The importance of feeling appreciated at work

How leadership style, perceived appreciation and congruence in personality are related to employee work engagement

Utrecht University

Ashley Groeneveld - 5971225

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First Reviewer: Marjoka van Doorn (m.vandoorn@uu.nl)

Second Reviewer: Jan-Fekke Ybema (j.f.ybema@uu.nl)

Abstract

In present society, it has become more self-evident to be online and available 24/7. This is among other things due to changes in our economy, which is reflected in our daily work. The current cross-sectional survey study (*N*=103) focussed on authentic leadership, appreciation and congruent personality traits of the leader and employee as influencers of work engagement. A positive relationship was found between authentic leadership and work engagement, and between appreciation and work engagement. Appreciation partially mediated the relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement. This suggests that an authentic leader partly stimulates employee work engagement through appreciation. Expressing the importance of feeling appreciated at work. Moreover, congruency between leader and employee in the personality trait Conscientiousness moderated the relationship between authentic leadership and appreciation. Thus, when leader and employee were alike on this trait, more appreciation was experienced from the authentic leader. Based on these outcomes practice can focus more on authentic leadership development, providing personal, regular and authentic feedback to foster appreciation and practice can create awareness of biases of similarity in personality. Future research could further focus on finding more mediators and moderators in the relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement.

Introduction

A global shift has taken place from manufacturing economies to service and knowledge economies (Grant & Parker, 2009). Nowadays organisational success increasingly depends on the ability to meet the needs of customers and clients (Grant & Parker, 2009). In combination with rapid developments in transportation, globalization, information technology and communication, this has had a great effect on the nature of work (Grant & Parker, 2009). Work today has become more socially embedded and interdependent than ever before. Employees collaborate in teams to complete tasks, whether face to face or virtually. As digital technology and globalization eliminates the boundaries of time and space, the world appears to be "flat" (Grant & Parker, 2009). As a result, team leaders can no longer suffice to expect from their employees to proficiently finish their tasks. Nowadays, leaders depend on their employees to be proactive and agile, to adapt and introduce change and improvement (Grant & Parker, 2009). In other words, organisations expect their employees to be more responsible, committed, take initiative, collaborate and be proactive in order to meet high quality performance standards (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). However, to ensure that employees continue to flourish, leaders also need to adapt. They have to offer resources such as autonomy, performance feedback, social support and coaching (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008).

Through these innovations and high-set expectations, employees feel more responsible to be accessible 24/7. Currently 1 out of 7 Dutch employees have had burnout complaints (CBS & TNO, 2015). In 2005, 1051 burn-out notifications were made by company doctors and in 2015 this number increased to 1989, an increase of 89% (Hooftman et al., 2016). This increase shows the importance of finding ways to improve sustainable employability and decrease burnout numbers. However, instead of focusing on repairing the negative things in life, the focus of psychology research and practice took a positive turn and is trying to build further on positive qualities. This started in 2000 with the rise of Positive Psychology in research (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive Psychology is the scientific study of optimal human functioning. It aims to discover and promote the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

This study follows the positive psychological flow and focuses on factors that enable employees to flourish and stay engaged. Previous research found several interesting antecedents, like leadership style, appreciation and similarity between leaders and employees. Leadership style has found to be one of the most important contributors to work engagement

(Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002). Therefore, present research will further focus on the most recent positive style: authentic leadership. Previous research found underlying mechanisms (mediators) in the relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement (Peus et al., 2012). Appreciation can be expressed by authentic leaders and it has a significant impact on work engagement (Hsieh & Wang, 2015; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Therefore, appreciation will be studied as mediator. As this has not been studied before, the outcomes of this study can contribute to research and practice. Moreover, previous research found that congruence in personality traits has effects on the interpretation of the leader and stimulates superior work outcomes (Felfe & Schyns, 2010; Zhang, Wang & Shi, 2012). The effect of congruent personality traits on the relationship between authentic leadership and outcomes like appreciation and work engagement has not been studied before. Therefore, this study will focus on congruent personality traits as moderator in these relationships and contributes to previous research and practice. I find it important to focus on underlying mechanisms and influencing factors in this study as real life has a variety of factors that could influence daily work.

Literature Review

Authentic Leadership

With the rise of the Positive Psychology movement, positive emotions became more important and a new leadership style occurred: authentic leadership (Ilies, Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2005). Authentic leaders are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, ethical, future-oriented and they inspire and empower others (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). An authentic leadership style is characterized by stewardship, assisting subordinates and making decisions in their interest (Hassan, Asad & Hoshino, 2016).

Although previous research found a positive relation between authentic leadership and other leadership styles like ethical and transformational leadership, there are differences (Walumba et al., 2008). Ethical leaders have two core components: the moral person and the moral manager. The main focus of this leadership style is morality and displaying actions to do the right thing, personally and professionally. Honesty, fairness, integrity and openness are the core attributions (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Ethical behaviour is a necessary condition for the establishment of an authentic leader, however this alone is not sufficient. Transformational leadership consists of five core components: attributed charisma, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

The main focus of this leadership style is inspiring employees to pursue and attain exceptional levels of performance (Banks et al., 2016). Although these dimensions are closely related to authentic leadership, there is a key distinction: self-awareness. Authentic leaders have a deep sense of themselves, they know their strengths and weaknesses and remain true to their values in times of challenges (Walumbwa et al., 2008).

Authentic leadership has four underlying components that distinguishes it from other leadership styles: *self-awareness, balanced information processing, authentic behaviour* and *relational transparency* (Gardner et al, 2005). *Self-awareness* is "a process where the leader continually comes to understand his or her unique talents, strengths, sense of purpose, core values, beliefs and desires" (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Authentic leaders are more accurate in *balanced information processing,* they process information from a more objective view, that incorporates both positive and negative attributes and qualities (Gardner et al, 2005). Authentic leaders are *authentic in their behaviour*, they act in accordance with their own values and needs and are not driven by extrinsic rewards or motivation (Gardner et al, 2005). Finally, *relational transparency*, which describes the presentation of one's true self to others. This is achieved by openness and self-disclosure of one's values, identity, emotions and motives. Subsequently, this transparency enhances employees' trust in leaders and the leader-employee relationship (Gardner et al., 2005). Other positive outcomes for employees through authentic leadership can be: creativity, engagement, empowerment, lower turnover intentions and less burnout or stress. Moreover, organisations benefit from authentic leaders because of better organisational performance, task performance and organisational citizenship behavior (Banks et al., 2016).

