The Mediating Role of Psychological Empowerment: The Influence of Authentic Leadership on Job Satisfaction and Performance of Kendari City Government Employees

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Abstract

The suboptimal performance of government employees and low job satisfaction in various Regional Government Organizations in Kendari City indicate problems in leadership effectiveness and employee psychological conditions. Leaders who lack authenticity in their behavior and decision-making often fail to foster a sense of meaning, competence, and employee self-confidence, which ultimately impacts organizational performance. Based on this phenomenon, this study aims to examine the mediating role of psychological empowerment in the relationship between authentic leadership, job satisfaction, and employee performance in Kendari. This study used a quantitative approach with a survey method by distributing questionnaires to 265 employees from various OPDs using a cluster proportional sampling technique. A Likert scale was used for each variable. Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis with the help of SmartPLS Version 4. The results indicate that authentic leadership has a positive and significant effect on psychological empowerment, job satisfaction, and employee performance. In addition, psychological empowerment mediates the influence of authentic leadership on employee job satisfaction and performance. These findings confirm that authentic leadership is a key factor in developing psychologically empowered employees who are more satisfied at work and contribute optimally to the achievement of public organization performance.

Keywords: New

INTRODUCTION

The quality of regional governance is largely determined by the effectiveness of human resources within regional government organizations (Kurniawan & Suswanta, 2020). As technical implementation units directly responsible for the provision of public services, regional government organizations require employees with high levels of job satisfaction and optimal performance to ensure that every development program runs efficiently and responsively to meet community needs. In the context of regional development, particularly in developing cities like Kendari, the demand for professionalism and accountability in public services continues to increase in line with social, economic, and administrative dynamics. Therefore, the organizational factors influencing the job satisfaction and performance of Kendari City government employees have become a crucial focus for academics, public management practitioners, and policymakers.

One important determinant of improving the quality of public sector employee behavior and performance is the leadership style implemented by regional government organization leaders (Sirait et al., 2022; Hilton et al., 2023; Aburumman and Wasti,

2025). Research on leadership in the public sector shows that the quality of the relationship between leaders and employees significantly determines organizational effectiveness, particularly in bureaucratic work environments such as local governments (Hassan & Hatmaker, 2015). Amid complex regulations, hierarchical structures, and high work pressure, local government employees need leaders who can build trust, provide clear direction, and create a safe psychological space for employee development. In this context, authentic leadership is considered one of the most relevant leadership styles for boosting job satisfaction and performance in the public sector (Daraba et al., 2021; Cortes-Denia et al., 2023).

Authentic leadership demonstrates a willingness to behave in accordance with internal values, maintain openness with subordinates, and process information in a balanced way before making decisions (Lemoine et al., 2019). Consequently, authentic leaders foster honest, trust-based relationships through consistent actions and moral commitment, thereby creating positive and psychologically safe working relationships for their followers (Gill et al., 2021). In public

organizations such as the Kendari City Regional Government Organization, an authentic leadership style is crucial because employees work in an environment fraught with ethical demands, accountability, and the need to maintain public confidence. The presence of an authentic leader can improve employees' perceptions of work processes, enhance role clarity, and strengthen loyalty to the institution. This aligns with the findings of Bryan & Vitello-Cicciu (2022) and Ayca (2023), which demonstrate that authentic leadership can improve employee behavior and performance through clarity of values and consistent behavior between what leaders say and what they do.

In addition to leadership factors, employee psychological well-being is a crucial element in determining the effectiveness of regional government organizations (Qing et al., 2020; Bharadwaja & Tripathi, 2020). One psychological factor that has received widespread attention in the management literature is psychological empowerment. Psychological empowerment refers to an employee's psychological well-being, encompassing their perceptions of the meaning of their work, self-competence, autonomy in performing tasks, and belief that their actions impact outcomes. These dimensions are understood as sources of intrinsic motivation that encourage employees to engage more actively and become performance-oriented (Park et al., 2017). In public organizations, psychological empowerment is crucial in determining the extent to which employees feel valued, have control over their work, and are involved in decision-making processes, ultimately contributing to increased job satisfaction and performance (Lee et al., 2018). Recent meta-analytic findings confirm that psychological empowerment is consistently associated with increased job satisfaction, commitment, and individual performance across various organizational sectors (Sun et al., 2022).

