

Does the Perceived Authentic Leadership Have a Mediating Role in the Relationship Between Employees' Emotional Intelligence and Self-Compassion?*

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Submitted: 29.11.2022 | Accepted: 06.04.2023

Abstract

Purpose: The main purpose of this study is to evaluate whether perceived authentic leadership has a mediating role in the relationship between employees' emotional intelligence levels and their self-compassion perceptions.

Design/methodology/approach: All data in the research were obtained from 175 employees in 12 different tea factories. In the study, in which the descriptive and cross-sectional method was followed, the analysis of the data was made with Hayes' (2013) simple mediation analysis approach within the scope of structural equation modeling.

Findings: The results of the analysis show that authentic leadership perceptions of employees are positively related to their emotional intelligence levels and self-compassion perceptions, and that perceived authentic leadership plays a mediating role in this relationship.

* This study is an extended version of the paper presented at the International Symposium of Scientific Research and Innovative Studies held on 22–25 February 2021.

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Suggested Citation: Yalap, O., & Gençay, E. (2023). Does the Perceived Authentic Leadership Have a Mediating Role in the Relationship Between Employees' Emotional Intelligence and Self-Compassion? *European Management Studies*, 21(1), 48–67. <https://doi.org/10.7172/1644-9584.99.3>

Research limitations/implications: The research has some limitations. First, the findings obtained in the course of the analyses are not generalized to the whole population, as they are collected from a specific sample. It should be mentioned that the results were obtained from different institutions.

It can be said that the perceived authentic leadership approach plays a role in the relationship between individual-oriented positive attitudes such as emotional intelligence and self-compassion. Therefore, it is anticipated that the results obtained from the study contribute to the literature. In addition, handling the statistical aspect of the research only with the mediation analysis approach constitutes a separate limitation. Different statistical approaches can be adopted for future studies.

Originality/value: This study presents a fragment of the results of structural equation modeling conducted for tea industry employees in Turkey on the topic of authentic leadership.

Keywords: perceived authentic leadership, employees' emotional intelligence, self-compassion, tea industry employees.

JEL: L20, M12, M21

Czy subiektywnie postrzegane autentyczne przywództwo pełni funkcję mediatora w zależności między inteligencją emocjonalną pracowników a ich samowspółczuciem?

Streszczenie

Cel: głównym celem badania jest ocena czy subiektywnie postrzegane autentyczne przywództwo pełni funkcję mediatora w zależności między poziomem inteligencji emocjonalnej pracowników a ich percepcją samowspółczucia.

Metodologia: wszystkie dane wykorzystane w badaniu pochodzą od 175 pracowników z 12 różnych fabryk herbaty. W badaniu, którego podstawę stanowiła metoda opisowa i przekrojowa, analizę danych przeprowadzono z zastosowaniem prostej analizy mediacji Hayes'a (2013) w ramach modelowania równań strukturalnych.

Wyniki: wyniki analizy wskazują, że postrzegane przez pracowników autentyczne przywództwo wykazuje pozytywny związek z poziomem inteligencji emocjonalnej i percepcją samowspółczucia pracowników, a przywództwo to jest w tej zależności mediatorem.

Ograniczenia/implikacje badawcze: badanie ma pewne ograniczenia. Po pierwsze, wyniki analiz nie są uogólnione na całą populację, ponieważ ich podstawą jest specyficzna próba. Należy wspomnieć, że bazują one na danych pozyskanych z różnych instytucji. Można stwierdzić, że podejście oparte na subiektywnie postrzeganym autentycznym przywództwie odgrywa pewną rolę w zależności między indywidualnymi pozytywnymi postawami, takimi jak inteligencja emocjonalna i samowspółczucie. Z tego względu przewiduje się, iż wyniki badania wniosą wkład w literaturę przedmiotu. Ponadto ograniczeniem jest koncentracja na aspekcie statystycznym badania wyłącznie przy zastosowaniu analizy mediacji. W przyszłych badaniach można przyjąć inne metody statystyczne.

Oryginalność/wartość: w artykule zaprezentowano fragment wyników modelowania równań strukturalnych przeprowadzonego wśród pracowników branży herbaciarskiej w Turcji w zakresie autentycznego przywództwa.