Work Engagement

The Positive Psychology movement certainly reinforced the interest in studying engagement, the positive counterpart of burnout (Schaufeli, Leiter & Maslach, 2009). *"We define engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption"* (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 295). Earlier research showed that all burnout and engagement scales are significant negatively related (Schaufeli et al, 2002). This is supported by research from Schaufeli & Taris (2014), employees who are more engaged are less likely to suffer from burnout complaints and are more resilient.

Most work engagement research is done within the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The JD-R model indicates that job demands and job

resources function as predictors of burnout and work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Work engagement can be predicted by job resources, such as: leadership, appreciation and performance feedback. *"Job resources refer to those physical, psychological, social or organisational aspects of the job that may do any of the following: (a) be functional in achieving work goals; (b) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; (c) stimulate personal growth and development"* (Demerouti, et al., 2001, p. 501). In contrast, burnout can be predicted by job demands, such as: high workload, work-home conflict and role ambiguity. *"Job demands refer to those physical, social or organisational aspects of the job that require sustained physical or mental effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and psychological costs"* (Demerouti, et al., 2001, p. 501).

Work engagement is related to several positive outcomes, like positive emotions, perceived good physical health and low levels of anxiety and depression. Engaged workers perform better because of their health and their proactive and prosocial behavior (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). Moreover, employee health and well-being is becoming a business value of strategic importance (Zwetsloot & Pot, 2004). The measurement and use of employee engagement data in managing business operations relates to: improved organisational culture, increased employee and customer loyalty, and higher sales and profits (Attridge, 2009). Instead of considering occupational health and well-being as costs, they are considered as having direct economic benefits to the company (Zwetsloot & Pot, 2004). Therefore, being work engaged is beneficial for both the employee as well as for the organisation: a win-win situation.

Leadership is suggested to be one of the biggest factors contributing to employee work engagement (Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002). Specifically, authentic leadership positively influences the behaviour and attitudes of the employees and stimulates employee work engagement (Avolio, Gardner, Walumba, Luthans & May, 2004). Thus, in line with literature, I expect that perceived authentic leadership will stimulate employee work engagement.

Hypothesis 1: (Perceived) Authentic Leadership will be positively related to Employee Work Engagement.

Appreciation

Appreciation is "*the act of recognizing someone's worth as a person or showing that you are grateful for something that person has done*" (Cambridge dictionaries online, 2018). Communicating appreciation, verbal or non-verbal through reciprocities, is not only effective to make employees feel good. Significant benefits have been found for the organisation as well. White (2014, p. 109): "*Employees show up and on time. The amount and intensity of staff conflict subsides. Losing quality members decreases. Policies and procedures are followed, with increased productivity. Customer satisfaction ratings rise, and managers and supervisors enjoy their work more.*" Overall, employees who feel truly valued and appreciated by their leader contribute to improving the organisation (White, 2014).

Authenticity, through self-awareness and relational transparency, fosters positive affective states (Kernis, 2003). Positive emotions experienced by authentic leaders can spread through social contagion processes and positively foster the emotional and cognitive development of other organisational members. Subsequently, through the principles of reciprocity, authentic leaders will establish more positive social exchanges with employees. These authentic relationships or reciprocities are characterized by high levels of trust, interaction, support and formal and informal rewards (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Ilies, Nahrgang & Morgeson, 2007). When employees feel supported, cared for and fairly treated by an authentic leader, these reciprocities will produce feelings of appreciation, responsibility and trust (Hsieh & Wang, 2015). Hence, authentic leadership is positively related to employees feeling more appreciated.

As authentic leadership has previously been found to produce feelings of appreciation (Hsieh & Wang, 2015), I expect that authentic leadership as perceived by the employee will positively relate to employees feeling appreciated.

Hypothesis 2: (Perceived) Authentic Leadership positively relates to Employees feeling Appreciated

As previously discussed, job resources increase work engagement and buffer against negative effects of job demands (JD-R model; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). In 1997 it appeared that feelings of appreciation and positive affections regarding the work situation are beneficial for employee well-being (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Later on, appreciation was found to be one of the strongest predictors of work engagement and well-being (Bakker et al., 2007; Bakker &

Demerouti, 2008). Therefore, I expect that employees who feel appreciated are more likely to feel work engaged.

Hypothesis 3: (Perceived) Appreciation positively relates to Employee Work Engagement

To sum up, authentic leaders are likely to have better quality relationships with their employees, due to their competences. Therefore, employees are likely to experience more support and appreciation (Hsieh & Wang, 2015). Subsequently, appreciation functions as a job resource and stimulates work engagement (Bakker et al., 2007). Previous research found that hope, positive emotions and trust are mediating the effect between authentic leadership and several positive outcomes (Peus et al., 2012). Feeling appreciated makes employees feel good. Or in other words, appreciation can be interpreted as a positive emotion (White, 2015). As appreciation is not previously assessed as mediating variable between authentic leadership and work engagement, and research is limited, this study will contribute to previous research and focusses on appreciation as a mediating variable specifically.

Hypothesis 4: (Perceived) Appreciation mediates the relation between Authentic Leadership and Work Engagement.

Congruence in Personality

Personality refers to personal characteristics that reflect long-term and pervasive individual differences in emotional style and has a general influence on emotional response (Langelaan, Bakker, Van Doornen & Schaufeli, 2006). The Big Five personality factors are most popular and used in psychology research (Norman, 1963). These factors are generally labelled Neuroticism (or Emotional Stability), Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness (Norman, 1963). Authentic leaders are found to be most conscientious and agreeable and on average extravert, emotional stable and open to experiences (Hassan, Asad & Hoshino, 2016). People who are conscientious can be described as reliable, responsible, achievement-oriented and thoughtful (Hassan, Asad & Hoshino, 2016). People who are agreeable are warm, trustworthy, cooperative, compliant, compassionate, and supportive (Hassan, Asad & Hoshino, 2016).

