

## **Relevance of mutual aid and solidarity in measuring authentic leadership: an analysis based on the perceptions of SME employees in Côte d'Ivoire**

## **Pertinence de l'entraide et solidarité dans la mesure du leadership authentique : une analyse selon la perception des employés de PME en Côte d'Ivoire**

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## Abstract

In Côte d'Ivoire, authoritarian leadership handicaps SMEs' ability to innovate and adapt to market demands. As a result, leaders need to come to terms with the authentic style that fosters employee creativity and adaptability. However, the successful emergence of authentic leadership within our SMEs requires contextualized measurement. To this end, we conducted a qualitative and quantitative study involving 314 SME employees from a variety of sectors. Factor analysis and structural modeling revealed that the relationship of mutual aid and solidarity highlighted by our results is a fifth dimension of authentic leadership of cultural origin that deserves to be taken into account in the Ivorian context.

**Keywords:** Authentic Leadership, solidarity, SME, culture, Côte d'Ivoire

## Résumé

En Côte d'Ivoire, le leadership autoritaire handicape la capacité de la PME à innover et à s'adapter aux exigences du marché. De ce fait, les dirigeants doivent s'accommoder avec le style authentique qui favorise la créativité des employés et leur capacité d'adaptation. Cependant, réussir l'émergence d'un leadership authentique au sein de nos PME nécessite une mesure contextualisée. A cet effet, nous avons conduit une étude qualitative et quantitative qui a mobilisé 314 employés de PME de secteurs d'activités variés. Il ressort de l'analyse factorielle et de la modélisation structurelle que la relation d'entraide et de solidarité, mise en évidence par nos résultats, est une cinquième dimension du leadership authentique d'origine culturelle qui mérite d'être prise en compte dans le contexte ivoirien.

**Mots clés :** Leadership authentique, entraide et solidarité, PME, contexte culturel, Côte d'Ivoire

## Introduction

Following the call to use authenticity in leadership to resolve crises in organizations (George, 2003), work on authentic leadership has accelerated. The authentic leader is, according to Walumbwa et al (2008: 91): [a leader of a high level of authenticity given that he knows who he is, what he believes; that he knows his values and acts accordingly while interacting transparently with others]. In so doing, he creates a positive working environment conducive to his own development and that of his colleagues.

Thus, the conditions necessary for authentic leadership to flourish have been explored (Chan et al., 2005; Peus et al., 2012). Other authors have analyzed its positive effects on organizational variables (Gardner et al., 2005), subordinates (Muceldili et al, 2013; Alilyyani et al, 2018) and the leader (Walumbwa et al., 2011). Also addressed were the contradictions inherent in the concept (Harter, 2002; Avolio et Mathre, 2012; Einola et Alvesson, 2021, Gardner et Cauley, 2022), socio-demographic factors (Avolio et al, 2004; Eagly, 2005) and cultural specificities (Furmanczyk, 2014; Owusu-Bempa et al, 2014; Biplab, 2015; Sayel, 2016; Amornpipata et Sorod, 2017).

Culturalist work aimed to respond to Cooper et al.'s (2005) call to investigate the measurement of authentic leadership and its discriminant validity. Given the emerging nature of the theory and debates over its conceptual and methodological foundations (Gardner et al, 2021). This call was echoed by Avolio et al. (2017), for whom contextual variations in concept dimensions should be a priority. Thus, Walumbwa et al's (2008) measurement scale, the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ), has been challenged respectively by the "Authentic Leadership Inventory, (ALI)" (Neider and Schriesheim's, 2011) and "Authentic Leadership Integrated Questionnaire, (ALQ-I)" (Levesque-Côté et al, 2018) scales.

Other work validating the Authentic Leadership Measurement Scale has been conducted in New Zealand (Caza et al, 2010), the United States (Clapp-Smith et al., 2009), Belgium (Leroy et al, 2012), Portugal (Rego et al, 2012), Spain (Moriano, et al, 2011), Germany (Peus et al., 2012) and China (Walumbwa et al, 2010). The results revealed a four-dimensional factor structure. However, 5- and 3-dimensional instruments have been developed respectively in Thailand (Amornpipata et Sorod, 2017) and India (Biplab, 2015).

The discrepancies between these measures can be explained by cultural contingencies (Zhang et al, 2012; Khilji et al, 2015; Tumaini, 2022; Lux et Lowe, 2024). However, despite calls to broaden the theoretical framework (Cooper et al., 2005; Alvesson and Einola, 2019; Gardner et al., 2021), enrich the current literature with more reviews (Hoang et al, 2024) and explore the

contextual validity of its dimensions (Avolio et al., 2017; Domínguez-Escrig et al, 2022), most investigations carried out in cultural situations are based on Western contexts (Mengmeng et Abdul Aziz, 2024). In contrast, Sub-Saharan Africa and Africa in general are respectively lagging behind in work on authentic leadership (Bolden and Kirk, 2009; Galperin and Alamuri, 2016) and leadership (Bella et al, 2024).