Słowa kluczowe: subiektywnie postrzegane autentyczne przywództwo, inteligencja emocjonalna pracowników, samowspółczucie, pracownicy branży herbaciarskiej.

1. Introduction

Organizational behavior, which aims to examine the emotions, thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors of employees in the organizational environment in a scientific and systematic sense, is one of the fields within social sciences (Chandra, 2020). Emotional intelligence, self-compassion and authentic leadership are also discussed in this context. Emotional intelligence is a concept coined in the name of education, psychology, and management studies. The roots of the concept are based on understanding one's own emotions, helping oneself in directing emotional responses, and labeling the experiences of different emotions and helping others to understand and channel their emotions (Landy, 2005; Mayer & Chobb, 2000).

Emotions are handled through three groups that activate individuals against any situation they may encounter in the future, direct their behavior in the later part of their life, and contribute to the control of some of their relations with other people (Scherer, 1993). In other words, emotions are the effort, planning and control needed to give the organizationally expected emotion during organized reactions, interpersonal transactions (Feldman, 1996). Intelligence, on the other hand, is expressed as the ability to add new information to human memory and to abstract and criticize this added information. Intelligence is also defined as the ability of a person to continue their life in harmony with their environment (Clayton, 1983).

Self-compassion consists of three main factors: self-compassion, common humanity, and awareness. While self-compassion requires being empathetic and self-respecting, especially after pain or failure, common humanity is about appreciating that one's successes and failures or thoughts and feelings can be experienced universally. Finally, awareness includes the recognition and awareness of cognitions and emotions without over-identification (Barczak & Eklund, 2020). Authentic leadership makes a positive contribution to managerial effects to improve the positive psychological state of the members of the organization and to create a leadership style that promotes a positive working environment in the organization. It enables them to use their self-awareness, morality, balanced information processing and relational transparency (Liao & Shaw, 2020).

Customers of the service sector, whose main factor is human, are increasingly interested in the level and standards of interaction they enter with the service sector personnel as well as the internal service they receive. Accordingly, this suggests that emotions are very important for the service sector personnel, and a significant part of their efforts is focused on expressing emotions determined by the organization (Morris & Feldman, 1996). According to current theoretical and experimental studies, positive attitudes such as understanding their emotions, putting themselves in customers' shoes (empathy), and self-esteem are related to the relationships that employees in the service sector have with their customers to ensure

customer satisfaction (Kim et al., 2021; Kim & Kim, 2021; Torres & Kline, 2013). In the same vein, it is also thought that workers in the service sector are thus better and more motivated. In the research, it is observed that these feelings are based on the experiences of the personnel and are perceived as valuable by themselves, their colleagues, and the organization. In addition, with the perception of authentic leadership, the emotional states, attitudes, and behaviors of service sector employees are monitored by their leaders, revealing that their personnel act consciously regarding what to do and how to do it. This study aims to examine the mediating role of perceived authentic leadership in the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-compassion by measuring the levels of employees' emotional intelligence, self-compassion perception, and authentic leadership perception.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Emotional Intelligence and Self-Compassion

Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to use emotions effectively, manage them, and form positive relationships with others (Goleman, 2000). Directing the emotions of the employees is effective in establishing productive relationships and reaching the goal effectively (Patton, 1998). Therefore, emotional intelligence has a positive effect on employee performance (Boyatzis, 1999). Self-compassion, on the other hand, is more associated with positive self-esteem (Cast & Burke, 2002; Coopersmith, 1959) and self-efficacy (Maddux, 1995; Bandura & Adams, 1977). As a result of this relationship, an individual becomes more resistant to negative events, and moreover, they can maintain a higher level of emotional intelligence (Wilson et al., 2020).

Studies show that there is a positive relationship between compassion and emotional intelligence levels, which includes the perception of an individual's emotions and the utilization of the information obtained from them while guiding their ideas, actions, and professional practices (Fabio & Saklofske, 2021; Shennar-Golan & Walter, 2020; Casthillo et al., 2017; Şenyuva et al., 2014; Neff, 2011; Heffernan, et al., 2010; Neff, 2003). In this context, the level of self-compassion of an individual can be considered in relation to the effective use of emotions. Therefore, we put forward the following hypothesis:

H₁: Emotional intelligence is positively related to self-compassion.

