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Authentic Leadership and Silence: Role of Commitment

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Abstract

The study investigated the link betwixt authentic leadership (AL) and employee silence (ES): role of affective commitment (AC) as mediator. Based on SET theory, the research adopted a descriptive survey design and the population consisted of eleven thousand six hundred and sixty-one employees of Local Government Areas in Delta State, Nigeria. Using Yamane formula gave sample size of 387, which were selected from the populace using a simple random sampling technique. Data were gathered with the aid of an organized questionnaire and analyses were performed with the aid of STATA statistical software. Descriptive statistics performed included simple percentages, mean, and standard deviation. Inferential statistics involved analyzing the measurement and structural models via structural equation modeling. The measurement model was analyzed using exploratory factor analysis, Cronbach alpha coefficient, average variance extracted, composite reliability and discriminant validity. Hypotheses were tested by looking at the path coefficients involving both direct and indirect effects. Sobel's test was used to determine whether the indirect effect has significance. Findings revealed that AC and AL were negative and significantly related to ES. Further, AL was positive and significantly related to AC. Finally, AC fully mediated AL and ES. The study recommended that the Delta State Local Government Commission should initiate leadership development programs in an attempt to promote AL, and improve AC. This initiative will decrease ES.

Keywords: Affective Commitment, Authentic Leadership, Employee Commitment, Employee Silence.

Introduction

The function of leadership behavior in determining organizational success has consistently attracted the attention of scholars and professionals in the fields of management and organizational studies (1). Leadership behavior is widely acknowledged by researchers as a crucial factor in shaping how employees act within organizational settings (2). While some leadership behaviors promote positive and productive employee conduct, others may lead to undesirable outcomes such as employee silence (ES), a form of counterproductive behavior in the work environment (3). Consequently, the need arises for research aimed at identifying effective behavior of leaders that enhance productive employee actions and also mitigate counterproductive tendencies, particularly within the domain of organizational leadership. Among the various leadership styles, Authentic Leadership (AL) has gained prominence as a human-centered approach explored by leadership scholars. Authentic leaders represent those who deliberately understand their own thoughts and attitude and are seen by their followers as being self-aware regarding their values, competencies, including personal and others' strengths. They dedicate interest on what happens at work, displaying confidence, resilience, sunniness, hopefulness, and strong moral integrity (4). AL is defined by four main behavioral components: self-awareness, balanced processing, embedded ethical viewpoint and openness in relationships (5). Self-awareness entails having a complete knowledge of oneself, making it possible for people to think about their feelings, values, identity, and internal motivations (6). Balanced processing denotes a leader's ability to objectively evaluate relevant data, including followers' viewpoints, prior to making decisions. Leaders who maintain moral perspective are guided by internal moral standards, rather than external pressures, and act according to those values, even when they are at odds with group or societal expectations. Additionally, relational transparency involves openly sharing genuine thoughts and emotions with followers, building confidence and intimacy through honest self-disclosure. Pragmatic research

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has demonstrated that AL significantly reduces the inclination of employees to display silence behavior (1, 7, 8). Leaders who demonstrate strong moral grounding, heightened self-awareness, and objective decision-making, sincere and forthright dialogue are certainly to deter silence among employees. Nonetheless, in the Nigerian context, there is prominent scarcity of research investigating the link betwixt AL and ES.