Apart from a few contributions in Nigeria (Amunkete et al, 2015; Balogun et al, 2020), Ghana (Owusu-Bempa et al, 2014), Egypt (Mousa et al., 2019), Kenya (Kwalanda, 2024) and South-Africa (Grobler and Grobler, 2024), French-speaking Africa following the example of Côte d'Ivoire remains on the bangs of scientific production on leadership in general (Fourie et al., 2015). Therefore, this article aims to propose a valid measure of authentic leadership in Côte d'Ivoire to address the challenges of SME innovation and adaptability (IOS, 2014; Yohou et Picarelli, 2022; Annexe fiscale, 2022).

These challenges, among others, are caused by a leadership style that is generally authoritarian and has repeatedly been indexed as the cause of SME failure (Hernandez, 1989; Chevassu, 1997; Okan and Dalberg, 2013). This style hampers creativity and innovation by creating a climate of suspicion unfavorable to collaboration (Diby, 2007). While authentic leadership fosters employee creativity and adaptability (Muceldili et al, 2013; Somedo et al, 2018) as well as SME performance (Jalal, 2020; García-Vidal et al, 2023).

From the above, it is timely to sensitize SME leaders to authentic leadership. However, because of cultural specificities, a measure adapted to the Ivorian context and based on employees' perceptions is essential to ensure that the desire to see genuine leaders emerge in our SMEs does not remain in the embryonic stage (Walumbwa et al, 2008: 89). Thus, our research question is: **What are the underlying concepts of Authentic leadership as perceived by employees in Côte d'Ivoire?**

Our purpose in this article is to identify the concepts underlying authentic leadership in SMEs. To achieve this objective, we conducted a qualitative and quantitative study involving respectively 130 and 184 employees of SMEs in different sectors. The quantitative study consisted in a factorial analysis followed by structural modelling. The rest of this article is structured around a literature review, methodology, results, discussions and a conclusion.

## 1. From theory to contingent measurement of authentic leadership

### 1.1. Authenticity in leadership: between disagreement and necessity

The study of authenticity has its origins in Greek philosophy (Luthans et Avolio, 2003), and is essentially traversed by the social-psychological, philosophical and developmental currents. The first, intrapersonal current, places authenticity in a perspective of self-development independent of any external influence (Kernis and Goldman, 2006). The second, interpersonal, constructs authenticity through interaction with others (Algera and Lips-Wiersma, 2012).

The third positions authentic leadership as a concept that can embody charisma, ethics and transformation (Ilies et al., 2005; Avolio et al., 2004). Thus, there is no integrated definition (Cooper et al., 2005; Arda et al., 2016). This discord, rooted in the theoretical underpinnings of authentic leadership, means that the concept is overused (Einola and Alvesson, 2021). Nevertheless, a consensus is emerging on the need for authentic, sincere and ethical leaders (Gardner et al, 2021).

This article adopts the conceptualization of Walumbwa et al (2008: 94) reviewed by Avolio et al (2017), as it integrates contributions from socio-psychological and philosophical currents. Finally, although contested for having introduced an ethical and moral dimension antinomic to the concept of authenticity (Helmuth et al, 2023), it remains the most widely used (Pioli et al, 2020; Mengmeng and Abdul Aziz, 2024) through its four dimensions:

**(1) Self-awareness:** this refers to the leader's knowledge of his or her values, identity, emotions, motivations, goals, strengths and weaknesses, and their effects on actions. This self-understanding provides the basis for action (Avolio et al, 2004), reinforcing the freedom and sense of responsibility that underpin authenticity (Kernis et Goldman, 2006).

**(2) Balanced information processing:** the ability to conduct an objective analysis, soliciting the views of collaborators before making a decision (Walumbwa et al, 2008). This approach enables him to recognize and avoid motivational or cognitive biases (Gardner et al, 2005).

**(3) Relational transparency:** the leader is committed to helping his or her collaborators to develop and to presenting his or her true nature, in order to create bonds based on intimacy and trust (Kernis et Goldman, 2006). However, relational transparency should be nurtured with diplomacy, flexibility and emotional intelligence, so as to avoid the setbacks of excessive authenticity (Romano, 2020; Gardner et al, 2021) in certain circumstances.

**(4) Internalized moral perspective:** this reflects the manager's ability to decide and act in accordance with his or her beliefs and values (Gardner et al, 2005).

These integrated dimensions characterize the authentic leader. However, depending on the cultural context, differences may emerge in employees' perceptions (Zhang et al, 2012; Khilji et al, 2015).

### **1.2. Measuring authentic leadership: an overview based on cultural contingencies**

The variability and relative importance of the dimensions in the Walumbwa et al (2008) model were analyzed from a cultural perspective.

Sayel (2016) showed that hierarchical distance had no influence on the dimensioning of authentic leadership as seen by employees in the USA (a country with low hierarchical distance) and the United Arab Emirates (a country with high hierarchical distance). On the scale of authentic leadership (Neider et Schriesheim's, 2011), Bocarnea and Petan (2016) obtained identical results when repeating the comparison between the USA and Romania.

In Poland, Furmanczyk (2014) observed great similarities between dimensions in Japanese and German companies. However, German companies place particular emphasis on transparency and balance of information, while Japanese companies prioritize self-awareness. In the same vein, in Asia, Marinakou and Nikolic (2016) revealed executives' particular interest in the practice of relational transparency.