2.2. Emotional Intelligence and Perceived Authentic Leadership

Since authentic leadership focuses on positive emotions such as subjective well-being, optimism, emotional intelligence, and hope, it is recognized in the leadership theories as positive organizational behavior (Luthans et al., 2001; Luthans, 2002; Yammarino, 2013). Therefore, it is stated that leaders with

a high level of emotional perceptions are good at understanding the emotions of others (Mayer et al., 2016). The ability to understand the emotions of others stems from the ability of authentic leaders to empathize with their followers (Miao et al., 2018; Duncan, 2017; Gardner et al., 2009; Humphrey et al., 2008). Furthermore, authentic leadership, according to the Conservation of Resources Theory (Braun & Peus, 2018), makes employees feel that their personal resources (e.g., self-esteem and self-efficacy) and conditional resources (empowerment and status) are protected, which increases employees' psychological capital and reduces work stress and anxiety (Wang et al., 2020). Some experimental research also shows that the leader's authenticity is associated with negative psychological conditions such as anxiety, stress, and depression, as well as positive psychological conditions such as psychological well-being, self-esteem, and self-compassion. In this context, an employee may feel anxious or apprehensive about a given task (Horton, 2017; Rahimnia & Sharifirad, 2015; Tondock, 2013). In this context, it may be claimed that conditions created by authentic leaders' attitudes and behaviors toward their employees when they are stressed, upset, and anxious have the potential to mitigate negative situations.

The basic condition in authentic leadership is to be reliable and act ethically (Cooper et al., 2005). Also, emotional awareness, which includes being conscious of one's own emotions, is one of the basic elements of emotional intelligence, which is a factor in ethical leaders (Avolio & Luthans, 2003). Moreover, literature identifies some characteristic features of an authentic leader. These generally ensue from the relationship between an authentic leader and their followers, positive attitudes such as self-awareness, sense of purpose, balanced and objective decision making, desire to make difference in the world, strong values/ethics (Johnson, 2019). For example, self-awareness entails not merely being aware of one's flaws but also admitting them. Identifying and overcoming one's own flaws may be a challenging task that requires a significant amount of time and personal commitment. Authentic leaders are self-aware in the sense that they are conscious of their own life's goal (Shamir & Eilam, 2005). Self-awareness may be the first step toward true leadership. One cannot fully lead authentically until they understand themselves (Johnson, 2019). From this point of view, it can be stated that it is an important indicator for leaders to consider both their own feelings and the feelings of others in the development of an authentic leader. The leader's ability to perceive emotions is evaluated in the balanced process dimension of authentic leadership. Emotionally intelligent leaders can follow an active and balanced process in expressing their own emotions and directing the emotions of others (Miao et al. 2018; Mayer et al., 2016).

When literature studies are examined, it is seen that authentic leaders with high emotional intelligence have a vast capacity to understand the emotional states of their followers towards their organizations and their

works (Miao et al., 2018; Duncan et al., 2017; Rodriguez, 2016; Kotzé et al., 2015; Berardi, 2015). Leaders who can direct their emotions can use their emotional intelligence to show the antecedents, consequences and meanings of emotions expressed by others (Mayeret al., 2016). Emotionally intelligent leaders can reflect their values and visions to their followers because they can interpret their followers' emotions accurately and effectively and reveal the reasons for their emotions (Miao et al., 2017; Walumbwa et al., 2008). Therefore, leaders who can establish high-quality relationships with their followers based on the principles of social interaction are more likely to be perceived as authentic leaders (Walumbwa et al., 2008). On the other hand, when examining studies on authentic leadership from both theoretical and empirical perspectives, the focus is generally on determining the authenticity of managers with leadership credentials and assessing whether followers perceive any authenticity in their leaders (Walumbwa et al., 2010; Walumbwa et al., 2008). As a result, this study explores employees' attitudes and challenges the perception of authenticity in their leaders. In this context, it was aimed at looking into the sample's perceived authentic leadership level.

In the light of these findings, the following hypothesis was developed:

H₂: Emotional intelligence is positively related to perceived authentic leadership.