For the past few decades, ES has predominantly been viewed in a negative light. ES refers to situations where employees intentionally choose not to voice their ideas, insights, or solutions, even when they possess valuable knowledge about underlying organizational problems or their possible resolutions (9). While silence may occasionally occur unintentionally, it is often a deliberate, conscious, and strategic act. Additionally, it can represent internal conflict or disagreement arising from insufficient information or not having a safe avenue for self-expression. In certain contexts, remaining silent becomes a natural answer to the prevailing organizational environment (10). Employees could decide not to speak out when they believe doing so could have adverse consequences or when they perceive their input as ineffective or unwelcome (11). The internal culture of organizations—shaped by group norms, internal politics, communication structures, and leadership attitudes—often discourages employees from expressing dissent or raising concerns. In addition, individual issues like low confidence, anxiety, difficult personality traits, past negative experiences, or not having awareness may also prompt silence. This tendency to remain silent can have damaging consequences on both employee welfare and organizational health. Broadly, both individual characteristics, like power distance, proactive personality, and perceived organizational politics, and contextual elements, like workplace ostracism, rude leadership, and perceived injustice, have been discovered to influence ES (12). The consequence of silence in workplace includes diminished organizational commitment, decreased contentment while working, increased fatigue on an emotional level, and a higher tendency to consider resignation (13). Previous empirical studies have consistently revealed adverse relationship between ES and commitment of employees (14-16).

Employee commitment (EC) remains a mainstream concept in organizational studies attributable to its strong predictive power over various workplace attitudes (17). Although definitions may vary slightly across the literature, there is agreement among researchers that EC represents a state of mind that depicts the emotional and cognitive attachment between an employee and their organization. As described, commitment is the comparative ability of an individual's association with and involvement in a specific enterprise (18). According to this view, a committed employee demonstrates three key characteristics: Strong conformity to the objectives of the enterprise and its values; readiness to put in a lot of work; and a persistent intention to remain within the enterprise. Building on this, researcher (19) introduced a three-dimensional model of EC, comprising affective commitment (AC), normative commitment (NC), and continuance commitment (CC). In their model, AC is identified by emotional attachment and active involvement, NC reflects moral obligation to stay, and CC shows the alleged costs of quitting the organization. Although these dimensions are interconnected, they are different conceptually (19). Empirical research reveals that EC is significantly linked to key workplace outcomes, including employee happiness, contextual and task performance, intention to leave, and disavowal behaviors (20-24). More recently, investigations suggested that AC serves as an intervening variable (mediator) in various organizational relationships (25-28); however, to date, no study seems to have examined its mediating role betwixt AL and ES. The intent of this investigation is to address this breach. Moreover, current findings imply that among the three mechanisms of commitment, AC tends to have the strongest influence on organizational outcomes (29). As such, this research adopts AC as the primary indicator of commitment.

The study objectives were to conduct enquiries into the link betwixt AL and ES; investigate the relationship betwixt AL and AC; determine the association betwixt AC and ES; and evaluate if AC mediate the relationship betwixt AL and ES. The study assumed four approaches for assessing mediation and states the following hypotheses:

H_{01}: AL significantly and positively impact ES.

H_{02}: AL positively and significantly impact AC.

H_{03}: AC positively and significantly impact ES.
H_{04}: AC mediates the link betwixt AC and ES.

Methodology

The research employed a basic random sampling method, ensuring that each individual within the target population had an equal probability of selection. This was to avoid selection bias (30, 31). The target population was 11,661 staff in the local government commission of Delta State, Nigeria. With this population, Yamane formula yielded 387 as sample size. Copies of these questionnaires were administered to the respondents in their office after a detailed clarification of the purpose, confidential, and voluntary form of the investigation. It was also emphasized to participants that their responses were strictly for research purpose. After two weeks, the researchers successfully retrieved 387 of the distributed questionnaires, amounting to 100 percent response rate.