Furthermore, Cervo et al (2016) proved the stability of the Walumbwa et al (2008) model on samples of Brazilian and Portuguese employees. In Pakistan, Bakari and Hunjra (2017) confirmed the four-dimensional model of Walumbwa et al (2008). However, in India, Biplab (2015) confirmed three. The field marking an indifference between relational transparency and internalized moral perspective. In Thailand, Amornpipata and Sorod (2017) identified a fifth dimension, "Harmony Relation" due to the collectivist culture.

From the above, culture is at the root of specificities in the perception of authentic leadership. Thus, its measurement in Côte d'Ivoire may be influenced by it.

### **1.3. Employees' expectations of authentic leadership: between universality and cultural specificity in Côte d'Ivoire**

The leadership style generally found in SMEs is authoritarian (Okan and Dalberg, 2013), as is the political system (IRIS, 2015). This style has been repeatedly indexed as one of the causes of SME failure (Hernandez, 1989; Chevassu, 1997; Okan and Dalberg, 2013). Based on the "myth of the leader", this style is a source of dysfunction in the modern company (Kessy, 1998), particularly with regard to employees (Okan and Dalberg, 2013). Hence the importance of their perception in assessing the leader's authenticity (Owusu-Bempa, 2014).

Studies in Côte d'Ivoire show that employees disapprove of management's behavior with regard to minimum wages, social obligations and labor standards (Okan and Dalberg, 2013). By reminding managers of the need to respect their conventional commitments and the word given (Ouffouet, 2021), so dear to African culture (Kessy, 1998), employees thus reveal a major need for ethical leadership. This perception is in line with the internalized moral perspective (Walumbwa et al, 2008).

In addition, employees lament a lack of organizational skills among their leaders, who struggle to define clear job sheets, career plans and ongoing training (Okan and Dalberg, 2013). In particular, younger employees between 20 and 35 want leaders who trust them, set clear objectives, recognize their performance, ensure their personal development and the development of their skills (Morgan et Mazars, 2016). In this way, employees express their quest for transparency in the manager-employee relationship, even though the cultural environment is resistant to it (Ouffouet, 2021). This expectation is in line with relational transparency as defined by Walumbwa et al (2008).

Some literature reveals a delegation crisis among SME managers (Okan and Dalberg, 2013; OIS, 2014). Since delegation rhymes with autonomy (Miramon, 2009), this crisis implies that employees have less autonomy in carrying out their tasks. Hence their marginalization in the decision-making process (Kessy, 1998; Ouffouet, 2021). This concern to participate in decision-making contrasts with cultural values. However, it is in line with the balance of information in Walumbwa et al (2008) model.

The culture of the leader myth deprives managers of objective feedback on the realities of the company and the consequences of their managerial choices (Kessy, 1998). As a result, managers are unable to question their practices with a view to improvement. Thus, while questioning is of particular interest to employees (Ouffouet, 2021), the myth of the leader as a mode of leadership may inhibit the practice of self-awareness or the constant questioning of organizational practices with a view to improvement. This employee perception is in line with the need for self-awareness advocated by Walumbwa et al (2008).

Lastly, according to Kessy (1998), strong community pressure means that a system of solidarity and mutual support within the organization is essential if African employees are to be committed. The cultural context can therefore influence the formulation of authentic leadership as perceived by employees (Wilde, 2007; Ouffouet, 2021).

We therefore formulate the hypothesis that: Authentic leadership as perceived by employees may comprise five underlying concepts: self-awareness, balanced information processing,



relational transparency, internalized moral perspective and the relationship of mutual aid and solidarity.

## **2. Methodology, results and discussions**

### **2.1. Survey context: target, framework, sample and data collection**

#### **2.1.1. Targeting SME employees**

SME employees are the target of our survey. For, while the leader's authenticity is the result of the leader-employee interaction, its assessment is based on the employee's perception (Owusu-Bempa, 2014; Algera and Lips-Wiersma, 2012). This limits the social desirability bias that can result from questioning the manager (Crowne and Marlowe, 1960). Furthermore, the choice of SME is based on the size of the workforce. Thus, any worker who passed the internship stage, whether hired or not, was qualified as an employee.

#### **2.1.2. Abidjan business sectors involved in the survey**

As Abidjan is home to 60% of existing SMEs and 80% of formal SMEs (Okan and Dalberg, 2013; PND, 2015-2020), various sectors of activity (Table 3) were selected because of their contribution to GDP and the interest shown in them by the National Development Plan (PND). However, only 40% of SME managers responded positively to the letters sent out. The sample was drawn on this basis, with the hope of increasing the response rate within each company. Our survey was carried out in one go over a four-month period from April to July.

#### **2.1.3. Sampling: between convenience and snowballing**

In the absence of reliable sampling frames, we used the convenience method to contact SMEs and then volunteer employees corresponding to the definition of our target population (Roussel, 2005:255). To avoid sampling bias, our sample was diversified in terms of both SME and employee characteristics. Two samples were drawn for exploratory and confirmatory analyses respectively, to guard against test and maturity effects (Igalens and Roussel, 1998:125).

Time and cost constraints meant that we had to administer a total of 500 questionnaires to the employees of 40 SMEs at a single time. This was done for the most part by convenience, and to a lesser extent by snowballing. When the questionnaires were counted, 314 were retained, giving a final response rate of 62.8%. This is in line with the minimum of 200 individuals recommended by Roussel et al (2005). The 314 questionnaires were then randomly split (Belghiti-Mahut et al, 2004). Thus, 130 questionnaires were used in the exploratory phase and 184 in the confirmatory phase.



