ROLE OF BEHAVIORAL INTEGRITY IN LINKING AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP AND INNOVATIVE PERFORMANCE

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Authentic Leadership, Innovative Performance, Behavioral Integrity & Higher Education	This study examines the relationship between authentic leadership and innovative performance via behavioral integrity. The authentic leadership as characterized by transparency, self-awareness, and ethical behavior is shown to positively influence the followers' commitment and performance whereas behavioral integrity is alignment in leader's words and actions, is proposed as vital mediator in linking authentic leadership and innovative performance. The data was collected from teachers hailing from southern region higher institutions through survey approach by using the structured questionnaire to examine the hypothesized relationships as extracted from theoretical framework of study by using different statistical procedures as per nature of relationships. The findings suggest that authentic leadership boosts perceptions of behavioral integrity among followers, which in turn fosters the innovative performance. This underscores importance of leaders demonstrating consistency between their communicated values & actions to cultivate an environment conducive towards innovations. In this regard, recommendations are offered about research phenomena for generalizing findings, and its application in other contexts along with certain directions to future researchers.
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INTRODUCTION

The authentic leadership has been considered as crucial leadership trait and style that is supportive and accommodative for considering the trust and openness of leadership on followers, through self-awareness, information processing, accuracy, internalized morality and transparency for making suitable decisions. The authentic leadership through ethical clarity, genuineness and psychological capital and resilience are important for nurturing the behaviour towards creativity and innovation

(Alavi, Mortazavi & Jamshidv, 2025). The leaders over authentic behaviors are active in ensuring alignment between behavioral integrity and ethical intentions towards reliable, observable and effective outcomes (Asim, Turi, Shahab & Rubab, 2023). The leaders are effective in strengthening honesty, trust and openness that are considered determinants for followers' pledge and integrity (Zeb, Rehman, Imran, Ali & Almansoori, 2020). The behavioral integrity is the outcome of leaders' commitment and responsiveness and employees' resilience and readiness for realizing the potential advantages at workplaces (Rahimi, Jones & Bailey, 2024). It helps in ensuring conducive situation that is auspicious for innovativeness and sustainability of institutions in modern competitive and dynamic environments.

The behavioral integrity ensures the truthfulness in leaders' strategies and actions for realizing the potential advantages for consistent and authentic decision-making. The leaders are more effective to show authentic behaviors to improve the behavioral integrity of the employees and make them responsible towards job-demands (Adil & Kamal, 2020). The behavioral integrity is fostered over authentic leader effective behavioral responsiveness and ultimate resilience of employees beneath for realizing sustainability and success over innovative performance (Wong, Lim & Quinlan, 2016). In higher education, authentic leadership is significant for predicting creativity by fostering the innovative working behaviors in different circumstances for different outcomes (Samkari & David, 2019). The research revealed that the behavioral integrity helps in strengthening the influence of authentic leadership upon performance outcomes in order to confirm the sustainable development and success in the competitive situations (Sozon, Pok, Alkhar & Sia, 2024). In this drive, fostering behavioral integrity of academic managers is not only moral objective but strategic phenomenon as reliable actions reduce perceived risk for innovators and increase willingness to engage in assigned tasks and responsibilities.

The innovative performance measurement in educational institutions requires comprehensive and dynamic frameworks like alignment of industry-based academic programs, adoption of innovative teaching modalities, opportunities for professional developments, provision of strong and dynamic cultures, and strategies for measuring the qualitative and quantitative assessment for ensuring the sustainable performance towards success (Waheed, Miao, Waheed, Ahmad & Majeed, 2019). In this linking, behavioral integrity is active mechanism that validates the leadership authenticity toward followers, thereby attenuating or amplifying its effects on strategic objectives and related outcomes (Stephens, Watson, Alansari, Lee & Turnbull, 2021). The leadership ensures that leader actions and interrelated eventualities are transparently aligned with genuine needs of employees that paves the ways toward sustainable outcomes (Wiewiora & Kowalkiewicz, 2019). The predictable supports and fair treatment at workplace are significant traits of authentic leaders that helps in providing opportunities for developing conducive environments for success (Zhou, Ma, Cheng & Xia, 2014). The leadership in higher education is dynamic for professional autonomy that is used as significant tool for desired development.

