (model 4) was applied with two significant mediators. As recommended by Hayes (2013), the regression/path coefficients are all in unstandardized form because standardized coefficients generally have no useful substantive interpretation.

## **Results**

### **Common method variance test**

Since all measurement scales were self-reported, two steps were taken to examine the influence of common method variance (CMV) in the study (Fuller,

Simmering, Atinc, Atinc, & Babin, 2016; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). First, we conducted Harman's single-factor test (Harman, 1967) by loading all items from each construct into an exploratory factor analysis constrained to one factor and unrotated solution to determine the account for the variance in the variables. While one factor contributing to more than 50% of total variance is considered an indication of CMV, the one factor in our analysis accounts for 41.44% of the total variance. Second, we performed a direct measure of a latent common method factor (Podsakoff et al., 2003) by loading the items on their theoretical constructs while also on a common latent factor (CLF). Following this, we compared the standardized regression weights from the CLF model with those from the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) model (see Table 1). The results revealed that only the path coefficient from OCBI to OCB construct was significantly affected because the difference between the standardized regression estimates was .26. Based on these findings, CMV does not seem to be a significant threat to this study.

### Assessment of the measurement model

The measurement model analyzes the relationships between the manifest indicators and the hypothesized latent constructs. The CFA essentially needs to answer the question of how well the identified measures predict or construct the latent variables. The fit statistics of the CFA model showed a good fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 254.61$ ,  $df = 141$ ,  $RMSEA = .060$ ,  $CFI = .968$ ,  $SRMR = .046$ ).

**Table 1.** Individual loadings ( $\lambda$ ), composite reliability ( $\rho_c$ ), t-values and average variance extracted (AVE).

Construct	Indicators	$\lambda$	$t$	$\rho_c$	AVE
1. Authentic leadership	RT	.89	16.77	.92	.74
	BP	.85	15.67		
	IMP	.77	13.55		
	SA	.92	17.74		
2. Work engagement	Vigor	.90	17.21	.92	.80
	Dedication	.95	18.59		
	Absorption	.84	15.38		
3. OCB	OCBI	.82	13.44	.87	.77
	OCBO	.93	15.65		
4. Personal identification	PI1	.89	16.84	.94	.81
	PI2	.92	18.08		
	PI3	.93	18.19		
	PI4	.86	16.05		
5. Social identification	SI1	.57	8.93	.88	.55
	SI2	.80	13.98		
	SI3	.58	9.05		
	SI4	.77	13.28		
	SI5	.82	14.70		
	SI6	.86	15.62		

### Reliability of reflective constructs

The individual reliability of each indicator is given by loading or correlations between the indicator and the construct ( $\lambda$ ). Researchers postulate that a latent variable should explain a substantial part of each indicator's variance (usually at least 50%). Accordingly, the standardized outer loadings should be higher than .50 with a critical t-value of 1.96 for  $p < .05$  (Hair et al., 2006). On the other hand, the scale reliability allows measuring internal coherence of all indicators in relation to the construct. The composite reliability ( $\rho_c$ ) is a preferred alternative to Cronbach's  $\alpha$  as a measure of internal consistency reliability. While Cronbach's  $\alpha$  assumes that all indicators are equally reliable, composite reliability prioritizes indicators according to their reliability, resulting in a more reliable composite (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009). The acceptable cutoff for  $\rho_c$  would be the same as what the researcher sets for Cronbach's  $\alpha$  because both attempt to measure internal consistency reliability. Consequently,  $\rho_c$  values should be above .70, whereas a value below .60 indicates a lack of reliability (Nunnally, 1978). The loadings of the indicators on the latent constructs ( $\lambda$ ) were generally strong, and  $\rho_c$  coefficients were high (see Table 1).