#### **2.1.4. Data collection based on a self-administered questionnaire**

The self-administered questionnaire has been favored to reduce survey costs and increase accuracy (Aaker et al, 2010). However, it does not provide reassurance about the respondent's true identity. In addition, once authorization had been granted by the manager, the selection of participants and distribution of questionnaires were carried out with the support of a resource person. On this occasion, the objectives of the research were explained in order to arouse the interest of the employees (Neuman, 1997).

Questionnaires were filled in voluntarily, anonymously, in the absence of the interviewer and in complete confidentiality. Completed forms were placed anonymously in a personal envelope and collected by the interviewer a few days later, to avoid putting respondents under pressure. Table 1, below, lists the items that best define the characteristics of authentic leadership.

The scale for measuring the "mutual aid and solidarity" dimension was added on the basis of the literature review (Kessy, 1998, Sogbossi, 2009) and statements from the qualitative fieldwork (Ouffouet, 2021). Use of the questionnaire was subject to prior authorization by MindGarden authorities. The 5-point Likert scale (Igalens and Roussel, 1998) was used to meet the requirements of exploratory analysis within the framework of a PCA. To conform to the original number of steps (Gavard-Perret et al, 2012), five steps ranging from "never" to "always" were retained.

**Table 1: Inventory of items on the Authentic Leadership Scale**

Dimensions	Code	Items
1. Self-awareness (LAC)	LAC1	My boss knows how to challenge himself in order to improve relations with his employees.
	LAC2	My boss has an exact idea of what employees think of his abilities
	LAC3	My boss knows when to rethink his position on important issues
	LAC4	My boss knows how to control the effects of his actions on others (adapted)
2. Balanced Information Processing (LAI)	LAI.1	My boss listens carefully to the different points of view of his staff before making a decision.
	LAI.2	My boss analyzes vital information before making a decision
3. Ethics and morality (LAE)	LAE1	My boss lets decisions contrary to his beliefs be imposed on him (adapted and reversed)
	LAE2	My boss allows himself to be manipulated when he makes a decision (adapted and reversed)
	LAE3	My boss respects the commitments he makes to the company and its employees (adapted)
	LAE4	My boss encourages us not to let ourselves be influenced when expressing our positions on a subject.
	LAE5	My boss tricks the employees (terrain)
4. Relational transparency (LAT)	LAT1	My boss says exactly what he thinks
	LAT2	My boss recognizes his mistakes and corrects them (adapted)
	LAT3	My boss is open to criticism from his staff (field)
	LAT4	In his dealings with employees, Mon patron doesn't use guile. He is sincere (adapted)
5. Solidarity and mutual aid (LAR)	LAR1	My boss shows solidarity with his employees (adapted)
	LAR2	My boss provides moral support to employees during unfortunate events (adapted)
	LAR3	My boss shares his employees' happy events (adapted)
	LAR4	My boss is involved in the social well-being of his employees (adapted)

**Source: adapted from Walumbwa et al (2008)**

## 2.2. Exploratory analysis: sample, analysis criteria and generated items

The exploratory analysis aims to purify the authentic leadership scale by removing items that reduce its metric qualities. It is based on a PCA analysis and Cronbach's alpha (Jolibert et Jourdan, 2006), which respectively measure construct validity and item internal consistency (Roussel, 2005: 256). The option of joint use is linked to the advantages it offers (Jolibert et Jourdan, 2006:193). The criteria used are summarized in Table 2 and the results in Table 4.

**Table 2: Criteria used for exploratory factor analysis (EFA)**

The different stages of AFE		Decision criteria	Authors
1	Checking the application conditions for factorization analysis		
	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) index	$\geq 0,5$	Gavard-Perret et al (2012)
	Bartlett's sphericity test	$< 5\%$	Jolibert et Jourdan (2006)
2	Choosing a factor analysis method		
	Principal Component Analysis (PCA)		Igalens et Roussel (1998:154)
3	Choice of number of factors		
	Eigenvalue criterion	$\geq 1$	Evrard et al (2003: 383)
	Percentage of variance explained criterion	$\geq 50 \%$	Thiétart et al (2014: 490)
4	Choice of rotation method		Thiétart et al (2014: 492)
	Orthogonal rotation (Varimax)		
5	Interpreting the factor structure		Gavard-Perret et al (2012: 251)
	Saturation or loadings	$\geq 0,3$	
6	Reliability or internal consistency		Nunnally (1994)
	Cronbach's Alpha	$\geq 50\%$	

**Source: data from literature review**

The use of exploratory analyses as part of a PCA involves requirements relating to sample size and measurement scales. With regard to sample size, we followed the recommendations of Igalens and Roussel (1998: 120) to obtain "a sample composed of 5 to 10 times as many individuals as there are items introduced in the same PCA". Thus, our exploitable sample for the exploratory phase is 130 employees. The characteristics of our sample are given below (Table 3).