The higher education is consistently focused upon creativity and innovation in modern competitive situations and technological changes wherein globalization if effective around and thus numerous measures are required for catering the authenticity, innovation and performance to realize desired

outcomes (Hussein, Omar, Noordin & Ishak, 2016). The integrity and performance are considered as intrinsic drivers of innovation that are vital in determining resilience and commitment for ensuring sustainability and success in different circumstances (Holden, Norris & Kuhlmeier, 2021). These dynamics implies the authentic leadership effect on institutional innovation in directly by shaping culture and indirectly by mobilizing individual motivations that produce innovative behaviors as required for comprehending situations towards success (Rehman & Zeb, 2023). The institutions are more focused on the leadership development programs that aims at developing ethical behaviour and authenticity for prioritizing the mechanisms towards creativity and innovation through clear and transparent decision-making (Tammeleht & Löfström, 2025). Thus, this study aims to examine the diverse hypothesized relationships among authentic leadership, behavioral integrity as well as innovative performance.

Objectives & Hypotheses

1. There is positive and significant association amid authentic leadership, behavioral integrity and innovative performance in higher education context (H1).
2. There is significant mediating role of behavioral integrity in linking authentic leadership, and innovative performance higher educational context (H2).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The authentic leadership in higher education is crucial for ensuring authenticity and legitimacy in linking the performance with sustainable outcomes through behavioral integrity towards genuine relationships in particular context. The authentic leadership is significantly rooted towards ethical decision-making concerning the intellectual autonomy, self-determination, and collaboration that are used ensuring academic excellence (Ahmad, Zafar & Shahzad, 2015). The authentic leadership is considered as significant force for ensuring innovation performance for sustainable outcomes over perceived alignment between a leader's words and actions that acts as behavioral manifestation of authenticity (Mira & Odeh, 2019). These leaders are effective in augmenting trust and confidence along with dependable and reliable supports toward desired determinations through ethical values into observable behavior toward desired development and success (Chimakati & Oduol, 2023). The behavioral integrity is vital for bridging leadership efforts with employees and institutional outcomes based on assurance of strong culture and dynamic reputations through effective policies and strategies (Tammeleht & Löfström, 2025), thus, reinforcing the dynamism towards the desired sustainability and success.

The behavioral integrity facilitates the sustainable performance through teamwork and creativity that are significant in articulating the mission and vision toward strategic objectives. The leadership in this linking, helps in transforming the authenticity through behavioral integrity for refining the culture and commitment for successes (Ausat, Suherlan, Peirisal & Hirawan, 2022). The behavioral integrity and leadership help in reducing fear of failure, inspires open dialogue & cultivates culture of mutual respect that are vital drivers of innovative behavior in academic institutions (Sevnarayan & Maphoto, 2024). The leaders through authentic behavior ensures integrity and truthfulness that are vital for sustainable performance culminates at desired sustainability and success (Imam, Naqvi, Naqvi & Chambel, 2020). The alignment between behavioral consistency and leaders' values and

efforts needs additional concentration and responsiveness for strengthening efficacies, commitment, and motivation for confirm the academic excellence and institutional sustainability (Rehman & Zeb, 2023). The leadership is overwhelmed at reality in action and driving innovation in prospects for institutional commitment to change and employees' responsiveness over active engagement for the desired achievements.

The authentic leadership in higher education is significant for desirability and commitment toward success wherein diverse factors and interwoven and facilitating the frameworks for developing the positive consequences that translates authenticity into tangible actions for advancing knowledge, excellence, and societal impression (Adil & Kamal, 2020). The literature examined the strength and direction in different contexts among authentic leadership and innovative performance with significant diverse outcomes (Manzoor, Zhang & Ma, 2023). The authentic leadership is significant for nurturing behavioral and attitudinal responsiveness that are critical in determining academic motivations, innovative performance and supportive structures for realizing the desired outcomes (Steffens, Wolyniec, Okimoto, Mols, Haslam & Kay, 2021). The leadership role is indispensable for ensuring creativity and innovation through different traits and attributes for realizing advantages that are significant in counting the desirability toward sustainability (Alhammadi & Romle, 2023). The leadership is playing role-model for their subordinates through inspirational motivation along with intellectual stimulation where trustworthiness and authenticity acts as further parameters for realizing desired success.