Table 1 depicts the demography of respondents for the research. Majority of respondents 53.75% (N=208) were females, while 46.25% (N=179) were males. As concerning age distribution, most (34.88%) of the responses (N=135) were between 30 – 39 years, 130 (33.59%) were between 40 – 49 years, 26 (6.72%) were between 20 – 29 years, while 96 (24.81%) were above 50 years. By marital status, majority (71.06%) were married (N=275), 54 were single (13.95%), 30 were divorced (7.75%), 18 were widowed (4.65%), while 10 (2.59%) were separated (Table 1). With educational qualification, majority (N=157) of the staff participants have Bachelor degree which amounted to 40.57 percent, while 139 respondents have NCE/Diploma amounting to 35.92 percent. 46 respondents have educational qualification below diploma amounting to 11.88 percent. Furthermore, 45 of the staff have Postgraduate degree amounting to 11.63 percent. In addition, Table 1 displays the spread of respondents by work experience (tenure). As revealed from Table 1, 107 (27.65%) have spent below ten years in their present organization, 112 (28.94%) have spent between 10-19 years, 151 (39.02%) have spent between 20–29 years, while 17 (4.39%) have spent above thirty years in their present organization.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	179	46.25
	Female	208	53.75
Age	20-29years	26	6.72
	30-39years	135	34.88
	40-49years	130	33.59
	Above 50years	96	24.81
Matrimonial Position	Single	54	13.95
	Married	275	71.06
	Divorced	30	7.75
	Widowed	18	4.65
	Separated	10	2.59
Academic Qualification	Below Diploma	46	11.88
	NCE/Diploma	139	35.92
	Bachelor Degree	157	40.57
	Postgraduate Degree	45	11.63
Work-Experience	Below 10years	107	27.65
	10-19years	112	28.94
	20-29years	151	39.02
	Above 30years	17	4.39

Table 2 summarizes the questionnaire items utilized for the assessment of the study's constructs. A scale with 7 points ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' assessed ES (explained variable), while AL (predictor variable) and AC (mediating variable) were assessed using a scale with 5 points.

Table 2: Questionnaire Development

Variables	No. of Questionnaire Items	Authors
ES	Fifteen	(32)
AL	Fourteen	(33)
AC	Six	(34)

Results

Means, Standard Deviation, Minimum, Maximum, and Correlation Matrix

Table 3 provides a brief of the descriptive data and correlation analysis for the variables, including mean values, standard deviations (SD), along with the minimum and maximum scores. The mean for ES was 3.76 with SD of 0.77, which is higher than the mid-point of 3.50 on the 1–7 scale. AL recorded a mean of 3.64 (SD = 0.71), also exceeding the mid-point of 2.50 on the 1–5 scale. Similarly, AC had a mean of 2.82 with SD of 0.62, slightly above its scale mid-point of 2.50. The correlation table also emphasizes the associations among the constructs: ES was found to be adverse and significantly related to both AL ($r = -0.29$, $p = 0.00 < 0.05$) and AC ($r = -0.15$, $p = 0.03 < 0.05$), while AL showed a significant positive association with AC ($r = 0.13$, $p = 0.02 < 0.05$). These results connotes that high levels of AL and AC are associated with reduced ES, while AL positively relates to EC.

Table 3: Means, SD, Minimum Value, Maximum Value, and Correlation Matrix

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std		Max.	ES	AL	AC
ES	387	3.76	0.77	1	7	1.00		
AL	387	3.64	0.71	1	5	-0.29*	1.00	
AC	387	2.82	0.62	1	5	-0.15*	0.13*	1.00

Measurement Model Valuation

The model for this investigation was evaluated using a number of statistical analytic measurements such as Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), Coefficient alpha (Cronbach's α), Average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability (CR) and Discriminant validity. These evaluations were conducted to ensure that the data-collecting instrument were valid and reliable. EFA evaluated the factor structures of the 3 adopted measures applied in this investigation. Prior to performing EFA, the sufficiency of the sample size of 387 employees utilized in this investigation was confirmed using both the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity, computed using 'factor test' command in STATA statistical software. The KMO value of 0.91 was obtained which exceeded the minimum value of 0.5, indicating sample adequacy (35). Furthermore, Bartlett test of sampling adequacy indicated a Chi-square value of 344.895, with a degree of freedom of 6, and p – value of 0.000. These findings demonstrated that the size of the sample was adequate for the research.