Table 3: Employee characteristics

130 employees mostly young ~71% were aged between 25 and 44	Gender (%)		Age (in years)		Study		Categories		Experience in the entity	
	H	F	Interval	%	Level	%	Nature	%	Duration in years	%
	56	44	< 25	10	None	3,1	Employees	58,5	< 1	23,8
			[25 ; 34]	41,5	Primary	6,9	Technicians	26,2	[1 ; 5 ]	50
			[35 ; 44]	29,2	Secondary	36,2	Engineers	6,9	[6 ;10]	16,9
			[45 ; 54]	14,6	License	42,3	Drivers	3,1	> 10	9,2
			[55 ; 65]	3,8	Master	10	Workers	5,4	-	-
			> 65	0,8	PhD	1,5	-	-	-	
	Breakdown of employees by SME lifespan (in years)									
	]1 ; 5] = 31,5% ;			[6 ; 10] = 30,8% ;			> 10 years = 37,7%			
Breakdown of employees by SME activity										
Transport		Health		Security		Building		Microfinance		NTIC
1%		22%		2%		8%		5%		8%
Communication		Wood industry		Hotels		Trade		Assistance for SMEs		Energy
14 %		6%		12 %		11%		2%		9 %

Source : our results

**Table 4: Authentic leadership scale items from factor analysis**

Dimensions	Factor	Value Own	Variance ( % )	Item code	Item labels	Factor contribution	Alpha	Bartlett/ KMO	Alpha
Self-awareness	F1	2,053	51,322	LAC.1	My boss knows how to challenge himself in order to improve relations with his employees.	0,731	0,680	P=0,000  KMO = 0.73	0,87
				LAC.2	My boss has an exact idea of what employees think of his abilities	0,640			
				LAC.3	My boss knows when to rethink his position on important issues	0,754			
				LAC4	My boss knows how to control the effects of his actions on others (adapted)	0,735			
Balance of information	F1	1,606	80,285	LAI.1	My boss listens carefully to the different points of view of his employees before making a decision.	0,896	0,749	P=0,000  KMO= 0.5	
				LAI.2	My boss analyzes vital information before making a decision	0,896			
Ethics and morality	F1	1,719	42,973	LAE1	My boss lets decisions contrary to his beliefs be imposed on him (adapted and reversed)	0,905	0,764	P=0,000  KMO = 0.58	
				LAE2	My boss allows himself to be manipulated when he makes a decision (adapted and reversed)	0,888			
	F2	1,333	33,321	LAE3	My boss respects the commitments he makes to the company and its employees (adapted)	0,818	0,575		
				LAE4	My boss encourages us not to let ourselves be influenced when expressing our positions on a subject.	0,854			
Transparent relationships	F1	2,071	69,026	LAT2	My boss recognizes his mistakes and corrects them (adapted)	0,880	0,770	P=0,000  KMO = 0.69	
				LAT3	My boss is open to criticism from his staff (field)	0,766			
				LAT4	When dealing with employees, My boss doesn't use tricks. He's sincere (adapted)	0,843			
Solidarity and mutual aid	F1	2,956	73,910	LAR.1	My boss shows solidarity with his employees (adapted)	0,884	0,881	P=0,000  KMO = 0.77	
				LAR.2	My boss brings moral comfort to employees	0,866			
				LAR.3	My boss shares his employees' happy events	0,874			
				LAR.4	My boss is involved in the social well-being of his employees	0,813			

**Source: our results**

Analysis of Table 4 above shows that all dimensions of authentic leadership are factorizable, as the KMO and Bartlett indices meet the thresholds ( $KMO \geq 0.5$  and  $sig < 0.05$ ). In addition, all dimensions of the measurement scale display good internal consistency, with Cronbachs above the reliability threshold ( $\alpha > 0.5$ ). Overall consistency is also established with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87. Following this analysis, items LAT.1 (Appendix 1) and LAE.5 (Appendix 2) were removed. Item LAT.1, with a factorial cord of 0.452, is poorly represented on the "relational transparency" factor. As for item LAE.5, its representation is inadequate on the two factorial axes of the "ethics and morality" dimension, with coordinates of (-0.679) and (0.237) on axes 1 and 2 respectively.

### 2.3. Confirmatory analysis: sample, criteria and model generated

Confirmatory analysis is generally carried out using structural equations, which set criteria for model acceptability. As measurement scales with fewer than four indicators cannot be subjected to confirmatory analysis (Evrard et al. 2003, Vernhet, 2011), the validity and reliability of the authentic leadership model as derived from the exploratory analysis was tested by grouping the scales of its five components.

**Table 5 : Employee characteristics**

184 employees, most of them young	Gender		Age (in years)		Study		Categories		Entity experience	
	H (%)	F (%)	Interval	%	Level	%	Nature	%	Duration	%
			< 25	8,2	None	2,2	Employees	56	< 1 year	21,2
			25-34	42,9	Primary	6,0	Technicians	26,6	1-5 years	48,9
	53,3	46,7	35-44	30,4	Secondary	36,4	Engineers	9,8	6-10	18,5
			45-54	14,7	License	41,3	Drivers	3,3	> 10	11,4
			55-65	3,3	Master	13	Workers	4,3		
			> 65	0,5	PhD	1,1				
	Breakdown of employees by:									
	SME lifespan (%)					SME size (%)				
1 to 5 years		6 to10 years		> 10 years		Micro	Small	Averages		
25 %		34,2 %		40,8 %		19,6	50,0	30,4		