2.3. Perceived Authentic Leadership and Self-Compassion

According to the self-determination theory, authenticity is externalized when people's actions reflect their true or core self (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Authentic leaders demonstrate self-determination and function autonomously. They are open to stimulating any experience without defense against or fear of exploring it. From this perspective, through emotional sharing, authentic leaders help foster self-compassion for followers while reinforcing themselves in understanding why they suffer (Dutton et al., 2014). In some studies (Banker & Bhal, 2020; Rynes et al., 2012), it is mentioned that it is the responsibility of the leaders to embed moral values in the organization and harmonize them in the behavior of the employees. Therefore, the leader has very important roles in reflecting a high level of self-compassion and an institutionalized organizational culture (Oliveira et al., 2021).

Although the perception of self-compassion stems from the individual's own psychological dynamics, it has no meaning on its own. Therefore, authentic leaders are of great importance in promoting self-compassion in general, both individually and organizationally. Authentic leaders who have strong empathy for employees can create a successful and effective work environment by fostering ethical and moral virtues in employees (Banker & Bhal, 2020). At the same time, this situation establishes a strong bond between the leader and their followers and provides benefits in the formation of a stronger organizational climate (Dutton et al., 2014). In this way, we developed the following hypothesis:

H₃: Perceived authentic leadership is positively related to self-compassion.

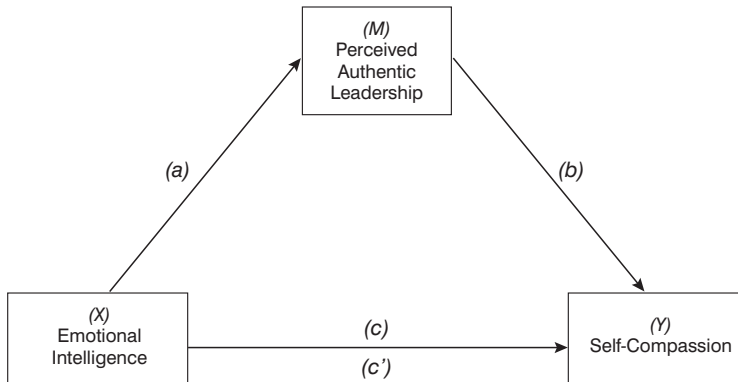
Studies on emotional intelligence have recently been associated with individuals' self-compassion levels (Fabio & Saklofske, 2021; Shennar-Golan & Walter, 2020) and authentic leadership (Miao et al., 2018; Duncan et al., 2017), which are two construct that are known to positively impact organizations where ethical and moral virtues are common. In addition, theoretical propositions and research suggest that an authentic leader may influence self-compassion by shaping interpersonal and organizational relationships (Tondcok, 2017).

On the other hand, there has been no research investigating either direct or indirect effect of emotional intelligence on self-compassion by the mediation of authentic leadership. Therefore, this study was conducted to explore the nature of the association between emotional intelligence and self-compassion and whether authentic leadership mediates this possible relationship in a causally related way. Accordingly, we put forward the following hypothesis and structural model:

H₄: Perceived authentic leadership has a mediating role in the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-compassion.

The structural model of the research is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Structural Model of Study



Note. $c = X \rightarrow Y$ (H_1); $a = X \rightarrow M$ (H_2); $b = M \rightarrow Y$ (H_3); c' = Indirect effect – $a.b$ (H_4).

3. Methodology and Procedure

In this study, a methodological and quantitative research method was adopted and a questionnaire technique was used to reach a large sample group. It was aimed at delivering more generalizable results by considering the data obtained from the sample with a deductive approach and conducting statistical analyses on the data in question (Erdemir, 2018). In addition, since the instrument used in the research was a reflection of the variable to be tested in order to measure the attitudes and behaviors of the employees, the data obtained from the sample were collected in a particular timeframe. Therefore, this study contains a cross-sectional element (Yılmaz et al., 2021).

The Simple Mediation Analysis (Model 4) developed by Hayes (2013) was used to test the hypotheses developed within the scope and theoretical model of the research. The data were subjected to mediation analysis with the resampling technique. In this section, information about the design of the study, participants, scales and the research process is given.