The higher institutions, in contemporary changing landscapes, need to determine that how actively, the authentic leadership, innovation, performance and integrity are recognized while chasing the diverse strategic objectives by transforming and adapting the strategic approaches used toward the outcomes (Adil & Kamal, 2020). The authentic leadership, stranded in relational transparency, self-awareness, balanced processing through an internalized moral perspective, emphasizes ethical consistency and realness in leadership behavior (Phuong & Takahashi, 2021). The moral integrity and intellectual autonomy are crucial for determining the success parameters that are important for nurturing leadership and employees' behaviors towards desired success in diverse circumstances (Löfström, Trotman, Furnari & Shephard, 2015). There is a need to examine the degree as leadership translates into measurable innovation depends largely on leaders' behavioral integrity that how consistently values are enacted in decision-making, communication and policy implementation for success (Pagaling, Eaton & McDermott, 2022). The academic freedom and dynamic innovativeness are contingent upon crucial role of leadership and employees' beneath for ensuring reputational and academic outcomes.

The academic leadership is significant for ensuring the norms, values, standards, and authenticity in different situations for different consequences by warranting the fairness, innovation and academic freedom through different strategic approaches for realizing the sustainability (Khan, Siddique & Khan, 2024). The leaders, when show behavioral integrity, may reinforce legality of their authority, strengthening institutional trust & establishing psychologically safe environment where innovative ideas can be expressed without fear of failure and criticism (Simola, 2017). The authentic leadership are responsible for inclusion over ethical behaviors, encouraging culture of openness and support

experimentations for problem-solving to enhance institutional efficiencies & educational outcomes (Kafetzopoulos & Gotzamani, 2022). The behavioral integrity helps leaders to ensure sustainable performances for realizing the potential outcomes aligned with strategic objectives and desirability for success and sustainability (Garrido, Rojas & Morales, 2024). The leaders are active in managing the situations at par towards the desired standards in order to ensure the performances through the innovative strategies and actions for emotional and ethical practicalities required for the desired developments and success.

In higher education, when authenticity is reinforced through consistent behavior, it generates high levels of trust, confidence, moral commitment and engagement that directly feed into innovative performance for realizing the desired outcomes (Khan, Gerald, Islam & Saif, 2023). This means that innovation in higher education is not merely a result of structural resources or support, but of moral and relational climate shaped by trustworthy & authentic leadership (Pedraja, Ponce & Miranda, 2025). The effective innovation reinforces the leadership trust and legitimacy thereby encouraging the integrity through sustainable performance for attaining the desired outcomes overwhelmed at leadership development and employees' enthusiasm (Homayoun, Salehi, ArminKia & Novakovic, 2024). These are leading features that inspires leadership & employees beneath to consider diverse situational and contextual parameters while chasing the strategic objectives and guaranteeing the potential efforts toward success (Khan, Nouman & Sarosh, 2025). In this regard, integrated approach ensures that innovation is not isolated and accidental but becomes sustained cultural characteristic of academic institutions wherein additional determining factors are involved to impact the process in diverse manners.

Figure 1 Theoretical Framework
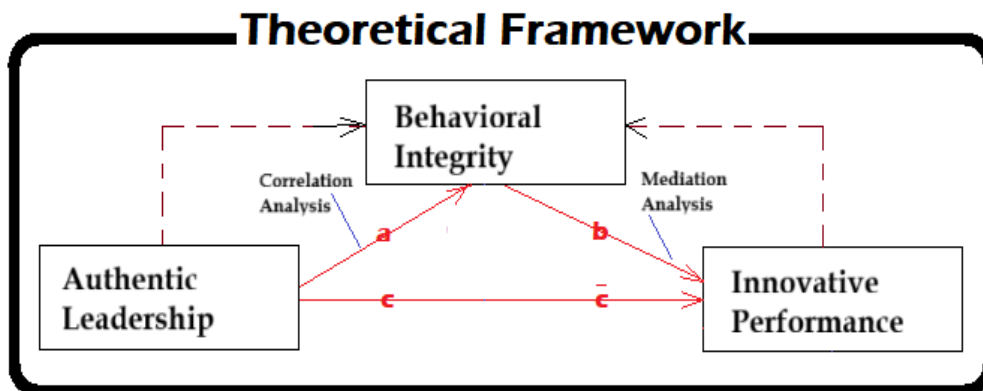
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research aimed to examine hypothesized relationships among authentic leadership, behavioral integrity and innovative performance in higher educational context by using positivism approach for ensuring the required theoretical support through strong justifications for reaching the desired conclusion. The positivism helps in determining the relationships among research phenomena using the required strictures like methodological procedures for data collection, analysis and extraction on new knowledge (Saunders Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). The positivism is further supported through