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**Source : Our results**

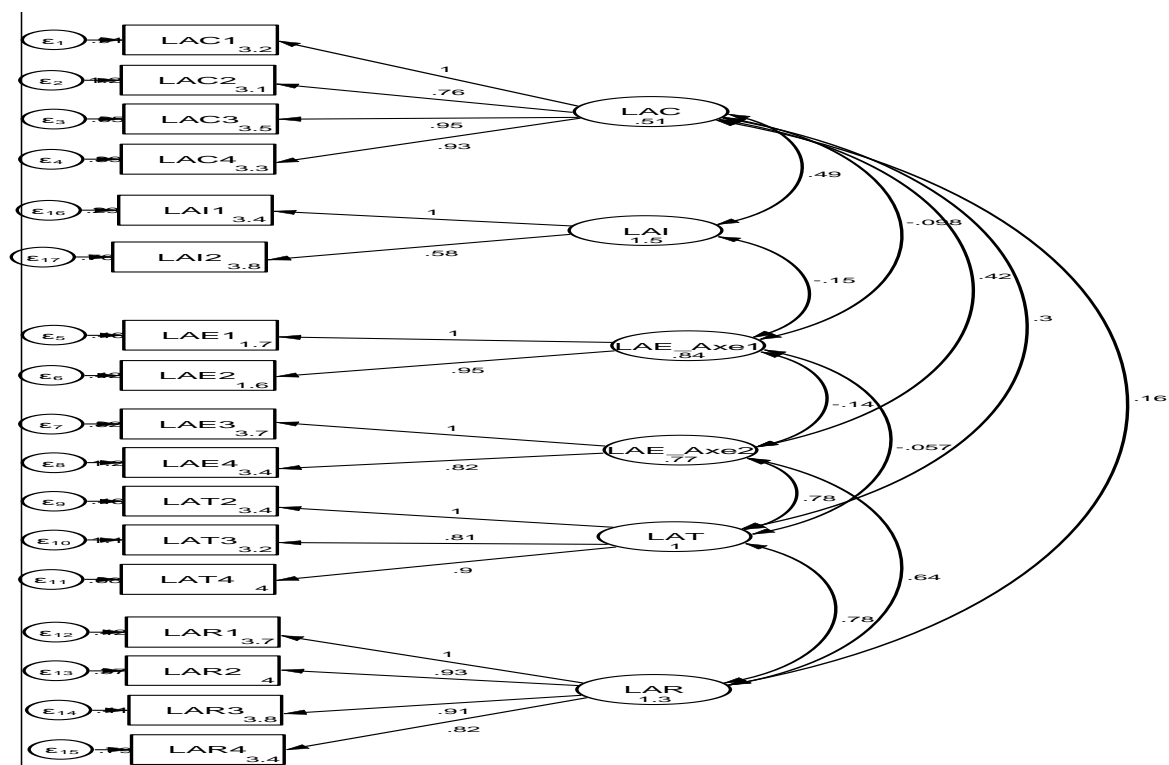
The table 5 above summarizes the characteristics of the population of 184 questionnaires obtained from the random split of 314 questionnaires (Belghiti-Mahut et al, 2004).

The validation criteria are summarized in Table 6, and Figure 1 below shows the results of the confirmatory factorial analysis.

**Table 6: Criteria used for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)**

The different stages of AFE		Decision criteria	Authors
1	Checking application conditions		
	Sample size	$\geq 100$	Roussel et al (2002: 49)
2	Choosing an estimation method		
	Maximum likelihood (ML)		
3	Matching the model to the data		
Absolute indices	$\chi^2/ddl$	$< 5$	Roussel et al (2002)
	GFI	$> 0.9$	
	AGFI	$> 0.8$	
	RMSEA	$< 0.08$	
Indices	NFI	$> 0.9$	(Lacroux, 2008).
Incremental	CFI	$> 0.9$	
Parsimony index	AIC	As low as possible	
	CAIC (saturated model)	$< \text{the CAIC of the saturated model}$	
4	Model evaluation and interpretation		
Reliability	Rh� de J�reskog	$\geq 0,7$	Roussel et al (2002)
Validity of Built	Rh� of convergent validity	$\geq 0,5$	
	Discriminant validity		

Source: Data from literature review

**Figure 1 : Mod le de mesure du leadership authentique**

Source: our results



First, concerning the model's goodness of fit, the goodness-of-fit indices obtained are summarized in Table 7.

**Table 7: Quality of fit index for the authentic leadership model**

The index	$\chi^2/ddl$	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA	NFI	CFI	AIC	CAIC
Good fit criterion	< 5	> 0.9	> 0.8	< 0.08	> 0.9	> 0.9	As low as possible	< the CAIC of the saturated model
Acceptance criteria	1,66	0,933	0,825	0,062	0,998	0,948	7358,010	7527, 343 < (7941,46)

**Source : Our results**

These indices confirm that the model is valid from the point of view of absolute, incremental and parsimony indices. Thus, our model fits well with the data of the proposed theoretical model. We retain it as it stands to measure authentic leadership.

With regard to the convergent validity and reliability of the model, the Jöreskog Rhô analysis gives us the results summarized below in Table 8.