### Convergent and discriminant validity

The convergent validity represents the common variance between the indicators and their construct, and it signifies that a set of indicators represents one and the same underlying construct (Henseler et al., 2009). Fornell and Larcker (1981) recommend using the average variance extracted (AVE) as a criterion. The higher the AVE value, the more representative are the indicators of the construct on which they load. In general, it is suggested that its value should be above .50 (Chin, 1998; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In this study, the AVE for each construct was satisfactory (see Table 1). To assess discriminant validity among constructs, the AVE square root should be higher than the squared correlation with all other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Thereby, each construct should share more variance with its own block of

**Table 2.** Means, standard deviations, AVE square roots and correlations ( $N = 225$ ).

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Authentic leadership	3.36	1.20	<b>.85</b>				
2. Work engagement	4.15	1.10	.40**	<b>.90</b>			
3. OCB	4.30	0.84	.29**	.53**	<b>.88</b>		
4. Personal identification	3.13	1.52	.78**	.44**	.23**	<b>.90</b>	
5. Social identification	4.20	0.95	.43**	.59**	.54**	.42**	<b>.74</b>

Diagonal elements in italics are the square root of AVE between the constructs and their indicators. For discriminant validity, diagonal elements should be greater than off-diagonal elements in the same row and column. \*\*  $p < .01$ .



indicators than with another construct representing a different block of indicators (Henseler et al., 2009). Table 2 shows correlations between the constructs and, along the diagonal, the AVE square root. In view of these data, there is discriminant validity among constructs assessed in the model, although all of them are significantly correlated.

### Hypothesis testing and model fit

Pearson's correlations (Table 2) provide provisional support for the hypotheses. Authentic leadership was positively related to work engagement ( $r = .40, p < .01$ ), OCB ( $r = .29, p < .01$ ), personal identification with the leader ( $r = .78, p < .01$ ), and social identification with the military unit ( $r = .43, p < .01$ ). In turn, personal and social identification were both related to work engagement ( $r = .44, p < .01$ ;  $r = .59, p < .01$ ) and OCB ( $r = .23, p < .01$ ;  $r = .54, p < .01$ ).

SEM was used to contrast the hypotheses of this study. For this purpose, the fit of the first model is assessed with only the direct effect of authentic leadership on work engagement and OCB. The second model was then estimated, with personal identification with the leader introduced as a mediator. Finally, social identification with the military unit was added as another mediator in the third model. Fit indices for the three alternative models are presented in Table 3.

Our results show that authentic leadership had positive and significant effects on work engagement ( $\beta = .43, p < .01, R^2 = .19$ ) and OCB ( $\beta = .34, p < .01, R^2 = .12$ ) in the first model, so H1 and H2 were supported. In the model 2, authentic leadership presented a strong influence on followers' personal identification with the leader ( $\beta = .83, p < .01, R^2 = .70$ ), supporting H3. In turn, personal identification with the leader had a positive and significant impact on work engagement ( $\beta = .30, p < .01, R^2 = .22$ ) but not on OCB ( $\beta = -.14, p = .31, R^2 = .13$ ). The third model (with effects mediated by personal and social identification) showed a good fit (see Table 3) and a higher explained

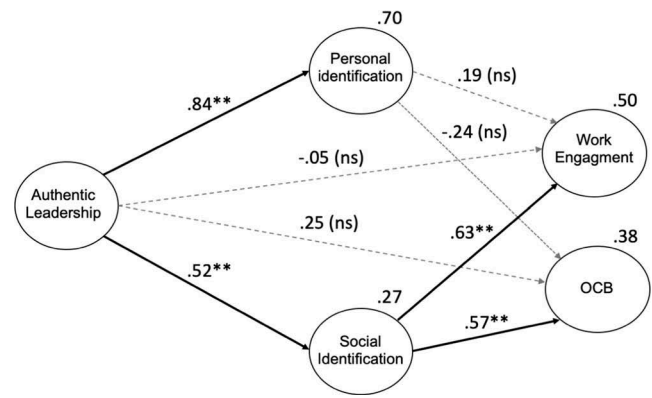


Figure 2. Standardized estimations for model 3.

variance of work engagement ( $R^2 = .50$ ) and OCB ( $R^2 = .38$ ) than previous models. The final model with standardized regression weights is displayed in Figure 2.