In the context of regional government organizations in Kendari City, psychological empowerment is even more urgent, given the persistence of top-down managerial practices, limited employee autonomy in completing work, and structural political dynamics that influence decision-making. Many employees in local governments face routine administrative work, high public service burdens, and rising public expectations, making it crucial to provide space for creativity, job control, and psychological support from leaders. Thus, psychological empowerment has the potential to be a key mechanism that bridges the influence of authentic leadership on employee job satisfaction and performance.

Research on authentic leadership has demonstrated its positive contribution to job satisfaction (Sakic et al., 2019; Oyewobi, 2022; Venegas et al., 2022; Perdani & Herachwati, 2022) and employee performance (Zeb et al., 2020; Kastelan Mrak & Grudic Kvasic, 2021; Bryan and Vitello-Cicciu, 2022; Ayca, 2023). Furthermore, psychological empowerment has been shown to be an important mediator in the relationship between leadership style and employee outcomes, including work behavior, motivation, and task performance (Qing et al., 2020; Pillai & Mikkilineni, 2021). Numerous studies have confirmed that employees who feel empowered tend to exhibit higher productivity and job satisfaction (Gong et al., 2020; Mufti et al., 2020). However, most of this research has been conducted in the context of private companies, non-profit organizations, and the public sector in Western countries.

While international literature supports a positive relationship between authentic leadership, psychological empowerment, job satisfaction, and performance, several important gaps remain in the literature. One example is the limited research on authentic leadership in the local government context in Indonesia, where studies have generally been conducted in the private sector or educational institutions. The Indonesian public sector, particularly local governments, has distinct bureaucratic characteristics, work cultures, communication patterns, and organizational structures, making it difficult to generalize international findings directly. Next, there are inconsistent research results, where some studies found that authentic leadership does not always have a significant impact on performance or job satisfaction, especially in hierarchical organizational contexts (Bharadwaja and Tripathi, 2020; Soto-Garcia et al., 2023), while others showed strong and significant results (Sakic et al., 2019; Oyewobi, 2022; Perdani & Herachwati, 2022; Zeb et al., 2020; Kastelan Mrak & Grudic Kvasic, 2021). This inconsistency suggests the need for retesting in other contexts. Finally, there is a lack of research that considers psychological empowerment as a mediator in the relationship between authentic leadership and both job satisfaction and performance. Most studies examine only one

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outcome; therefore, a comprehensive relationship model is rarely tested in the public sector.

Based on these theoretical and empirical conditions, this study was designed to fill the literature gap by comprehensively examining the relationship between authentic leadership, psychological empowerment, job satisfaction, and employee performance in the context of the local government. This study offers a scientific contribution by broadening our understanding of the psychological mechanisms that mediate the influence of authentic leadership on employee outcomes, particularly in public organizations in Indonesia, which have bureaucratic characteristics and work cultures that differ from those in the private sector or international contexts. Furthermore, this study provides a practical contribution to the Kendari City Government in formulating strategies to improve leadership quality and strengthen employee capacity as a foundation for improving the quality of public services.

Based on the description of the phenomenon and previous empirical studies, this study aimed to analyze the influence of authentic leadership on employee job satisfaction and performance and examine whether psychological empowerment plays a mediating role in this relationship. This research is expected to strengthen theoretical studies related to human resources in the public sector and provide a practical contribution to regional apparatus organizations within the Kendari City Government in designing leadership interventions and empowerment strategies that can improve the quality of public services.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative explanatory research approach with a cross-sectional design. The unit of analysis was employees in all departments or regional government organizations within the Kendari City Government. This study used all employees as the population, and the Slovin formula was used to determine the sample size of respondents. Based on calculations with a 5% margin of error, the sample size

was 266 employees of regional government organizations within the Kendari City Government. The sampling method used was cluster proportional sampling, proportionally selecting employees from each department. With a cross-sectional design, this study employed a questionnaire survey as the data collection tool. The SEM-AMOS analysis tool was used to analyze the data collected.