The Similarity-Attraction Theory (SAT) stated that the attraction toward another individual is positively related to similarities in their personality characteristics (Byrne, Griffitt, & Stefaniak, 1967). Felfe and Schyns (2010) found that perceived similarity in personality enhances the interpretation of a transformational leader and enhances the

relationship between leader and employee. This was specifically the case with respect to personality traits related to transformational leadership. As transformational leadership and authentic leadership are positively related I expect that this also works for authentic leadership (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Thus, when an authentic leader, who is very conscientious and agreeable, and the employee have the same personality traits it is expected that they interpret their leader to be more authentic and their relationship is closer (Hassan, Asad & Hoshino, 2016; Felfe & Schyns, 2010). Similarity or congruence in personality traits between a leader and employee has superior work outcomes, such as: job satisfaction, affective commitment and job performance (Zhang, Wang & Shi, 2012).

Concluding, it is expected that employees who perceive their leader as similar to themselves identify stronger with their leader. In addition, the congruence in personality between leader and employee is expected to influence the perception of the leader and to have superior outcomes. As previous research focussed on transformational leadership and different work outcomes, this research will focus explicitly on authentic leadership and on appreciation and work engagement as outcomes. I expect that congruency in employee and leader personality traits, especially for Conscientiousness and Agreeableness, will positively influence the relationship between authentic leadership and appreciation and authentic leadership and work engagement.

Hypothesis 5: Congruence between Personality Traits of employee and leader enhances the relationship between (perceived) Authentic Leadership and Appreciation and between (perceived) Authentic leadership and Work Engagement.
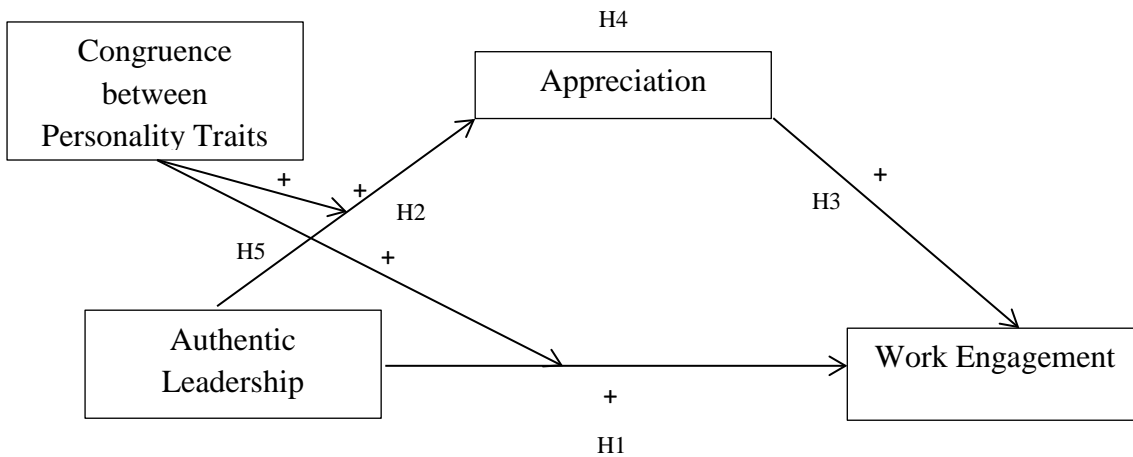
Figure 1: Research model

Method

Participants

Participants from Dutch organisations were recruited via social media (Facebook, LinkedIn), as well as friends and family were asked to fill in an online questionnaire. In total 133 employees participated, but 30 participants did not fully complete the questionnaire and were excluded listwise from the analyses. Of all participants (*N*=103) 72 were female (69.9%) and 31 were male (31.1%). The vast majority had a Dutch nationality (97.1%). Most participants were between 18-34 years old (54.4%) and worked for 32-40 hours a week (46.6%). The majority worked with their supervisor for 0-3 years (71.9%). 18.4% of all participants worked in the Health sector, followed by 9.7% in the IT sector. Most participants were educated on HBO (Dutch Bachelor) level (40.8%) followed by WO (Dutch Academic) level (32.0%).

Procedure

Before the start of this study, an a priori power analysis was performed with G*Power to determine the sample size for this research. 74 Participants were needed to have a power of .95 ($f^2 = 0.15$, $\alpha = 0.05$), so with a sample size of *N*=103 the analyses could be performed with adequate power.

Subsequently, participants were asked to fill in an online questionnaire, which was created with Qualtrics. The distribution of the online questionnaire was carried out via social media posts on LinkedIn, Facebook and WhatsApp. Several participants distributed the online questionnaire via their own social media account. The questionnaire started with an informed consent, which stated that all data would be handled confidentially and participants had the right to stop filling out the questionnaire at any given time without indicating a reason. In

addition, a short introduction of the research topic was given and the requirements of participation were described. To participate, the participants had to be employed and work with a direct supervisor. To be able to start the questionnaire, the participants had to actively agree with the requirements of this research.

Materials

The questionnaire included the measures discussed below and demographic variables. The full questionnaire can be found in the Appendix. All questions were provided to the participants in Dutch.

Authentic Leadership. Authentic leadership was measured using the *Authentic Leadership Questionnaire* (ALQ) (Walumba et al., 2008). This questionnaire consists of 16 items ($\alpha = .93$, $N = 111$, $M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.75$), measuring the four factors of authentic leadership: self-awareness, balanced information processing, authentic behavior and relational transparency. An example question is: my supervisor… '*Makes decisions based on his/her core values*', measuring the factor authentic behavior. Participants scored all items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*rarely or never*) to 5 (*very often*).

Work Engagement. Work Engagement was measured with the shortened Dutch version of the *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale* (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). This questionnaire measures the three factors of work engagement: vigor, absorption and dedication, with nine items in total ($\alpha = .93$, $N = 107$, $M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.78$). An example question is: '*At work I burst with energy*', measuring the factor vigor. Participants rated all items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*rarely or never*) to 5 (*very often*).

Appreciation. Appreciation was measured with six items, created especially for the present study ($\alpha = .84$, $N = 106$, $M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.76$). These items were created based on previous research by Bakker et al. (2007) and White (2014). An example question is: '*At work I feel genuinely appreciated*'. Participants rated all items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*rarely or never*) to 5 (*very often*).