Mediation analyses were further tested using the bootstrapping method with bias-corrected confidence estimates (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). In the present study, the 95% confidence interval of the indirect effects was obtained with 10,000 bootstrap resamples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Results of the mediation analysis confirmed the mediating role of personal identification with the leader (H4a:  $b = .14$ , CI = .01 to .29) and social identification with the military unit (H6a:  $b = .19$ , CI = .12 to .28) in the relation between authentic leadership and work engagement. In addition, results indicated that the direct effect of authentic leadership on work engagement became non-significant ( $\beta = .02$ ,  $t(225) = 0.29, p = .77$ ) when controlling for personal and social identification, thus suggesting full mediation. In relation with OCB, the mediation analysis also supports the mediating role of personal identification with the leader (H4b:  $b = -.06$ , CI =  $-.15$  to .03) and social identification with the military unit (H6b:  $b = .16$ , CI = .10 to .21). After controlling for the mediators, a non-significant total direct effect of authentic leadership was found ( $\beta = .11$ ,  $t(225) = 1.79, p = .07$ ), suggesting that the effect of authentic leadership on OCB was based only on indirect effects and that social identification was found to be the strongest mediator.

### Discussion

The goal of this study was to increase our understanding of authentic leadership and its relationships with other important psychosocial variables in workgroups. Our results underline the importance of considering authentic leadership as a useful style for leaders of military units

Table 3. Fit indices for the three alternative models.

Model	$\chi^2(df)$	$p$	RMSEA	CFI	SRMR
M1: direct effects of authentic leadership (no mediation)	37.94 (24)	.035	.051	.991	.036
M2: effects mediated only personal identification	103.78(59)	<.001	.058	.983	.035
M3: effects mediated by personal and social identification	256.73(142)	<.001	.060	.967	.047

RMSEA, Root mean square error of approximation; GFI, Goodness-of-fit index; CFI, Comparative fit index; SRMR, Standardized root mean square residual.

due to its positive relation with soldiers' work engagement, OCB, personal identification with the leader and social identification with the military unit. When we analyze the outcome variables (work engagement and OCB) separately we found that the effects of authentic leadership are totally mediated by soldiers' identification with their leader and with their military unit. However, when we include all the variables together in an structural equation model (Figure 2), we found that only the social identification with the military unit continue playing a significant mediational role in the relationships between authentic leadership and both work engagement and OCB.

According to the formulated hypotheses we found significant positive correlations among soldiers' evaluation of their leaders on authentic leadership and soldiers' scores on work engagement, OCB, personal identification with the leader and social identification with the military unit. These associations are not new in the literature. For example, Swain et al. (2018) reported positive association between authentic leadership and work engagement, Azanza et al. (2013) found positive association between authentic leadership and OCB, and Wang et al. (2014) and Haslam et al. (2011) found positive correlations between authentic leadership and identification with the leader and with the work team respectively. However, these results were found in organizational settings. For this reason, one of the main contributions of this paper is to replicate the association of authentic leadership with the variables of the study in military settings.

In the case of work engagement, it is reasonable to think that authentic leadership is a significant enhancer of intrinsic motivation of the soldiers, because this leadership style is characterized by promoting feelings beyond the work and the leader-follower relationship. An authentic leader will encourage his/her followers to believe in what they do, support them, consider their opinions, increase their personal involvement, strengthen their job and personal satisfaction, and facilitate the development of work engagement (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Hoch et al., 2018; Swain et al., 2018). In a military organization, where performance is the result of collaborative efforts, the engagement of one person may transfer to others and indirectly improve unit performance (Bakker, 2011). From a global point of view, we can consider the presence of work engagement in the organization as a signal of good management in terms of communication, support and meeting the expectations of employees (Tims et al., 2015); such results are essential for the best performance of a military unit.

Concerning the OCB, it is feasible to consider that authentic leadership would be a facilitator of the presence of such behaviors a result of the employee exchange relationship with the leader, based on honesty and trust (Organ et al., 2006). Job satisfaction is also a key aspect in promoting the OCB; good results regarding work engagement, then, may to some extent be interrelated with the OCB.