3.1. Study Design and Participants

In this study, a descriptive method was used to analyze the theoretically structured model and data were collected by the survey technique. The cross-sectional survey was conducted in the Rize Province, Turkey. On the other hand, with the convenience sampling method (Taherdoost, 2020), the sample of employees working in the tea sector was selected. 200 employees from 12 different tea companies were reached by the convenience sampling method. Questionnaires were distributed to each of the participants and a total of 175 responses (return rate: 87.5%) were collected. The data of the study were collected in January 2021. The ethics committee approval required for the collection of the research data was obtained under number E-18457941-050.01.04-2431 from Artvin Coruh University in Turkey.

In the sample with a mean age of 37.13, 62.3% of the participants were male ($n = 109$). In addition, in terms of marital status, 65.7% of them were married ($n = 115$), and most of the participants were university graduates – this percentage was 73.7% ($n = 129$). The results regarding the demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Age	175	100%	37.13	9.07	0.489	-0.401
Gender^a			1.62	0.48	-0.511	-1.759
Female	66	37.7%				
Male	109	62.3%				
Marital Status^b			1.34	0.47	0.668	-1.572
Married	115	65.7%				
Single	60	34.3%				
Education^c			2.83	0.53	-0.797	1.845
Primary school	3	1.7%				
High school	33	18.9%				
Undergraduate	129	73.7%				
Postgraduate	10	5.7%				

Note. n = 175; a = (1 = Female, 2 = Male); b = (1 = Married, 2 = Single); c = (1 = Primary school, 2 = High school, 3 = Undergraduate, 4 = Postgraduate).

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. Emotional Intelligence (EI)

The 33-item “*Emotional Intelligence Scale*” developed by Schutte et al. (1998), abbreviated by Chan (2006), with 12 items was used (e.g., “*I am aware of emotions as experienced.*”). It has four sub-dimensions. These are: emotional appraisal (3 items), positive regulation (3 items), empathic sensitivity (3 items) and positive utilization (3 items). Each item is scored on a five-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree). It proved to be internally consistent (Cronbach’s alpha ranging from .87 to .90) in the original form. It was observed that the scale had been used in many studies in the Turkish culture and the reliability coefficient values are .60 and above (Polatçı & Özyer, 2015; Aslan, 2008). In the presented study, Cronbach’s alpha was calculated as .75.

3.2.2. Self-Compassion Short Form (SCS-SF)

The “*Self-Compassion Scale Short Form (SCS-SF)*” with 12 items developed by Raes et al. (2011) was used to measure the participants’ self-compassion perceptions (e.g., “*When I feel inadequate in some way, I try to remind myself that feelings of inadequacy are shared by most people.*”). Each item was rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The SCS-SF has good reliability ($\alpha \geq 0.86$ in all tested samples). The short form of the self-compassion scale was validated in the Turkish culture

by Yıldırım and Sarı (2018), and it was preferred to measure the self-compassion perception level of the sample in this study. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.82.

3.2.3. Perceived Authentic Leadership (PAL)

To measure the authentic leadership perception levels of the participants, Walumbwa et al.'s (2008) "*Measure of Authentic Leadership*" scale with 16 items was preferred. As an example, the following item in the measurement tool can be given: "*Solicits views that challenge his or her deeply held positions.*". It is a 5-point Likert-type rating (1 – strongly disagree, 5 – strongly agree). The validation study of the measure in the Turkish culture was carried out by Tabak et al. (2012). Moreover, to measure the perceived authentic leadership levels of the employees, the scale suitable for Turkish culture was preferred. In this study, the reliability coefficient was 0.87.

4. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the sample were subjected to preliminary analysis, and descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, reliability analysis, confirmatory factor analysis and mediation analysis within the scope of Hayes' (2013) *Simple Mediation Approach* were applied to the variables. In addition, the common method error variance of the instruments was calculated, and all processes were carried out using IBM SPSS 24.

To test the construct validity of the measurement tools, confirmatory factor analysis was applied, and this analysis was carried out within the framework of the LISREL 8 statistical package program. Model goodness of fit values related to measurement tools, chi-square statistic (χ^2/df), goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), comparative fit index (CFI), normed fit index (NFI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is preferred as it is supported in the literature (Bentler, 1995; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006).