Employee personality. Personality was measured with a short version of the Big Five (Van Emmerik, Jawahar & Stone, 2004). In total 15 items were included, three items per personality trait. Openness to Experience ($\alpha = .66$, $N = 104$, $M = 3.78$, $SD = .65$) was measured for example with: I am… '*Very creative*'. Conscientiousness ($\alpha = .82$, $N = 104$, $M = 3.87$, $SD = .92$) was amongst others measured with: I am… '*Organised*'. Introversion ($\alpha = .81$, $N = 104$, $M = 3.63$, $SD = .91$) with: I am… '*Shy*'. Neuroticism ($\alpha = .85$, $N = 104$, $M = 2.04$, $SD = .96$) was measured with: My…'*Moods go up and down*'. And Agreeableness ($\alpha = $

.66, N = 104, M = 3.94, SD = .63) with: I am… *'Soft hearted'*. Participants rated all items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*not applicable at all*) to 5 (*fully applicable*).

   Perceived leader personality. The same items were used for measuring the personality of the leader perceived by the employee. Although the items and answer scale were alike, the reliability of these scales varied. Openness to Experience ($α$ = .84, N = 104, M = 3.52, SD = .89), Conscientiousness ($α$ = .89, N = 104, M = 3.49, SD = 1.07), Introversion ($α$ = .77, N = 104, M = 4.32, SD = .75), Neuroticism ($α$ = .90, N = 104, M = 2.16, SD = 1.07) and Agreeableness ($α$ = .82, N = 104, M = 3.49, SD = .87).

   Congruency between personality traits leader and employee. To analyse hypothesis 5, congruent personality variables were created. Congruency was met when both the employee and the leader were rated above or below average on the same personality trait. For example, when the employee and leader were both scored above average (=>3) on the same trait, congruency was met. If the employee scored below average (<3) and the perceived leader personality was scored above average (=>3) on the same trait, congruency was not met. High-high congruency was met when both employee and leader were scored above average and low-low congruency was met when they were both scored below average. The distribution is shown in Table 1. The majority of the respondents scored their own personality and their leader personality above average, except for the trait Neuroticism. This might be due to self-report measures, further discussed in the Discussion section.

Table 1

Congruence in personality traits

	High-high Congruency	Low-low Congruency	No Congruency
Openness to Exp.	77 (74%)	4 (3.9%)	23 (22.1%)
Conscientiousness	68 (65.4%)	4 (3.8%)	32 (30.8%)
Extraversion	80 (76.9%)	1 (1%)	23 (22.1%)
Neuroticism	11 (10.6%)	58 (55.7%)	35 (33.7%)
Agreeableness	82 (78.8%)	0 (0%)	22 (21.2%)

Note. N=104

Data-analysis

Data-analysis was executed with SPSS 21. Some questionnaires were not fully completed and data were missing. Listwise deletion was used, because power assumptions were met (Field, 2013).

First all basic regression assumptions for all hypotheses were checked, through plots, histograms, exploratory tests and T-tests. For hypothesis 1, most assumptions were met although the Kilmogorov-Smirnov test found a significant deviation for normality of the residuals, $D(107) = 0.095$, $p < .05$. In addition, the variances of error terms were not similar across the values of the independent variable, these were more positively distributed. So the assumption of homoscedasticity is debatable.

Similarly for hypothesis 2, most assumptions were met. However, a significant deviation for normality of residuals was found, $D(106) = 0.118$, $p < .001$. Again, the assumption of homoscedasticity was not perfectly met, as the variance of error terms was more positively distributed across the values of the independent variable. In addition, one residual error term was found to be a significant outlier. However, this outlier was kept in the data, because it did not significantly impact the outcomes of the analyses.

For the third hypothesis all assumptions were met, except the variance of error terms was not perfectly similar distributed across the values of the independent variable. Therefore the assumption of homoscedasticity is debatable.

Reliability of all scales was assessed with reliability analyses (Cronbach's Alpha). All scales were sufficiently reliable, and it was decided to keep all items in each scale for further analyses.

Gender correlated strongly with work engagement ($r = -.20$, $p < .05$). Therefore T-tests were performed to check group differences. Only for work engagement a significant difference ($t = 2.15$, $N = 103$, $p < .05$) was found in gender. Men ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.61$, $N = 31$) were significantly more work engaged than women ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 0.82$, $N = 72$). However, gender did not influence the analyses regarding the relationships between variables. For this reason, I decided not to control for gender, nor to report the results for men and women separately.

Further, all variables were measured on a continuous scale, so the hypothesis were tested with regression analysis. Hypothesis 1, 2, 3 and 4 were analysed with regression analyses and a mediation analysis in PROCESS (Model 4; Hayes, 2013). Hypothesis 5 was analysed with a moderated mediation analyses in PROCESS (Model 8; Hayes, 2013).

Results

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations between all variables. Authentic leadership and work engagement are moderately correlated ($r = .49$, $p < .01$) as well as authentic leadership and appreciation ($r = .56$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, appreciation and work engagement are moderately correlated ($r = .59$, $p < .01$). These correlations are in line with previous research and consistent with what was expected in the present study. Employee Extraversion and appreciation is weakly correlated ($r = .32$, $p < .01$). This might be explained by the fact that extravert people are more sociable and hence experience more positive affect in the relationships with their leader.

Authentic leadership is weakly correlated with perceived leader Conscientiousness ($r = .27$, $p < .01$), moderately correlated with perceived leader Neuroticism ($r = -.47$, $p < .01$), moderately correlated with perceived leader Openness To Experiences ($r = .57$, $p < .01$) and moderately to strongly correlated with perceived leader Agreeableness ($r = .63$, $p < .01$). These correlations are partly in line with previous research, although it was expected to find a moderate to strong correlation between authentic leadership and perceived leader Conscientiousness. Next to that, no significant correlation between authentic leadership and leader Extraversion was found, a medium correlation was expected due to previous research.