Also, as expected, we observed a positive relationship between authentic leadership and identification with both the leader and the working group. This is important in relation to the military, because any identification will promote unit cohesion. It is something that, according to Siebold (2012), is essential for enhancing motivation and performance. The significant association between authentic leadership and personal identification with the leader, obtained in this study, indicates that the values promoted by the authentic leader significantly increase the identification with him/her. Similarly, we also found a positive relationship of authentic leadership with identification with the working group. Therefore, we can conclude that, as pointed out by Avolio et al. (2004), authentic leaders who express high levels of honesty and integrity in their relationship with followers facilitate social identification among all members of the working group. This is consistent with Haslam et al. (2011), who state that to make possible the leader-follower relationship, it is essential to have a shared sense of social identity.

Beyond to explore the direct association between variables, an important objective of this research was to explore the global interaction between them through a model of structural equations. In this model we propose that soldier's personal identification with the leader and with the work group will play a mediational role on the association between authentic leadership and work engagement and OCB. Our data present a good fit for this model (Figure 1).

We found that social identification with the military unit play a total mediational role in the relation between authentic leadership and both work engagement and OCB. This finding sheds light about the psychological processes through authentic leader influence the work engagement and OCB of the employees (in this case the soldiers). Authentic leaders increase the identification with the work team, which in turn increase the implication and motivation (work engagement) of the employees on their work or mission and their implication in OCB (voluntary behaviors promoting effectiveness and efficiency in organizations, Organ, 1988). Banks et al. (2016) showed that the collective component, supported by the internalized moral perspective, was more explicit and central to authentic leadership in comparison with

other models such as transformational leadership. In a similar way, Coxen, Van der Vaart, and Stander (2016) also found that trust in co-workers mediated the relationship between authentic leadership and OCB. This result is especially important in organizations such as firefighters, police, civil defense, and in our case the Army, in which strong internal solidarity is required to accomplish their mission. Key here is the ability to bring together group members by making them aware of their mutual interdependence.

Our results show also that, although important, soldier's identification with the leader is not so important neither for soldier's work engagement nor OCB. This result is unexpected, and deserved a greater research in the future. Bearing in mind that the study was conducted in the military field, where the identification of followers with their leaders has been traditionally considered a fundamental element in battlefield success, the result takes on even greater relevance. It would be important to examine in future studies if this result is due to the fact that outcome variables have one more group than individual character and therefore are more affected by group factors. We can also look for structural explanations such as, for example, the fact that increasingly army units tend to be smaller. Additionally, formal leaders often direct their subordinates at a distance through technological equipment. This can indicate, in the medium term, a doctrinal change concerning the relevance of the strengthening of the formal leader in military units. The movement is toward a new horizon in which greater importance will be given to cohesion, social identification and even strengthening and preparation of informal leaders within the group.

The result of this research invites us to go deeper into the study of leadership, as the armed forces of any country means a cornerstone in its doctrinal development at all levels of their structures. Military leaders play a fundamental role in the health and behavior of the organization, as well as that of followers or subordinates. Leaders' behaviors can have a dampening or enhancing effect on the well-being of employees (Bardera, García-Silgo, & Pastor, 2014). Bass (1998) notes that in the future (2025), leaders will be needed who earn the trust and appreciation of their subordinates, communicate the meaning of work and present challenges, set an example and are able to visualize and express objectives and attractive futures. They will have to address the individual needs of their subordinates and help them identify and internalize the values and beliefs that underpin the consistency of their units. We can thus conclude, in this regard, that authentic leadership is able to fulfill some of the proposed requirements.

A limitation of the study is its cross-sectional nature; this made it difficult to establish casual and mediation relationships. In addition, controversy exists about the overreliance found on authentic leadership studies that collected data at one time point. According to Banks et al. (2016), the potential for correlated method variance may inflate the relations between authentic leadership and important outcomes. We propose future studies based on a longitudinal methodology, that is the best way to assess the impact of leadership forms (Hoch et al., 2018).

The results of this research could reinforce the importance of ethical standards in military training. Their role could matter not only from a traditional point of view, but also considering modern conflicts where moral values are a leading factor. Findings have underlined the strength of identification with the military work team, to the detriment of identification with the leader. This makes sense because cohesion and values of a military unit depend not only on the leader or boss, but also on the feelings and moral standards of their members. Nowadays, autocratic leadership styles must be overcome and substituted by others where subordinates could feel identified and valued. This new leadership style becomes a basic requirement in modern societies and new company management styles. It should undoubtedly be important during the training of military commands.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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