Following the KMO and Bartlett's tests for sampling adequacy, EFA evaluated the underlying factor structure of the data. Kaiser's Criterion (35) was applied in the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), which recommends retaining only those factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 for further interpretation. As indicated in Table 4, three factors were extracted based on Kaiser's Criterion, collectively accounting for 84.10% of the total variance in the dataset. The first factor, labeled 'es', had an eigenvalue of 2.939 and accounted for 39.36% of the variation. The second factor, 'al', had an eigenvalue of 1.969 and contributed 24.25% to the variance, while the third factor, 'ac', with an eigenvalue of 1.365, explained 20.49% of change in variation. Figure 1 displays the scree plot that depicts these extracted factors. Prior researchers have outlined some criteria for evaluating factor loadings, suggesting that a loading of 0.71 is considered excellent, 0.63 as very good, 0.55 as good, 0.45 as fair, and 0.32 as poor (36). Higher factor loadings indicate a stronger association, thereby increasing the researcher's confidence in the connection betwixt the item and its underlying factor. Although no conclusive standards exist, this study retained factor loadings greater than 0.6. Of the fifteen items that described silence, only ten items (es1, es4, es5, es6, es7, es8, es9, es10, es12, and es13) had factor loadings greater than 0.6 (Table 4). These ten items were retained for further analysis. AL was proxied by 14 items; nevertheless, factor loadings

more than 0.6 were found for 10 items (al2, al4, al5, al6, al7, al8, al9, al10, al11, and al13). These were retained for further analysis. All the six items that measured affective commitment (ac1, ac2, ac3, ac4, ac5, and ac6) were retained (Table 4).

The measurement model was evaluated further using AVE, Cronbach's alpha (α), and CR (Table 4). The Cronbach alpha values for ES, AL and AC, were 0.89, 0.81, and 0.91, respectively. These values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70 as recommended by past researchers (37). The composite reliability values for ES, AC, and Al were 0.92, 0.90, and 0.93, which are above the minimum acceptable level of 0.6 as recommended by past researchers (38). Additionally, AVE values for ES, AL, and AC were 0.54, 0.56, and 0.61, respectively, which surpass the 0.5 proposed benchmark (39). Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the square root of each construct's AVE with the correlation coefficients of other constructs (39). Table 5 reveals that the square of the AVE (diagonal values) was higher than the corresponding inter-construct correlation values (off-diagonal entries), indicating satisfactory discriminant validity. The measurement instruments utilized in this investigation were therefore valid and reliable.

Common method bias (CMB) is a recurring concern in Behavioral Science research, often arising when both the independent and dependent variables are collected from the same respondent or source. To ascertain whether CMB presented an issue for this investigation, Harman's single-factor test was employed. This method is predicated on the premise that if significant CMB exists, then either (a) From the factor analysis, one factor emerged or (b) a dominant general factor will explain most of the covariance among the constructs (40). Neither of the extracted factors accounted for over 50% in the variability, indicating that this study fails to consider CMB as a problem (Table 4).

Table 4: Factor loadings, Coefficient Alpha (Cronbach's α), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR)

	Factor Loadings					
Variables	**Factor1**	**Factor2**	**Factor3**	**α**	**AVE**	**CR**
es12	0.81			0.89	0.54	0.92
es5	0.80					
es8	0.78					
es13	0.76					
es9	0.73					
es10	0.72					
es1	0.70					
es4	0.69					
es6	0.68					
es7	0.67					
al6		0.83		0.81	0.56	0.93
al13		0.80				
a14		0.79				
a19		0.77				
al11		0.75				
al5		0.74				
al10		0.72				
a12		0.70				
a17		0.69				
a18		0.67				
ac5			0.85	0.91	0.61	0.90
ac1			0.82			
ac4			0.78			
ac6			0.77			
ac3			0.74			