**Table 8: Convergent validity and reliability of the authentic leadership construct**

Items	Self-awareness	Balance of information	Ethics and morality 1	Ethics and morality 2	Relational Transparency	Solidarity and mutual aid	Contribution weight squared
LAC1	0,73						0,53
LAC2	0,66						0,44
LAC3	0,77						0,60
LAC4	0,76						0,58
LAI1		0,89					0,7921
LAI2		0,89					0,7921
LAE1			0,91				0,83
LAE2			0,89				0,79
LAE3				0,81			0,66
LAE4				0,85			0,72
LAT2					0,89		0,7921
LAT3					0,77		0,5929
LAT4					0,81		0,6561
LAR1						0,89	0,7921
LAR 2						0,89	0,7921
LAR 3						0,88	0,7744
LAR 4						0,81	0,6561
Jöreskog Rhô $\geq 0.7$	0,82	0,88	0,89	0,82	0,86	0,92	
validity Rhô $\geq 0.5$	0,54	0,79	0,81	0,69	0,68	0,75	
Cronbach's Alpha	0,71	0,72	0,79	0,55	0,76	0,89	

**Source: our results**

These results show that the Jöreskog Rhô for each latent variable is above the 0.7 threshold, and the validity Rhôs are all above 0.5. The authentic leadership scale derived from the exploratory analysis is therefore reliable and valid.

Finally, the analysis of discriminant validity (Table 9) shows that this is confirmed between factors. Indeed, the variances of the latent variables are greater than the squares of the correlations between the latent variables. As a result, testing a second-order model did not seem appropriate. The model of authentic leadership in the Ivorian context is therefore a first-order 5-factor model.

**Table 9: Discriminant validity of the authentic leadership scale**

	Correlation between latent variables	Correlation square	Latent variable variance
Self-awareness - Ethics and morality 1	-0,10	0,01	0,51
Self-awareness - Ethics and Morality 2	0,42	0,18	0,51
Self-awareness - Transparent relationships	0,30	0,09	0,51
Self-awareness - Solidarity and mutual support	0,16	0,03	0,51
Self-awareness -Balanced processing	0,49	0,24	0,51
Ethics and Morality 1 -Ethics and Morality 2	-0,14	0,02	0,83
Ethics and Morality 1 - Transparent relationships	-0,06	0,00	0,83
Ethics and Morality 1 - Information processing	-0,15	0,02	0,83
Ethics and Morality 2 - Transparent relationships	0,78	0,62	0,77
Ethics and Morality 2 - Solidarity and mutual aid	0,64	0,41	0,77
Transparent relationships - solidarity and mutual support	0,78	0,60	0,87

**Source : Our results**

In conclusion, the scale for measuring authentic leadership shows good psychometric qualities. Thus, the measure of authentic leadership can be retained.

## 2.4. Discussion

Theoretically, the study revealed a five-factor model of first-order. In line with the original model (Walumbwa et al, 2008), the first factors are: self-awareness, information balance, ethics and morality and relational transparency. However, the ethics and morality dimension of the original measure has been split into two factors respectively named: Ethics and morality 1 "leader's instability in beliefs" and Ethics and morality 2 "leader's sense of integrity". The first refers to employees' need for leaders capable of combining the art of listening with objective decision-making. The second expresses employees' desire to work with responsible leaders who put their money where their mouth is. The fifth factor, which stems from the cultural context,

is the "relationship of mutual aid and solidarity". According to Wilde (2007: 171): "Solidarity, in general, is the feeling of mutual sympathy and responsibility in a group that encourages mutual help".

The mutual aid and solidarity relationship fosters closer ties between SME players, insofar as some learn to open up to others through communication and self-sacrifice. As such, it reinforces self-awareness and transparency in relationships. The former, by revealing oneself to others (MacDonald et al, 2014), and the latter, by establishing bonds of trust and synchronicity between players (Kelly et MacDonald, 2016). In this way, mutual aid and solidarity promote self-awareness and relational transparency, which are respectively at the heart of intrapersonal and interpersonal authenticity. Interpersonal authenticity advocates that managers take employees' interests into account. Hence the manager's openness to flexibility, in contrast to the intrapersonal approach, which, while encouraging introspection - the starting point for authenticity - can result in managerial rigidity based solely on the manager's own values and interests, in the event of too much introspection.

As expressed by the employees in this study, the relationship of mutual aid and solidarity paves the way for vulnerability. For the authentic leader, vulnerability, far from being synonymous with weakness, means replacing professional distance and coldness with uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure, the benefits of which are beneficial in the workplace (Seppala, 2020). Also, by providing employees with moral reassurance, sharing their happy events, getting involved in their social well-being, the leader engenders more positive and constructive behavior in employees (Searle et Barbuto, 2011). This, in turn, reinforces feelings of hope and trust, both in themselves and in the company (Joseph et Winston, 2005). Which, in turn, boosts employee performance (Seppala, 2020).

Moreover, the need for this relationship in the Côte d'Ivoire context stems from the fact that the collectivist culture requires employees to be socially, economically and financially involved in community life, at the risk of being marginalized in the event of distress (Kessy, 1998). Indeed, given the low levels of income in Africa (CeoWorld, 2023)<sup>1</sup>, the additional costs associated with dysfunctional health (Gbede et Seka, 2023) and education systems (Akoua, 2017), the steady rise in the cost of living and the strength of cultural and traditional constraints (Kessy, 1998), employees are quickly overwhelmed by financial demands, which ultimately weigh on their motivation and productivity. Consequently, mutual aid and solidarity actions within the

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<sup>1</sup> CeoWorld magazine, Countries with The Highest and Lowest Average salaries, 2023

organization, supported or initiated by the manager within the SME, become levers of psychological motivation and commitment for employees (Kessy, 1998; Simen et N'Koa, 2018).