This study used three types of variables: independent, mediating, and dependent. The independent variable, namely authentic leadership style in this study, is measured by four indicators from Lorenzo & Aurora (2022): (1) self-awareness, (2) management balance, (3) transparent relationships, and (4) internalized moral perspective. The mediating variable, psychological empowerment, was measured using indicators from Joo et al. (2019), which consist of (1) meaningfulness, (2) competence, (3) self-determination, and (4) impact. Finally, the dependent variable is job satisfaction, which is measured by indicators from Bektas (2017), consisting of (1) intrinsic satisfaction and (2) extrinsic satisfaction. Performance variables were measured by adopting measurements from Government Regulation No. 30 of 2019, which consists of (1) quantity, (2) quality, (3) time, (4) cost, (5) service orientation, (6) commitment, (7) work initiative, and (8) cooperation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The total number of questionnaires distributed was 287, and 266 respondents met the study criteria. Based on this, a descriptive analysis of the characteristics of the respondents showed that the majority were aged 40–47 years (42%), with a greater proportion being male (63%) than female (37%). Regarding employee education level, the majority had a bachelor's degree (53%), and most had worked for 9 to 16 years (58%). This indicates that the respondents had a good understanding of each aspect of the study, including leadership styles, perceived empowerment, and attitudes toward commitment and job satisfaction.

Table 1. Respondents Characteristics

Category	Quantity (People)	Percentage (%)
Age 24 - 31 years	50	19
Age 32 - 39 years	65	24
Age 40 - 47 years	111	42
Age 48 - 56 years	40	15
Male	167	63
Female	99	37
Senior high school	6	2
Associate's degree	43	16
Bachelor degree	142	53
Master degree	54	20
Doctoral degree	21	8
Exp 1 - 8 years	34	13
Exp 9 - 16 years	153	58
Exp 17 - 24 years	68	26
Exp ≥ 25 years	11	4

Table 2. Standardized Regression Weight

			Estimate
X1	<---	Authentic_Leadership	.609
X2	<---	Authentic _Leadership	.887
X3	<---	Authentic _Leadership	.894
X4	<---	Authentic _Leadership	.727
Y1.1	<---	Psychological_Empowerment	.824
Y1.2	<---	Psychological_Empowerment	.861
Y1.3	<---	Psychological_Empowerment	.876
Y1.4	<---	Psychological_Empowerment	.768
Y2.1	<---	Job_Satisfaction	.829
Y2.2	<---	Job_Satisfaction	.834
Y3.1	<---	Performance	.780
Y3.2	<---	Performance	.868
Y3.3	<---	Performance	.696
Y3.4	<---	Performance	.794
Y3.5	<---	Performance	.857
Y3.6	<---	Performance	.832
Y3.7	<---	Performance	.790
Y3.8	<---	Performance	.781

Construct Validity

The validity of the latent variables against their indicators was tested using Confirmatory Factor Analysis. To determine the validity of each construct, factor loading values from the standardized regression weights were used. Validity in the CFA analysis was determined by a factor loading value >0.30. Table 2 shows that the standardized regression weight output for all estimated factor loading values was above 0.30. Therefore, it can be concluded that the indicators for each construct adequately reflect their respective latent variables. Therefore, the indicators are considered to be construct valid.