ac2			0.73
Eigenvalue	2.939	1.969	1.365
% of variance	39.36	24.25	20.49

Table 5: Discriminant Validity

Variables	es	al	ac
es	**(0.73)**		
al	-0.29	**(0.75)**	
ac	-0.15	0.13	**(0.78)**

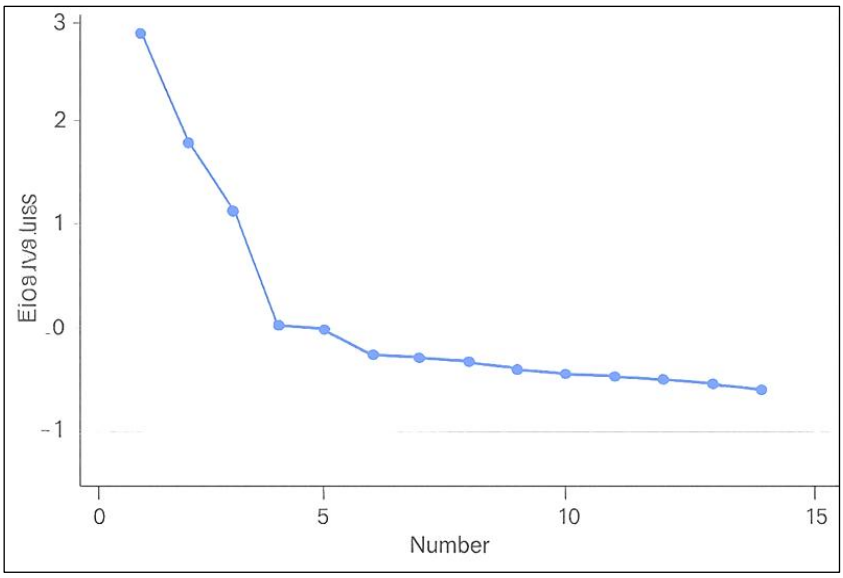

Figure 1: Scree Plot of Eigenvalues

Hypotheses Testing

With the aid of STATA statistical software, structural equation modeling (SEM) tested the hypotheses. According to researchers (41), prior to assessing the path coefficients, it is vital to assess whether the specified model 'fits' the data. Several goodness-of-fit indices assessed whether the study's data fits the 3-factor model specified in this investigation. Further, other researchers (42) recommended threshold values were applied to this end. The goodness-of-fit indices used for this purpose included: Chi-square/Degree of freedom (χ^2 /df); Comparative Fit Index (CFI); Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI); Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA); Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR). The Goodness-of-Fit indices' results showed an excellent model fit (Table 6).

Table 6: Goodness-of-Fit Indices

Fit Indices	Threshold values	Estimates	Decision
X^2/df	<3	1.758	Good
RMSEA	<0.08	0.062	Good
SRMR	<0.05	0.033	Good
CFI	>0.95	0.961	Good
TLI	>0.95	0.985	Good

Path analysis results are summarized in Table 7 and Figure 2. H_{01} states that 'AL has a significant positive impact on ES'. As revealed in Table 7, AL was significant and adversely related to ES (β = -0.270, p = 0.000 < 0.05), thus, H_{01} was rejected. Therefore, a unit increase in AL leads to 27.0% decrease in ES. H_{02} states that 'AL has a significant positive impact on AC'. As indicated in Table 7, AL was significantly and positively related to AC (β = +0.201, p = 0.043 < *0.05*), thus, H_{02} cannot be

rejected. So, a unit increase in AL leads to 20.1% increase in AC. H_{03} states that 'AC has significant positive impact on ES'. As revealed in Table 7, AC was adverse and significantly related to ES (β = -0.184, p = 0.022 < 0.05). Thus, H_{03} was rejected. Therefore, a unit increase in AC leads to an 18.4% decrease in ES.

Testing Mediation

The study considered (30) approach in testing for mediation. As advocated by these researchers, three steps are included in testing for mediation. To establish mediation, three conditions must be met. First, the independent variable must have a significant relationship with the mediating variable. Second, the mediating variable must be significantly associated with the dependent variable. Third, when the mediator is involved in the model, the relationship between the independent and dependent variables should become non-significant, indicating full mediation; if it remains significant, partial mediation is indicated. Hypothesis 4 (H_{04}) proposes that "AC mediates AL and ES." As shown in Table 7, when AC is introduced as a mediator, the direct effect of AL on ES increases but becomes statistically non-significant (β = -0.147, p = 0.073, which is greater than 0.05). To further assess the significance of the indirect effect, the Sobel test was conducted. Results in Table 8 indicate a non-significant indirect effect, supporting the occurrence of full mediation. Therefore, H_{04} is accepted, confirming that AC fully mediates AL and ES. The mediation analysis in brief is provided in Table 7 and Figure 2.