Model 4 of Hayes' (2013) SPSS macro-PROCESS for assessing the mediation effect was used to investigate the mediating function of perceived authentic leadership and to verify the hypotheses, following the approach outlined in Preacher et al. (2007) and Hayes (2013). (2018). The SPSS macro-PROCESS produces unstandardized coefficients and biased adjusted confidence intervals (CIs) in a single step using bootstrapping ($n = 5000$). Finally, age, gender, marital status, and education were included as control variables.

5. Results

5.1. Common Method Bias

Detection of common method bias, which is seen as a potential concern in the research, and robustness checks are of great importance. To check for this, we applied Harman's single factor test. Therefore, we applied exploratory factor analysis to all measurement intervals of all variables. We investigated whether the variables had explanationable variances from a single-factor or multidimensional analysis (Podsakoff et al., 2003). According to the results of the exploratory factor analysis, it was observed that there was a structure in a few factors and none of the factors had the covariance of more than 50% (the highest covariance was a single-factor structure with 41.26%).

5.2. Construct Validity and Confirmatory Factor Analysis

In the presented study, CR and Croanbach's alpha values were calculated for the composite reliability of the measurement tools used in the structural measurement model, and AVE values were calculated for the construct validity. The results are presented in Table 2. It was determined that AVE scores were higher than 0.50, CR scores were higher than 0.70 and AVE scores, and the square root values of AVE scores were higher than the intercorrelation coefficients. In this context, it is shown that the measurement tools can successfully measure their own latent structures, unlike other latent structures (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Henseler et al., 2015).

After testing the construct validity of the measurement tools, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted for the validity of the structural model developed in line with the purpose of the research. It was observed that the best structural model goodness of fit values with one-factor structure were statistically significant ($\chi^2/df = 998.45/489$; RMSEA= 0.077; GFI = 0.91; CFI= 0.92; AGFI= 0.90; NFI= 0.91) (Bentler, 1995; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006).

5.3. Descriptive Statistical Analysis and Correlation Analysis of Variables

The means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for all variables of this study are presented in Table 2.

As shown in Table 2, only emotional intelligence was found to have statistically significant relationships with some control variables. According to this, emotional intelligence is strongly correlated with age ($r = -0.18$; $p < 0.05$), gender ($r = -0.17$; $p < 0.05$), and marital status ($r = -0.16$; $p < 0.05$). But no intercorrelation was proved between emotional intelligence and education. On the other hand, there are no statistically significant relationships between control variables and authentic leadership and self-compassion.

Table 2
Means, SDs, Intercorrelations, SWs, KRTs, CRs and AVEs

	Mean	SD ^a	SW ^b	KRT ^c	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	CR	AVE
Control variables													
1 – Age	37.13	9.07	0.113	-0.858									
2 – Gender	1.62	0.48	-2.059	2.265	0.16*								
3 – Marital Status	1.34	0.47	1.304	-0.365	0.30*	-0.10							
4 – Education	2.83	0.53	-0.071	-1.161	-0.10	-0.02	-0.02						
Independent variable													
5 – Emotional intelligence	3.25	0.66	-0.419	0.508	-0.18*	-0.17*	0.16*	-0.04	(0.76)			0.93	0.59
Mediator variable													
6 – Perceived authentic leadership	3.79	0.52	-0.291	-0.509	-0.02	-0.03	-0.08	-0.01	0.32*	(0.73)		0.92	0.54
Dependent variable													
7 – Self-compassion	3.32	0.51	-0.187	0.780	-0.03	0.06	0.03	-0.03	0.26*	(0.78)		0.94	0.62

Note. N = 175; a = Standard deviation; b = Skewness; c = Kurtosis; * p < 0.05; the values in parentheses are the square root of AVE.

Emotional intelligence was strongly and positively correlated with authentic leadership ($r = 0.32$; $p < 0.05$) and self-compassion ($r = 0.16$; $p < 0.05$). Lastly, authentic leadership as a mediator variable was strongly and positively correlated with self-compassion ($r = 0.18$; $p < 0.05$).