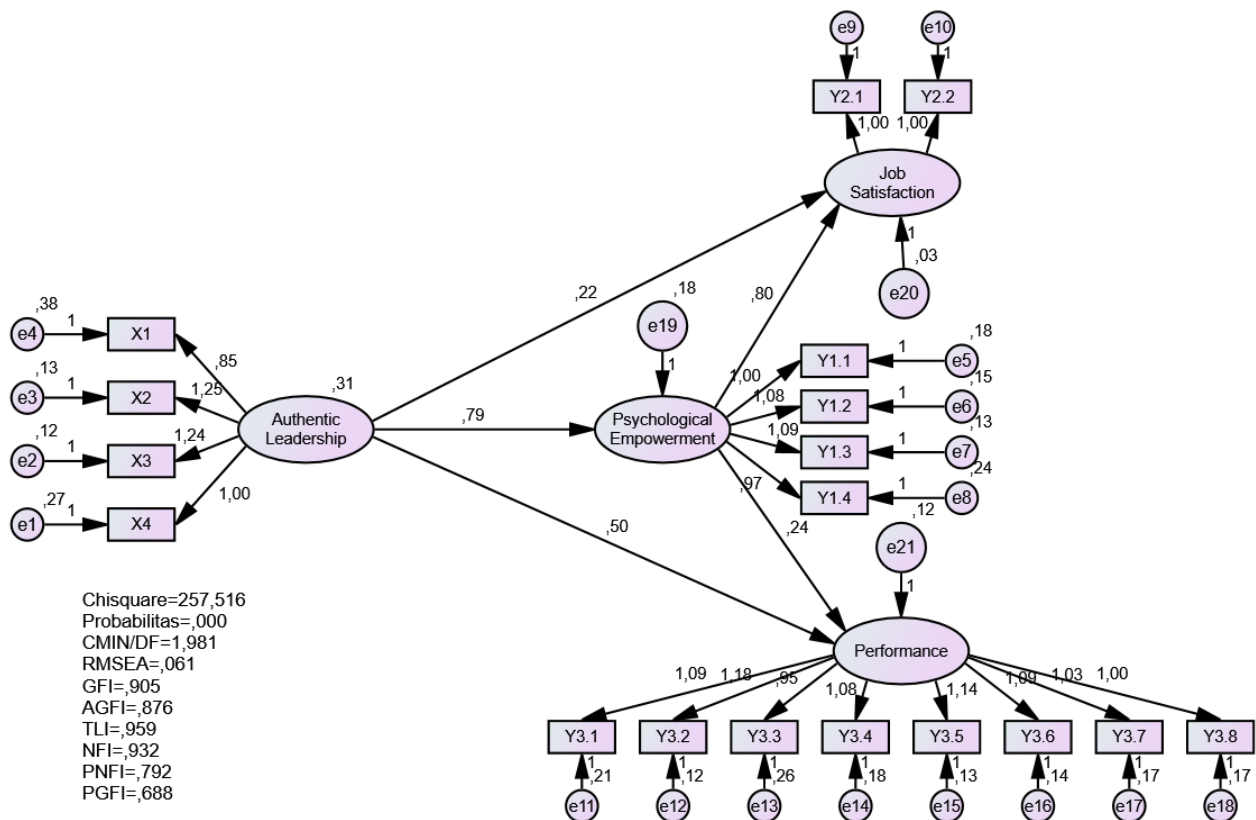Table 3. Goodness of Fit Test Results

Goodness Of Fit Index	Cut off Value	Result	Meaning
Chi-Square	Expected to be smaller	257.516	x^2 with df = 130, sig 5% (157,609) - Marginal
Significancy Probablity	≥ 0,05	0.000	Marginal
CMIN/DF	≤ 2,0	1.981	Good
GFI	≥ 0,90	0.905	Good
RMSEA	≤ 0,08	0.061	Good
AGFI	≥ 0,90	0.876	Marginal
TLI	≥ 0,90	0.959	Good
NFI	≥ 0,90	0.932	Good
PNFI	0,60 – 0,90	0.792	Good
PGFI	0 – 1,0	0.688	Good