Table 7: Path Analysis

Path	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	Std Err	z	*p* > /z/	[95% Conf. Interval]	
es →al	-0.270*	-	-0.270*	0.085	-2.32	0.000	-0.312	-0.232
ac →al	+0.201*	-	+0.201*	0.073	1.79	0.043	+0.012	+0.275
es →ac	-0.184*	-	-0.184*	0.088	-3.12	0.022	-0.460	-0.105
es → ac→al	-0.270*	+0.123	-0.147	0.095	-3.01	0.073	0.034	0.230

Table 8: Significance Testing of Indirect Effect of Affective Commitment (Unstandardized)

Estimates	Delta	Sobel	Monte Carto
Indirect Effect	0.120	0.122	0.123
Std. Err.	0.091	0.093	0.095
z- value	-2.99	-3.02	-3.04
p – value	0.075	0.074	0.069
Conf. Interval	(0.030, 0.229)	(0.033, 0.231)	(0.032, 0.233)

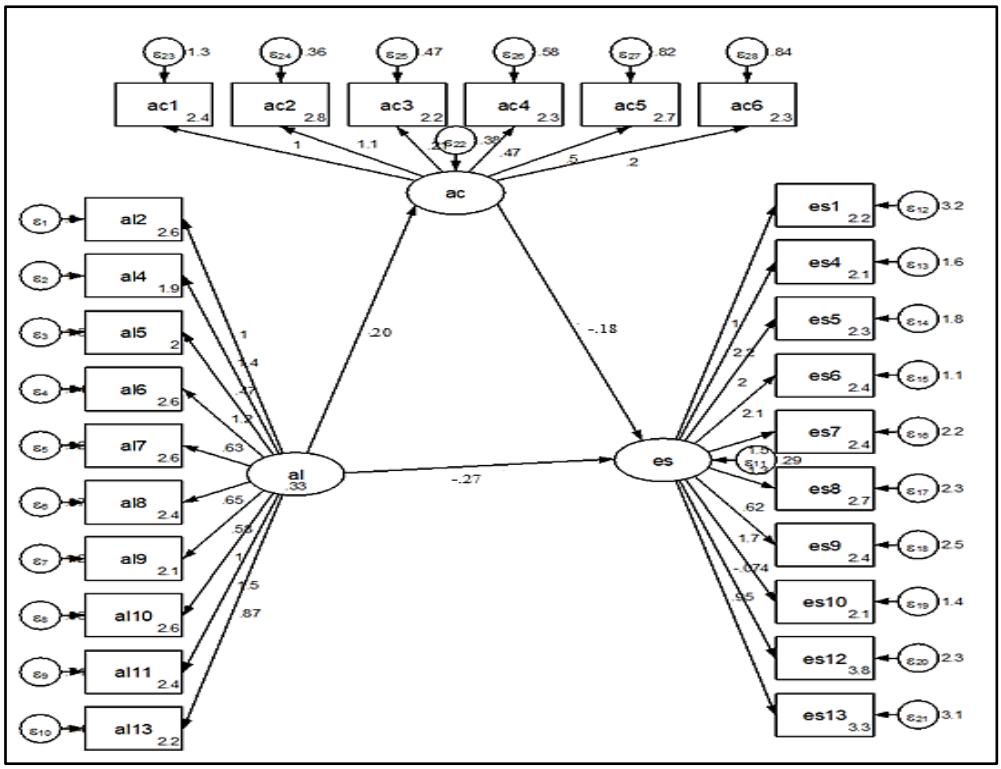

Figure 2: Path Diagram

Discussion

The essential goal of this practical investigation was to look the mediating influence of AC on the link betwixt AL and ES. The first key finding highlights the significant role that AL plays in minimizing and preventing silence behavior among employees. The results supported the direct effect of AL on ES, confirming Hypothesis 1 (H_{01}). The research revealed that leaders who exhibit strong moral values, high self-awareness, relational transparency and balanced information processing are more prone to demotivate ES. Conversely, leaders lacking these attributes, such as low moral integrity, poor self-awareness, biased decision-making, and limited transparency, often foster silence among their subordinates. This outcome aligns with the findings reported in past studies (1, 7, 8). Hypothesis 2 (H_{02}) proposed a link betwixt AL and AC, which was confirmed by the results. A positive and significant association was found, showing that workers are more psychologically committed to organizational goals when their leaders demonstrate authenticity in managing and interacting with them. This result is in line with the findings of past researchers (43-46), though it contrasts with the perspectives presented in past studies (47, 48). The study also hypothesized a significant positive relationship betwixt AC and ES, as stated in Hypothesis 3 (H_{03}). However, the results revealed a significant but negative relationship between AC and ES. This suggests that higher levels of ES are associated with lower levels of AC. This outcome aligns with previous research findings reported in some studies in the past (14-16, 49), although it contradicts the findings of other researchers (50, 51), who observed a strong positive association between ES and EC in university settings. Additionally, the study tested Hypothesis 4 (H_{04}), which proposed that AC mediates the relationship betwixt AL and ES. The results confirmed that AC fully mediated this relationship, indicating that AL reduces ES indirectly through the impact of AC.