surveys that are used to access the population through sampling for the purpose of generalizability to generalize the findings from the sample towards entire population and its applicability in other contexts (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). The data was collected from teachers (through questionnaire as extracted from previous studies), hailing from the higher institutions in southern region KP, Pakistan wherein sample of 310 was extracted by using sampling formula used for sample-size determination (Yamani, 1967). The sampling and sampling techniques are significant for providing justification for data collection and its analysis through different procedures to realizing the desired outcomes and reaching conclusions.

RESULTS OF STUDY

The results obtained through diverse statistical procedures for analyzing hypothesized relationships among variables likewise authentic leadership, behavioral integrity and innovative performance in higher education institutional context regarding the association and mediation for extracting the information from these procedures and reaching conclusion for making suitable leading decisions concerning variables.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Authentic Leadership	310	1.30	4.80	3.2282	.74187
Behavioural Integrity	310	1.70	4.70	3.3642	.67116
Innovative Performance	310	1.63	4.70	3.4711	.61385

The descriptive statistics provides significant information from different perspectives like minimum and maximum response rates like (authentic leadership: minimum = 1.30, maximum = 4.80, mean = 3.2282 and SD = .74187), (behavioral integrity: minimum = 1.70, maximum = 4.70, mean = 3.3642 and SD = .67116), (innovative performance: minimum = 1.63, maximum = 4.70, mean = 3.4711 and SD = .61385), and thus significantly describe the research variables in terms of different parameters that are significant in measuring required descriptions about research variables under study in this research examination.

Table 2 Correlation Analysis (H$_1$)

Correlations		[1]	[2]	[3]
Authentic Leadership [1]	Pearson Correlation	1	.466**	.585**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	310	310	310
Behavioural Integrity [2]	Pearson Correlation	.466**	1	.421**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	310	310	310
Innovative Performance [3]	Pearson Correlation	.585**	.421**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	310	310	310
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

The association among research variables likewise authentic leadership, behavioral integrity and innovative performance in higher educational context to confirm the strength and direction toward relationships among variables. The results from correlation confirmed the significant and positive association among variables like authentic leadership and innovative performance (R = .585 & P = .000), behavioral integrity and innovative performance (R = .421 & P = .000), and authentic leadership and behavioral integrity (R = .466 & P = .000), and consequently, hypothesis about association is accepted.

Table 3 Mediation Analysis (H₂) (Path–a)

R	R Square	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.4664	.2175	.3536	104.2367	1.0000	308.0000	.0000

Table 4 Mediation Analysis (H₂) (Path–a)

Model	Coefficient	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	2.0021	.1318	15.1853	.0000	1.7426	2.2615
Authentic Leadership	.4219	.0413	10.2096	.0000	.3406	.5033

Predicting Variable: Authentic Leadership, Criterion Variable: Behavioral Integrity

Table 5 Mediation Analysis (H₂) (Path–b & ć)

R	R Square	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.6088	.3706	.2387	85.2748	2.0000	307.0000	.0000

Table 6 Mediation Analysis (H₂) (Path–b & ć)

Model	Coefficient	Se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	1.5605	.1636	9.5385	.0000	1.2386	1.8825
Behavioral Integrity	.1735	.0455	3.8119	.0002	.0840	.2631
Authentic Leadership	.4110	.0433	9.4808	.0000	.3257	.4963

Predicting Variable: Authentic Leadership, Behavioral Integrity
Criterion Variable: Innovative Performance

Table 7 Mediation Analysis (H₂) (Path–c)

R	R Square	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.5852	.3424	.2486	151.7494	1.0000	308.0000	.0000

Table 8 Mediation Analysis (H₂) (Path–c)

Model	Coefficient	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	1.9080	.1382	13.8016	.0000	1.6360	2.1800
Authentic Leadership	.4842	.0393	12.3187	.0000	.4069	.5616

Predicting Variable: Authentic Leadership, Criterion Variable: Innovative Performance

The mediation procedure was used in this study to confirm mediating role of behavioral integrity in linking the authentic leadership and innovative performance through four diverse mediation paths while determining the direct and indirect relationship. The path-a revealed that 21.75% variance in behavioral integrity with the significant impact on authentic leadership (R = .466 & P = .0000). The paths (b and ć) revealed that there is 37.06% variance in the innovative performance is due to predictor (authentic leadership: R = .4110 & P = .0000, and behavioral integrity: R = .1735 & P = .0002). Similarly, path-c revealed that there is 34.24% variance in innovative performance is due to the authentic leadership (R = .4842 & P = .0000). The results of mediation from all the four paths revealed that behavioral integrity partially mediated relationship between authentic leadership and innovative performance due to decrease in coefficient value from (.4842) in direct relationship to (.4110) in indirect relationship and therefore hypothesis was partially accepted from the results of mediation procedure.