Model Goodness of Fit Test

The purpose of this test was to determine whether the model fit the available sample data. Based on Table 3, the goodness-of-fit evaluation results for the research model showed good results, with seven of the ten criteria meeting the cut-off value. Although some indices were still below the cut-off value or considered marginal, these values were not too far from the cut-off value. In this case, a marginal value means that the value is closest to the standard and is still considered appropriate. Hair et al. (2010) suggested that researchers do not need to report or show all goodness-of-fit indices, even though they are sometimes insufficient to adequately test the model's suitability. Therefore, reporting several values that meet the cutoff value provides sufficient information for evaluating the model. Therefore, it can be concluded that the model fits the existing data and is acceptable for use.

Figure 1. Full Structural Equation Model

Hypothesis Testing

This test explains the results of the direct effect test conducted using SEM-AMOS analysis. The criteria for accepting a hypothesis were a critical ratio (CR) >1.96 and a p-value (<0.05). Based on the test results, it can be seen that all direct effects met the criteria for significance, and all direct effect hypotheses can be accepted. The results of the direct effect test are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Direct Effect Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis				Coefficient	C.R.	p-value	Results
H1	Authentic Leadership	□	Psychological Empowerment	0.790	9.941	0.000	Significant
H2	Authentic Leadership	□	Job Satisfaction	0.222	3.178	0.001	Significant
H3	Authentic Leadership	□	Performance	0.502	6.338	0.000	Significant
H4	Psychological Empowerment	□	Job Satisfaction	0.797	10.746	0.000	Significant
H5	Psychological Empowerment	□	Performance	0.236	3.666	0.000	Significant

Based on the results of the hypothesis testing presented in Table 4, it can be seen that for H1, authentic leadership was found to have a coefficient value of 0.790 with a significance of 0.000 (<0.05) and a C.R value of 9.941 (>1.96) on its influence on psychological empowerment, which shows that authentic leadership has a positive and significant effect on psychological empowerment. In addition, for H2, it was also found that authentic leadership has a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction with a coefficient value of 0.222 and a p-value of 0.001 and a C.R of 3.178, and on its effect on performance in the H3 test, it was also found that the correlation value between authentic leadership and performance was 0.502 with a C.R of 6.338 and a p-value of 0.000, which means that there is a positive and significant effect between authentic leadership and performance. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the better the implementation of authentic leadership within the Kendari City government, the better the psychological empowerment and perceived job satisfaction, as well as the resulting employee's perform-ance. Furthermore, testing the effect of psychological empowerment on job satisfaction and performance (H4 and H5) found that the effect of psychological empowerment on job satisfaction had a coefficient of 0.797 with a p-value of 0.000. Similarly, its effect on performance correlated 0.236 with a p-value of 0.000 (<0.05), and a CR of 3.666 (>1.96). These results indicate that psychological empowerment has a positive and significant effect on both job satisfaction and performance. Based on this, it can be concluded that all direct effect hypotheses tested in this study (H1 to H5) are accepted.

Furthermore, to test the mediating role of psychological empowerment in the influence of authentic leadership on job satisfaction and performance, this study used the Sobel test to determine the presence or absence of a mediating effect. The results of the Sobel mediation test are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Mediation Hypothesis Testing

Mediation Effect	Coefficient	t-statistic	p-value	Results
Authentic Leadership □ Psychological Empowerment □ Job Satisfaction	0.630	7.328	0.000	Significant
Authentic Leadership □ Psychological Empowerment □ Performance	0.186	3.460	0.000	Significant

Based on Table 5, it can be seen that the results of the Sobel test for H6, which examines the mediating role of psychological empowerment on the influence of authentic leadership on job satisfaction, had a coefficient of 0.630 with a p-value of 0.000 and a t-statistic of 7.328 (>1.96), indicating that psycho-logical empowerment plays a role in mediating the influence of authentic leadership on job satisfaction. In addition, for H7, similar results were found that psychological empowerment mediates the influence of authentic leadership on employee performance with a coefficient value of 0.186, a t-statistic of 3.460, and a p-value of 0.000. This mediation finding can be interpreted as authentic leadership directly influencing satisfaction and performance, but its influence will be greater when authentic leadership first provides psychological empowerment to its employees. Based on this test, H6 and H7 were tested and accepted.