Despite these results, the research has certain limitations. First, data were collected exclusively from employees in Local Government Areas in Delta State, Nigeria, which are non-profit public sector organizations. This limits the generalizability of the results to other organizational contexts. Second, the research adopted a cross-sectional design, which restricts the aptitude to draw strong conclusions about causal relationships. Third, the study relied solely on self-reported data, meaning that all information on the variables were from the same respondents at the same point in time. This approach increases the risk of bias due to common method variance.

Upcoming studies should use multi-source data collection methods or gather data at different time intervals to minimize this limitation.

Conclusion

The goal of this practical investigation was to look into the mediating effect of AC in the link betwixt AL and ES. The path analysis results revealed that both AL and AC were negatively and significantly associated with ES. Additionally, AC mediated the link betwixt AL and ES. Given these results, the research concludes that AC fully mediates the connection between employees' view of AL and their tendency to remain silent. This relationship is explained through the lens of the SET, which posits that followers reciprocate the positive treatment they receive from leaders and supervisors by becoming more strongly committed to the enterprise (52). Drawing from the study's results, it is recommended that the Delta State Local Government Commission implement leadership development initiatives to foster leadership authenticity in the work settings. Moreover, management in various Local Government Areas should focus on enhancing employees' AC as a strategy to reduce silence behavior.

Abbreviations

AC: Affective Commitment, AL: Authentic Leadership, AVE: Average Variance Extracted, CMB: Common Method Bias, CR: Composite Reliability, EFA: Exploratory Factor Analysis, ES: Employee Silence.

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Author Contributions

All authors reviewed and gave their consent to the approved final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

Regarding the publishing of this paper, the authors affirm that they have no conflicts of interest.

Declaration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Assistance

In the course of developing this thesis, I acknowledge that we made limited use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) and AI-assisted technologies as supportive tools. Specifically, employed Microsoft Copilot, OpenAI's ChatGPT, Google Gemini, and Perplexity AI to assist in tasks such as: Refining the clarity, structure, and coherence of written arguments; Summarizing and paraphrasing complex ideas for better understanding; suggesting recent scholarly references and formatting them according to required citation styles; and enhancing readability through grammar checking and stylistic improvements.

Ethics Approval

Ethical Approval was obtained from Local Government Commission in agreement with established guidelines. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

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