5.4. Test of Hypotheses

In this study, we examined the effect of emotional intelligence on self-compassion, outcome variable, via authentic leadership, which was tested by dividing it into direct and indirect effect. To test the hypotheses, we used Model 4 of Hayes' (2013) SPSS macro-PROCESS for estimating the mediation effect. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Results From the Mediation Model (Model 4)

Independent and mediator variables	Mediator variable			Dependent variable		
		<i>M (PAL)</i>		<i>Y (SCF-SF)</i>		
		b	SH		b	SH
<i>X (EI)</i>	<i>a</i>	0.24*	0.05	<i>c'</i>	0.15*	0.05
<i>M (PAL)</i>	–	–	–	<i>b</i>	0.18*	0.07
<i>Constant</i>	$-M$	3.00	0.18	$-Y$	2.19	0.30
		R ² = 0.10			R ² = 0.09	
		F (1; 173) = 20.0311; p <0.001			F (2; 172) = 9.0316; p <0.001	
<i>Indirect Effect</i>		<i>a.b</i> = 0.04*, 95% CI [0.006, 0.098]				

Note. $N = 175$; EI (X) = Emotional intelligence; PAL (M) = Perceived authentic leadership; SCF-SF (Y) = Self-compassion; β represents unstandardized regression coefficients with the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression method. * $p < 0.001$.

First, we tested Hypothesis 1, which predicts that emotional intelligence is positively related to self-compassion. As shown in Table 3, the results demonstrate that emotional intelligence has a significant and positive effect on self-compassion ($\beta = 0.15$; $p < 0.001$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported. Hypothesis 2 states that emotional intelligence is positively related to authentic leadership. As seen in Table 3, the results indicate that emotional intelligence has a significant and positive effect on authentic leadership ($\beta = 0.24$; $p < 0.001$). Thus, Hypothesis 2 is supported. Hypothesis 3 predicted that authentic leadership is positively related to self-compassion. As can be seen in Table 3, the result demonstrate that authentic leadership has a significant and positive effect on self-compassion ($\beta = 0.18$; $p < 0.001$). Through this result, Hypothesis 3 is supported.

Finally, according to the results in Table 3, a 95% bias-corrected confidence interval based on 5000 bootstrap resamples indicates that the indirect effect of emotional intelligence on self-compassion ($\beta = 0.04$; 95% boot CI: lower = 0.006, upper = 0.098) is significantly different from zero. Hence, the indirect effect of emotional intelligence on the outcome variable is significant. In other words, our analyses suggest that authentic leadership completely mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-compassion. Thus, Hypothesis 4 is supported.

6. Discussion, Theoretical and Practical Contribution

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-compassion. As expected, we have found that employees with higher emotional intelligence reported higher levels of self-compassion. This is line with the previous studies which revealed a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and self-compassion (Hashemi, 2019; Adıgüzel & Kuloğlu, 2019; Neff, 2013; Heffernan et al., 2010).

Although there are studies examining the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-compassion, especially in the organizational behavior literature, no study has been found in which perceived authentic leadership is considered as a mediating variable (Di Fabio & Saklofske, 2021; Şenyuva et al., 2014; Heffernan et al., 2010). Therefore, this study has its own peculiarity. In this context, the main objective of the research was to determine the mediating role of perceived authentic leadership in the association of emotional intelligence with self-compassion. According to the results of the tested developed hypothesis, we found that perceived authentic leadership has a mediating role in the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-compassion.

Hypothesis 1 was tested and a positive relationship was found between employees' emotional intelligence levels and their self-compassion perceptions. Although there are studies in the literature that support this finding (Di Fabio & Saklofske, 2021; Shennaar-Golan & Walter, 2020), it can be suggested that the concept of self-compassion, which is considered a positive personality trait and has been the subject of recent research, should also be considered as an organizational result rather than a psychological outcome. Employees who are empathetic and compassionate towards their co-workers, for example, can be studied in respect of relationships with job satisfaction, performance, workforce turnover, and organizational commitment.

Hypothesis 2 was supported, demonstrating a positive relationship between the sample's emotional intelligence level and their perceived authenticity of their leader. Much research reinforces our findings by examining authentic leadership and emotional intelligence jointly (Miao et al., 2018; Kotzé & Nel, 2015). Employees' levels of emotional intelligence rise among leaders

and followers in mutual social engagement, as does their level of authenticity toward their leaders. Studies analyzing both employee views and attitudes as well as emotional intelligence, which demonstrates the authentic direction of leaders, can add to the literature on authentic leadership.