As expected, many of the measured variables are correlated. Therefore, this study has a correlational design and causality cannot be determined. Additionally, the correlations I found in this study are in the expected direction.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics and correlations

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Authentic leadership	3.51	.75												
2. Work Engagement	3.69	.78	**.49****											
3. Appreciation	3.60	.76	**.56****	**.59****										
4. Openness to Experience[1]	3.78	.65	-.00	.08	.02									
5. Conscientiousness[1]	3.87	.92	-.10	.01	-.09	-.21*								
6. Extraversion[1]	3.63	.91	.12	.24*	**.32****	-.09	-.21*							
7. Neuroticism[1]	2.04	.96	-.12	-.16	-.08	.00	-.16	-.12						
8. Agreeableness[1]	3.94	.63	.10	-.04	-.02	.11	**.31****	-.07	**-.32****					
9. Openness to experience[2]	3.52	.89	**.57****	**.43****	**.39****	-.06	.10	.20*	-.17	**.31****				
10.Conscientiousness[2]	3.49	1.07	**.27****	.03	.07	-.19	.01	.05	.05	-.12	.20*			
11. Extraversion[2]	4.32	.75	.04	.02	-.05	-.16	.19	.00	**-.27****	.14	.13	-.04		
12. Neuroticism[2]	2.16	1.07	**-.47****	-.23*	**-.28****	.03	.02	-.09	.17	.06	-.06	-.09	-.03	
13. Agreeableness[2]	3.49	.87	**.63****	**.34****	**.42****	.09	-.17	.18	-.11	.10	**.30****	.14	-.13	**-.56****

Note. N varies between 104 and 111. The personality factors coded with [1] are the characteristics of the employee, the factors coded with [2] are the perceived characteristics of the leader. All means of the variables are based on scales from 1 to 5. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01

Authentic leadership and Work engagement

In hypothesis 1 a positive relationship was expected between perceived authentic leadership and employee work engagement. This hypothesis is tested with a simple regression analysis. Authentic leadership is the independent variable and work engagement the dependent variable. The results show a significant positive relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement, $\beta = .53$, $t(105) = 5.68$, $p < .001$. Authentic leadership explained 23.5% ($R^2 = 0.235$) of the variance in employee work engagement, $F(1,105) = 32.21$, $p < .001$. Thus, when employees perceive their leader as more authentic, they are more work engaged. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is supported.

Appreciation as mediator

In hypothesis 2 a positive relationship was expected between perceived authentic leadership and feeling appreciated. This hypothesis was tested with a simple regression analysis. The results show a significant positive relationship between authentic leadership and appreciation, $\beta = .61$, $t(104) = 6.95$, $p < .001$. Authentic leadership explained 31.7% ($R^2 = 0.317$) of the variance in appreciation, $F(1,104) = 48.30$, $p < .001$. So, when employees perceive their leader as more authentic they feel more appreciated. Hereby, hypothesis 2 is supported.

In hypothesis 3 a positive relationship was expected between feeling appreciated and work engagement. This hypothesis was tested by performing a simple regression analysis. The results show a significant positive relationship between appreciation and work engagement, $\beta = .60$, $t(104) = 7.37$, $p < .001$. Appreciation explained 34.3% ($R^2 = 0.343$) of the variance in work engagement, $F(1,104) = 54.26$, $p < .001$. So, employees who feel more appreciated are also more work engaged. Therefore, hypothesis 3 is also supported.

In hypothesis 4 it was expected that appreciation would mediate the relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement. This hypothesis is tested with PROCESS (Model 4; Hayes, 2013). When controlling for appreciation as mediator a significant effect was found, $\beta = .29$, 95% CI [0.14, 0.48]. The direct effect between authentic leadership and work engagement remained significant, although smaller, $\beta = .24$, $t(104) = 2.30$, $p < .05$. Thus, a partial mediation effect was found, as appreciation did not completely mediate the effect between authentic leadership and work engagement. This suggests, that a perceived authentic leader apparently expresses more appreciation for employees, which stimulates employees' work engagement. Therefore, hypothesis 4 is supported.

Congruence in personality factors as moderator

In hypothesis 5 it was expected that congruence in personality traits of the employee

and the perceived personality of the leader enhances the relationship between authentic leadership and appreciation and between authentic leadership and work engagement. This was tested through a moderated mediation analysis with PROCESS (Model 8; Hayes, 2013). Congruency on the Conscientiousness personality trait shows a positive significant interaction effect on the relationship between authentic leadership and appreciation, $\beta = .40$, $t(100) = 2.20$, $p < .05$. By adding the main effect and interaction effect, this model explained 34,1% of the variance in appreciation ($R^2 = 0.341$), $F(3,100) = 17.22$, $p < .001$. Both congruency and incongruency in Conscientiousness had a positive significant effect on the relationship between authentic leadership and appreciation. Although, the effect of congruency in Conscientiousness was stronger: $\beta = .36$, $t(100) = 2.53$, $p < .05$ versus $\beta = .76$, $t(100) = 6.63$, $p < .001$. Thus, when both the employee and leader scored congruent on Conscientiousness, this positively influenced the relationship between authentic leadership and appreciation (visualized in graph 1). This suggests that similarity between leader and employee in terms of Conscientiousness, makes an employee feel more appreciated by his or her supervisor.