DISCUSSION

The current study aimed to examine the relationship between authentic leadership and sustainable performance in the context of higher education that confirms that authentic leadership is vital for fostering innovation and creativity thereby ensuring excellence in decision-making toward desired sustainability (Carmeli, Gelbard & Palmon, 2013). The behavioral integrity is used as mediating mechanism for connecting the leadership and performance that means that authenticity, fairness and transparency on par of leadership in crucial in nurturing the motivation towards sustainable performance from different perspectives (Wong, Lim & Quinlan, 2016). The teachers' engagement innovation-driven behaviors and the leadership motivation are significant predictors of sustainable performance for ensuring the integrity, honesty and commitment for strengthening the alignment between leaders' actions and employees' abilities (Yusliza et al., 2020). The finding supports that behavioral integrity enhances credibility, trust, and moral consistency amid institutional members, thereby motivating them to show commitment, creativity and openness to change (Holden, Norris & Kuhlmeier 2021), considered as leading determinants towards desirability and commitment for sustainability and success.

The authentic leadership ensures dynamic culture wherein main focus remained on motivation and empowerment while chasing the different tasks and facilitating innovation is performance through ethical orientation and transparency for institutional developments (Inayat, Afridi & Javed, 2022). The findings are consistent with theories of positive organizational behavior and transformational leadership, reinforcing idea that authentic leadership is key precursor of innovation in knowledge-based organization (Khan, Khan & Asad, 2023). The leaders who are capable for ensuring integrity are effective in resistant to change, reduce uncertainty, enhances adaptability and learning, and improving integrity-driven authenticity for realizing desired outcomes (Khan, Siddique & Khan, 2024). The authentic leaders ensure collaborations for problem-solving, trust-based cultures and exchanges for innovative ideas that are significant attributes for inducing obligation for academic freedom and pledge of authenticity & integrity in actions toward desired success (Alavi, Mortazavi & Jamshidy, 2025). Therefore, findings of current and previous studies confirmed that authentic

leadership, reinforced by behavioral integrity, is the catalyst for innovative performance in higher educational institutions.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the role of authentic leadership for predicting innovative performance through association in higher educational context wherein the results of current study confirmed the significant and positive association between the variable meaning that leaders are effective in ensuring authenticity and reliability in their actions for inspiring the attitudes and behaviors of the employees for determining the desired outcome. The study further aimed to examine the mediating role of behavioral integrity in linking the authentic leadership and innovative performance where results through the mediation procedures showed that behavioral integrity partially mediated the relationship between authentic leadership and innovative performance, meaning that leadership is more effective in ensure the fairness, authenticity, inspirational motivation and legitimacy in their actions for motivating the employees to show their undaunted commitment and motivation towards the realization of desired outcomes in higher educational context. The study therefore significantly chased the hypothesized relationships among the variables in systematic manner and produced the desired outcomes based upon the results from correlation and mediation in reaching conclusion and offering recommendations.

Recommendations

1. For effectiveness of authentic leadership, institutions are required to implement ensure the leadership development programs by aligning the main traits with institutional norms and values for sustainability and success.
2. The leadership is required to confirm the moral integrity by strengthening innovation, self-awareness and ethical decisions by aligning the leadership traits and employees' behaviors for realizing the institutional reputation.
3. The institutions are required to set clear strategies for accountability and ethical standards in different situations to ensure that leaders' actions are strategically linked to improvements in sustainable performance of institutions.
4. The institutions are required to ensure the culture of collaboration and openness to promote trust and commitment for recognizing the innovation efforts and engagement over persistent efforts for developments and success.
5. The institutions are required to frame effective strategies and policies by aligning leadership, integrity and performance in diverse situations for ensuring fairness, and transparency for the sustainable academic development.

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