The findings of this study indicate that authentic leadership positively and significantly influences psychological empowerment, job satisfaction, and employee performance in regional government organizations within the Kendari City Government. These findings confirm that honest, consistent, and transparent leadership behavior builds trust and provides a sense of psychological safety for employees. Authentic leaders create a more open and supportive work environment, ultimately strengthening employee motivation and their positive perception of work. This aligns with the findings of Qing et al. (2020), Zeb et al. (2020), and Cortes-Denia et al. (2023), who emphasized that authentic leadership plays a key role in improving employee job evaluations and positive behavior. Furthermore, the finding that psychological empowerment significantly impacts job satisfaction and performance indicates that employees' psychological well-being is a crucial component in enhancing work effectiveness within the Kendari City Government. When employees feel trusted, have autonomy, and influence over task completion, they tend to demonstrate higher levels of satisfaction and optimal performance. These findings support the growing literature on psychological empowerment, which shows that empowerment contributes strongly to increased employee satisfaction and performance, as well as meta-analyses by Lee et al. (2018) and Sun et al. (2022), which confirm a strong relationship between empowerment, satisfaction, and organizational member performance.

Furthermore, this study shows that psychological empowerment mediates the effect of authentic leadership on job satisfaction and performance. These findings indicate that authentic leadership operates not only through direct relationships but also by improving employees' internal psychological well-being. Authentic leaders strengthen employees' sense of meaning, competence, and autonomy, making them feel more empowered and motivated to work effectively. This is consistent with the research by Qing et al. (2020) and Mufti et al. (2020), who stated that empowerment is an important psychological mechanism that mediates the influence of leadership style on employee outcomes. These findings confirm that improving the quality of authentic leadership and strengthening psychological empowerment are effective strategies for improving job satisfaction and performance among government employees. In the context of the Kendari City Government, these results have strong practical implications, considering the characteristics of the bureaucracy, which requires leadership with integrity and a work system that can provide space for autonomy and trust to employees.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that authentic leadership plays a significant role in improving the quality of public sector employees' work behaviors and attitudes. Furthermore, psychological empowerment is a key mechanism bridging the influence of authentic leadership on both outcomes. These findings highlight that when leaders demonstrate integrity, transparency, and consistency in their actions, employees experience greater meaning, competence, and autonomy in their work. Theoretically, this study strengthens the literature on positive leadership and organizational behavior in the public sector context, particularly in developing countries, which remain underexplored in global studies. Practically, the results indicate that developing authentic leadership capacity and creating an empowering work environment are effective strategies for improving employee satisfaction and performance. Thus, this study provides an important foundation for strengthening human resource management and improving the quality of public services in the Kendari City Government.

Furthermore, the findings of this study have important implications for regional government organizations within the Kendari City Government, as

the strong influence of authentic leadership confirms that leadership capacity building must be a strategic priority. Training programs that focus on self-awareness, integrity, transparent communication, and behavioral consistency can strengthen leaders' abilities to create a more positive and constructive work environment for employees. Furthermore, examining the role of psychological empowerment suggests that the Kendari City Government needs to develop a work system that enhances employee autonomy, trust, and participation. Providing employees with the space to make decisions, take the initiative, and contribute to task planning strengthens their perceptions of meaning and competence, ultimately leading to increased satisfaction and performance. The mediating role of psychological empowerment confirms that leadership effectiveness is determined not only by leader behavior but also by the psychological well-being of employees. Therefore, the Kendari City Government needs to ensure policies that support employees' psychological well-being, such as constructive feedback, open communication, and emotional and professional support mechanisms.

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