Hypothesis 3 is related to the authentic leadership perception and self-compassion relationship of the sample. The findings show that there is a positive and significant relationship between the participants' perception of authentic leadership and their self-compassion levels. It is observed that there are a limited number of studies examining the concept of self-compassion (Hu et al., 2018; Tondock, 2013), which has been discussed in the organizational behavior literature, and authentic leadership, which is one of the leadership types of research. Although there are studies supporting the result we have obtained, it can be suggested that the concepts of authentic leadership and self-compassion can be used together, especially in future studies. This is because the ability to establish strong relationships and give importance to values and commitment to ethics and morality, which are characteristic features of authentic leadership, can be considered together with self-compassion (Johnson, 2019).

Finally, Hypothesis 4 in the structural model of the research was tested as to whether perceived authentic leadership had a mediating role. When the concept of authentic leader, which is considered as a mediator variable in this study, is mentioned, the main element used by an authentic leader in influencing their followers is the leader's reliability. In other words, authentic leaders are accepted as reliable leaders by their followers because they act transparently in their decisions and practices, depending on ethical values (Kernis, 2003). On the other hand, when authentic leadership is evaluated as a process, it combines positive leadership capability with the concept of advanced organization (Avolio & Luthans, 2003). In this context, it can play an active role in directing the emotions of employees and using their emotional intelligence.

The results of those theoretical studies on authentic leadership show that the number of people trying to know and understand authentic leaders is increasing. In addition, those who feel psychologically strong, like authentic leaders, have more ownership of their work (Qiu, 2019; Horton, 2017; Tondock, 2013; Walumbwa et al., 2010).

7. Limitations and Future Research

Although useful results were obtained in this study to contribute to the literature, it is obvious that there are some limitations regarding future studies. They regard the fact that the participants' own self-reports were used in the data collection tools. Thus, although the participants provided their self-reports, they may have given socially desirable responses. Research on self-reported performance, however, suggests that self-report data are

comparable to ratings from other sources (Faction & Craig, 2001). On the other hand, obtaining the research data horizontally and collecting them from a single sample is not sufficient to report diverse results. Therefore, longitudinal studies with different research designs can be adopted for future research. In this way, authentic leadership perceptions of employees can be compared with data obtained in different time periods.

Second, while we did conduct data analyses, the results from a single sample might lead to a probable common method variance. In future research, it is advised that employees' authentic leadership perception levels be tackled using the categories of moral principles, discipline, and self-efficacy, which are typical characteristics of authenticity. Also, the present study suggests that the mediating role of perceived authentic leadership is useful in understanding the effects of emotional intelligence on self-compassion. For this reason, the future research directions should explore other possible mediators (e.g., charismatic leadership, paternalistic leadership) of this relationship. In this respect, it can be examined whether different leadership concepts have mediator or moderator roles in directing emotional intelligence of employees.

The results of this study have several important practical implications. First, organizations may increase employees' emotional intelligence and self-compassion by boosting the perceived authentic leadership qualities of managers. As the results from the presented study suggest, emotional intelligence and self-compassion are positively affected by authentic leadership. Second, this study suggests that clearly there is a role for various types of leaders. Third, top management of organizations should acknowledge the value of being authentic.

With all these limitations of the study, new suggestions can be made for future research. Especially for quantitative studies, new directions can be set to minimize the limitations. New and current approaches proposed for mediation analysis can be tested. Approaches such as adopted by Baron and Kenny (1986) and Hayes (2017) can be evaluated separately within the scope of future research and discussed statistically. The elimination of statistical errors and new directions in quantitative research are among the issues that should not be ignored for further studies (Shlomo, 2018).

8. Conclusion

Our study looks at the relationship between the emotional intelligence levels of service sector employees and their self-compassion perceptions. It has been questioned whether service sector employees' perceptions of authenticity toward their leaders have a moderating effect. Finally, there are significant relationships between emotional intelligence, self-compassion, and the feeling of authentic leadership. It has been established that employees' level of authenticity toward their leaders serves as a gateway between

emotional intelligence and self-compassion. Also, by controlling emotions and ascribe meaning to employees' attitudes and behaviors, authentic leaders enable their followers to be more compassionate.

Funding

No funding was provided or sponsor consulted for this study.

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