With regard to the influence of cultural contingencies, our results are confirmed by those of Amornpipata and Sorod (2017) and Biplab (2015), who respectively developed five-dimensional instruments in Thailand and three-dimensional instruments in India. From a psychometric point of view, the results of Walumbwa et al (2008), Biplab (2015) and Bakary and Hunjura (2017) agree on the second-order factor, unlike our results, which validate the first-order construct. The measure of authentic leadership proposed in this research presents a first-order factor structure with five (5) factors of 17 items, including 4 items from the dimension of mutual aid and solidarity. This structure offers the best fit to the data and satisfactory internal consistency.

The dimensions of the measurement scale have good internal consistency, as the various Cronbachs agree with the reliability criterion ( $\alpha > 0.5$ ). The results show that employees are interested in autonomy in carrying out tasks, clarity in setting objectives, in drawing up personal and skills development plans, and sincerity in recognizing their work. However, the scores for reliability, ( $\alpha = 0.68$ ) self-awareness and ( $\alpha=0.76$ ) "ethics and morality" are respectively below the scores ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ) and ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ) of Roux (2010).

The summary Cronbach (0.87) is slightly below the (0.91) of Walumbwa et al (2008). The low score for managerial integrity ( $\alpha = 0.6$ ) compared with Roux's score can be explained by the inverted items in the ethics and morality dimension: "My boss allows decisions contrary to his beliefs to be imposed" (adapted), "My boss allows himself to be manipulated when making a decision" (adapted). Indeed, according to Barnett (2000), Merritt (2012), Tomas and Oliver (1999) cited by Luthans and Youssef (2017), these items are generally problematic in the measurement of positive constructs. Moreover, our reliability scores, while satisfactory, remain low compared to those of the reference model (Walumbwa et al, 2008), which displays a reliability for authentic leadership of ( $\alpha = 0.953$ ), and reliabilities per dimension ranging from 0.810 to 0.904.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to propose a measure of authentic leadership based on the perception of SME employees in the Côte d'Ivoire context. To this end, we conducted an exploratory and confirmatory quantitative study based on qualitative data. This quantitative study mobilized a sample of 314 SME employees randomly split into two groups. The first composed of 130 employees and the second of 184 used respectively for exploratory and confirmatory analysis. The results show that the measure of authentic leadership appropriate to the context of Côte d'Ivoire is first-order, based on five factors: self-awareness, balance of information, ethics and morality, relational transparency and the relationship of mutual aid and solidarity. This last dimension is rooted in community culture.

Concerning managerial implications, leaders need to be trained in authentic leadership. The first step in this learning process is the quest for self-awareness which is an ongoing process. Leaders, through the exploration of their experiences and the way in which they appropriate them, establish their beliefs and values. They must then translate these values into leadership principles. These intrinsic motivations that underpin their leadership must be balanced with their extrinsic motivations to create a work environment that fosters their fulfillment and that of their colleagues. The second stage aims to make them authentically flexible, realistic, prudent and credible with their staff. This means helping them to grasp the nuances of authenticity in the practice of balanced information, ethics and morality, and transparency in relationships.

Thirdly, through the principles defined for leadership and an understanding of the subtleties of authenticity, leaders must identify the cultural values to be mobilized, accommodated or proscribed in the exercise of authentic leadership. Hence the proscription or prudent use of hierarchical distance and the emergence of sense of mutual aid and solidarity in the practice of authentic leadership. Then, they can draw on the best practices of mutual aid and solidarity aimed at reducing the perverse effects of collectivism, and adapt them to their own context.

Ultimately, the scale for measuring authentic leadership is based on employee perceptions alone. Although this is well-founded, future studies can exploit the employers' point of view in the context of Côte d'Ivoire. Moreover, with this study, research in authentic leadership era is still in its infancy in Côte d'Ivoire. Thus, future studies could include validating the concept until its factor structure and internal consistency coefficients are confirmed.

## APPENDICES

**Appendix 1: Factor coordinates of "Relational transparency" items**

Component matrix		
		Component
		1
LAT.1	My boss says exactly what he thinks	0,452
LAT.2	My boss recognizes his mistakes and corrects them	0,875
LAT.3	My boss is open to criticism from his staff	0,745
LAT.4	In his dealings with employees, Mon patron doesn't use guile. He is sincere	0,825

**Source : our results**

**Appendix 2: Factor coordinates of "Ethics and morality" items**

Component matrix after rotation			
		Component	
		1	2
LAE.1	My boss allows decisions contrary to his beliefs to be imposed on him	-0,064	0,901
LAE.2	My boss allows himself to be manipulated when making decisions	-0,082	0,878
LAE.3	My boss respects the commitments he makes to the company and its employees.	0,786	-0,124
LAE.4	My boss encourages us not to let ourselves be influenced when expressing our positions on a subject.	0,785	0,144
LAE.5	My boss tricks the employees	-0,679	0,237

**Source : our results**

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