To summarize, congruence in personality between leader and employee, only for the personality characteristic Conscientiousness, enhanced the positive relationship between authentic leadership and appreciation. For all other congruent personality factors this moderating effect was not found. In addition, no congruent personality factor was found to moderate the relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement. Therefore, hypothesis 5 is only met for congruency in Conscientiousness as moderator of the relationship between authentic leadership and appreciation.
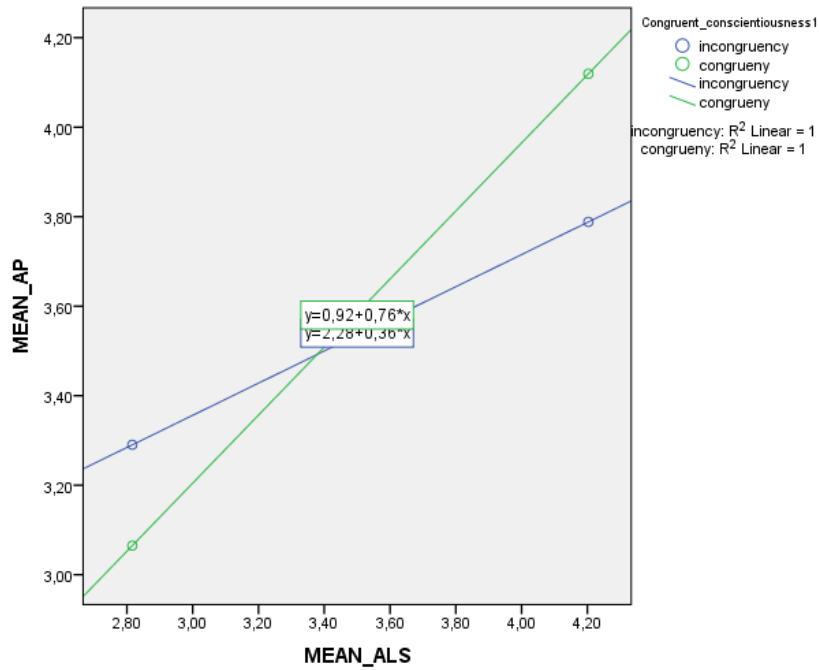
Graph 1: The significant interaction effect of congruence and incongruence of the personality factor Conscientiousness
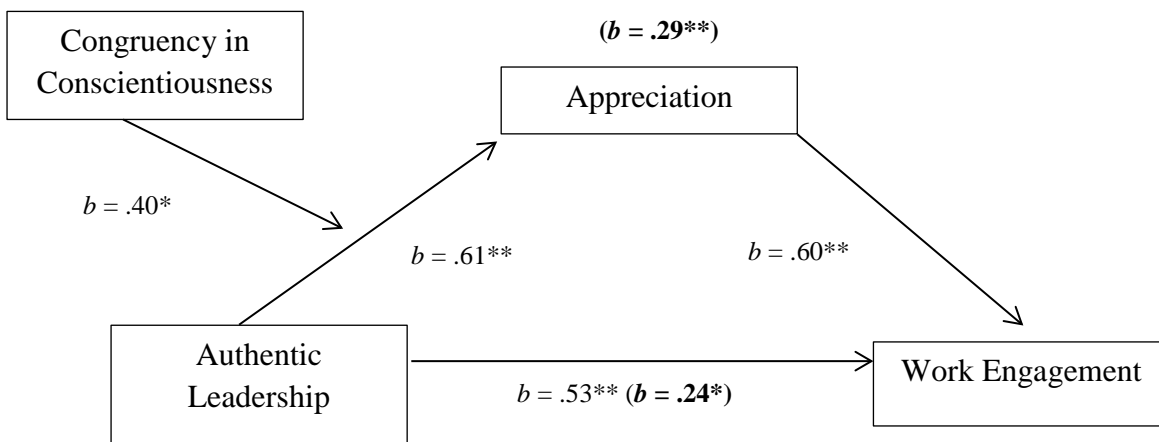

Figure 2: Process model with the direct effects, the mediating effect (**bold**) and the moderating effect (* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$).

Discussion

Work engagement has become a hot topic and by focussing on positive factors, this study aimed to find the importance of authentic leadership and feeling appreciated at work. Present research found a positive relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement, as

well as for appreciation and work engagement. Appreciation partially mediated the relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement. This suggests that an authentic leader partly stimulates employee work engagement through appreciation. Expressing the importance of feeling appreciated at work. Moreover, when congruency between leader and employee was observed in the personality factor Conscientiousness, this congruency moderated the relationship between authentic leadership and appreciation. This suggests that similarity between leader and employee in terms of Conscientiousness, makes an employee feel more appreciated by his or her supervisor. For all other congruent personality factors this moderating effect was not found. In addition to this, no congruent personality factor was found to moderate the relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement. As this study only found congruency in Conscientiousness to moderate the relationship between authentic leadership and appreciation, it could be interesting for future research to explore why this is and to further elaborate on this subject. For practice this also could be interesting as this knowledge might be used in creating more engaged teams. However, caution is needed in interpreting these findings, as no causal conclusions can be made.

Appreciation as mediator

As previously discussed, authentic leadership positively influences employee behavior and stimulates work engagement (Avolio et al., 2004). This research also found this positive relationship. So, in this study the importance of leading authentically was confirmed. Although previous research found leadership, and authentic leadership in particular, to be an important antecedent of work engagement, the underlying mechanisms are rarely discussed in the leadership literature (Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002; Avolio et al., 2004; Kark & Van Dijk, 2007). Zhu et al. (2009) also claimed that this area could be explored further by using other unmeasured variables that could directly or indirectly influence feelings of work engagement. Therefore, my study has found an important underlying mechanism involving appreciation. Expressing the need to feel appreciated at work to be more engaged.

In contribution to previous research, this study indicates that appreciation is an underlying mechanism that partly explains *how* authentic leaders stimulate employee work engagement. Authentic leaders apparently tend to show their appreciation for employees, which stimulates employees' work engagement. These results are in line with previous findings that authentic leaders are transparent and self-aware and foster positive affective

states, such as feeling appreciated (Kernis, 2003). Appreciation in turn positively affects work engagement, as indicated by previous research (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Bakker et al., 2007; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

This research contributes to identifying a new underlying mechanism that may well explain the positive effect of authentic leadership on employees' wellbeing and work engagement and also provides more support for previous research. Future research could focus on further exploring the effects of appreciation on work engagement, or on finding other underlying mechanisms that explain the relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement.

Congruency in Conscientiousness as moderator

Individuals attract towards another because of similarities in their personality (SAT; Byrne, et al. 1967). This influences the interpretation, and the relationship with a leader (Felfe & Schyns, 2010). Further, congruence in personality traits between an employee and a leader enhances work outcomes (Zhang, Wang & Shi, 2012). Therefore, congruence in personality was added to this research. Congruence in personality traits was expected to moderate the relationship between authentic leadership and appreciation, and authentic leadership and work engagement. This was mainly expected for Conscientiousness and Agreeableness (Hassan, Asad & Hoshino, 2016). This research found a striking result with congruency in Conscientiousness to enhance the positive relationship between authentic leadership and appreciation. Actually, from a methodological point of view, it is very difficult to find a moderator effect in survey studies, due to the human tendency to score average and due to bias and leniency of self-report studies (Atkins & Wood, 2002). Therefore, the moderator effect of congruent Conscientiousness is found to be a striking effect. However, congruency in Conscientiousness did not moderate the relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement, as was expected in hypothesis 5. Moreover, no significant effects were found for other congruent personality factors as moderator.

With this finding, present research contributes to previous research and emphasizes the need to focus on congruence in personality. Future research could further focus on incorporating congruence in personality in leadership and work engagement research. For example, future research could measure leader and employee personality separately instead of measuring the employee's perception of leader personality.

Limitations and future research

First of all, this research depended on self-reporting measures, which could affect the outcomes of this study. The perception of employees of their leaders authenticity can be inaccurate, as employees sometimes are unable to accurately observe and describe their leader (Yukl, 2013). This also applies to the interpretation of the leader personality, as congruency on all personality traits was high. Which shows that employees often interpret their leaders as similar to themselves. In addition, the congruency distribution in Table 1 also shows that the personality interpretation is skew, as high-high congruency is more common. Self-reports are often mild, have less variance and more bias (Atkins & Wood, 2002). Thus, the interpretation of the results should be done with some prudence.

Second, this study has a cross-sectional design. So precaution is necessary in stating causality, as causality can only be determined in experimental studies (Yukl, 2013). Future work engagement research could focus on conducting more experimental studies regarding authentic leadership, appreciation and congruent personality.

Third, not all assumptions in this study were met. Not all residuals were significantly normally distributed. However, this violation can be ignored because the power of this study was high enough due to the number of respondents and the Central Limit Theory states that with large sample sizes (N>30) the assumption of normality may be assumed (Field, 2013). In addition, the assumption of homoscedasticity was not perfectly met, because the variance of error terms was not similar across the values of the independent variable. However, no clear pattern in the distribution, for example a cone-shape, was found (Field, 2013). Therefore, this violation was ignored.

Finally, future research could focus on underlying mechanisms and influencing factors, explaining the relation between authentic leadership and work engagement. Present research only focused on appreciation and congruent personality factors, though finding striking results, regarding the JD-R model many more job resources or personality factors could moderate or mediate the relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Therefore, to further understand how authentic leaders can optimally contribute to employee work engagement more research is recommended.

Practical implications

Having engaged employees is beneficial both for the employee and for the organisation, because it enhances positive emotions, mental and physical health. Engaged employees will perform better which influences and improves organisational culture, customer experience and profits (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007; Attridge, 2009). Besides this, with the increase in burnout numbers and the growing societal interest in sustainability, increasing sustainable employability through work engagement is our future. Although the outcomes of this research should be interpreted with caution, it can be assumed that authentic leadership, appreciation and congruency in Conscientiousness all contribute to influence work engagement, directly or indirectly.

Therefore, HR or Learning & Development can put more focus on authentic leadership development. Previous research found three out of four factors of authentic leadership to be prone to training: self-awareness, relational transparency and balanced information processing (Baron & Parent, 2015). Organisational training can be provided in these factors to enhance authentic leadership development.

Moreover, employees who feel truly valued and appreciated by their leader contribute to improving the workplace of the organisation (White, 2014). Therefore, appreciation should be expressed more often. Appreciation is best communicated when leaders consider individual differences. Some people appreciate verbal praise, others would benefit more from on-the-job helping (White, 2014). In addition, appreciation always has to be personal. Although teamwork is often the case, the feedback should be on a personal level for an employee to feel valued (White, 2014). Besides this, appreciation should be genuinely communicated, be authentic (White, 2014). Finally, feedback should be provided on a regular basis. Conducting evaluations once a year is a thing are from the past. Regular on-the-job feedback is found to be necessary to foster appreciation (White, 2014).

Finally, organisations could create awareness that similarity in personalities of leader and employee, as I found for Conscientiousness, possibly affects the quality of the leader-employee relationship. Leaders arguably express more appreciation towards employees who are similar to them, and fail to express positive feedback to employees who are less alike. Notably, heterogeneous teams are more effective than homogeneous teams (Van Knippenberg, De Dreu & Homan, 2004), so it is not recommended to create homogeneous teams based on leader's personality. Concluding, making leaders and organisations aware of

this possible bias based on congruence in personality, may help both in the selection process and to appreciate all employees alike, regardless their personality.

Conclusion

To summarize, this study has contributed to work engagement research as it has found appreciation and authentic leadership to be two important antecedents. More striking, it found appreciation as an underlying mechanism in the relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement. Besides this, congruency in Conscientiousness between the leader and employee is found to influence the relationship between authentic leadership and appreciation. Future research could further focus on finding underlying mechanisms and influencing factors that could enhance employee work engagement. Practical implications have been given and interventions can be applied through organisations. We should not underestimate the effect of appreciation on the work floor and be aware of the biases due similarity in personality. To conclude with, in this ever-changing society we need resources to become more flexible, agile and continue to flourish.

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Appendix

Questionnaire "Work engagement through leadership and appreciation"

Dit onderzoek is onderdeel van mijn masterthesis Social, Health & Organisational Psychology aan de Universiteit Utrecht. Het doel van het onderzoek is inzicht krijgen in de bijdrage van leiderschap en waardering op het werk aan het werkplezier en de inzet van medewerkers. Voor dit onderzoek ben ik op zoek naar medewerkers die een directe leidinggevende hebben en niet eindverantwoordelijk zijn. Heeft u geen leidinggevende? Dan kunt u helaas niet meedoen aan dit onderzoek.

U zult nu een vragenlijst invullen met betrekking tot dit onderzoek. Deze vragenlijst bevat 15 vragen met stellingen en demografische vragen en duurt slechts 5 minuten. Uw hulp draagt bij aan wetenschappelijk onderzoek en mijn afstuderen, daar wil ik u graag voor bedanken. Onder alle deelnemers worden 5 bol.com bonnen verloot t.w.v. 20 euro.

Dit onderzoek is vertrouwelijk. De data zijn alleen in te zien door de hierna genoemde onderzoekers* en wordt anoniem verwerkt. Persoonsgegevens worden niet ter beschikking gesteld aan derden. Na afronding van dit onderzoek en de verloting van de bol.com bonnen wordt alle data vernietigd. Als u nu of tijdens het onderzoek besluit af te zien van deelname aan dit onderzoek zal dit op geen enkele wijze gevolgen voor u hebben. U kunt uw medewerking dus ten allen tijde staken zonder opgave van redenen.

 * Dit onderzoek wordt uitgevoerd door A Groeneveld, BSc. (a.groeneveld2@students.uu.nl) onder begeleiding van dr. M van Doorn (m.vandoorn@uu.nl).

Klik hieronder de toestemmingsverklaring aan om met de vragenlijst te beginnen:

o Ja, ik geef toestemming voor deelname aan het onderzoek en gebruik van de daarmee verkregen gegevens voor dit onderzoek

Leiderschap

Hieronder staan een aantal uitspraken die betrekking hebben op hoe u uw directe leidinggevende op het werk ervaart. Lees elke uitspraak zorgvuldig en geef aan in welke mate u deze in het algemeen ervaart. Er zijn geen goede of foute antwoorden, het gaat om uw eigen indruk.

1=nooit, 2=zelden, 3=soms, 4=vaak, 5= altijd

Mijn leidinggevende.....

1. Geeft duidelijk aan wat hij/zij bedoelt
2. Geeft het toe als hij/zij een fout maakt
3. Moedigt iedereen aan om zijn/haar gedachten uit te spreken
4. Vertelt je de harde waarheid
5. Toont emoties die in overeenstemming zijn met zijn/haar gevoelens
6. Doet precies wat hij/zij belangrijk zegt te vinden
7. Neemt besluiten op basis van zijn/haar kernwaarden
8. Vraagt mij te doen wat past bij mijn kernwaarden
9. Neemt moreel juiste beslissingen
10. Staat open voor tegenspraak of andere opvattingen
11. Analyseert relevante gegevens voordat hij/zij een besluit neemt
12. Luistert zorgvuldig naar verschillende standpunten voordat hij/zij een conclusie trekt
13. Vraagt om feedback om zijn/haar omgang met anderen te verbeteren
14. Is zich goed bewust hoe anderen hem/haar zien en wat anderen zijn/haar krachten en zwaktes vinden
15. Kan zijn/haar mening of standpunten bijstellen als dat nodig is
16. Begrijpt zijn/haar effect op anderen

Werkbevlogenheid

De volgende uitspraken hebben betrekking op hoe u uw werk beleeft en hoe u zich daarbij voelt. Lees elke uitspraak zorgvuldig en geef aan in welke mate u deze in het algemeen ervaart.

1=nooit, 2=zelden, 3=soms, 4=vaak, 5= altijd

1. Op mijn werk bruis ik van energie
2. Als ik werk, voel ik me fit en sterk
3. Ik ben enthousiast over mijn baan
4. Mijn werk inspireert mij
5. Als ik 's morgens opsta, heb ik zin om aan het werk te gaan
6. Wanneer ik heel intensief aan het werk ben, voel ik mij gelukkig
7. Ik ben trots op het werk dat ik doe

8. Ik ga helemaal op in mijn werk

9. Mijn werk brengt mij in vervoering

<u>Waardering</u>

De volgende uitspraken hebben betrekking op hoe u waardering ervaart voor uw werk.

Lees elke uitspraak zorgvuldig en geef aan in welke mate u deze in het algemeen ervaart.

1=nooit, 2=zelden, 3=soms, 4=vaak, 5= altijd

1. Ik voel mij oprecht gewaardeerd op mijn werk

2. Mijn collega's waarderen mijn werk

3. Ik ontvang regelmatig feedback op mijn werk

4. Mijn leidinggevende neemt de tijd om zijn/haar waardering voor mijn werk te uiten, in woorden of op een andere wijze

5. Wanneer ik in een team werk krijg ik persoonlijke feedback

6. Ik krijg complimenten voor mijn werk

<u>Persoonlijke voorkeuren medewerker</u>

De volgende vragen hebben betrekking op uw persoonlijke voorkeuren. Lees elke uitspraak zorgvuldig en geef aan in welke mate u deze in het algemeen ervaart of hoe u zich gedraagt.

1=niet van toepassing, 2=zelden van toepassing, 3=soms van toepassing, 4=vaak van toepassing, 5= altijd van toepassing

In welke mate zijn de volgende uitspraken op u van toepassing?

1. Heel creatief

2. Vinden van nieuwe oplossingen

3. Vindingrijk

4. Ordelijk

5. Georganiseerd

6. Nauwkeurig

7. Verlegen

8. Bedeesd in het gezelschap van anderen

9. Stil in het bijzijn van anderen

10. Humeuriger dan anderen

11. Stemmingen gaan erg op en neer

12. Prikkelbaarder dan anderen

13. Aardig tegen anderen
14. Zachtaardig
15. Sympathiek

Interpretatie persoonlijke voorkeuren van leidinggevende

De volgende vragen hebben betrekking op uw interpretatie van de persoonlijke voorkeuren van uw leidinggevende. Lees elke uitspraak zorgvuldig en geef aan in welke mate de volgende uitspraken, naar uw mening, op uw leidinggevende van toepassing zijn.

1=niet van toepassing, 2=zelden van toepassing, 3=soms van toepassing, 4=vaak van toepassing, 5= altijd van toepassing

In welke mate, naar uw mening, zijn de volgende uitspraken op uw leidinggevende van toepassing?

1. Heel creatief
2. Vinden van nieuwe oplossingen
3. Vindingrijk
4. Ordelijk
5. Georganiseerd
6. Nauwkeurig
7. Verlegen
8. Bedeesd in het gezelschap van anderen
9. Stil in het bijzijn van anderen
10. Humeuriger dan anderen
11. Stemmingen gaan erg op en neer
12. Prikkelbaarder dan anderen
13. Aardig tegen anderen
14. Zachtaardig
15. Sympathiek

Demografische variabelen

Ik ben een
o Man (1)
o Vrouw (2)

Mijn nationaliteit is
o Nederlandse (1)
o Anders, namelijk… (2) _____

Wat is uw huidige leeftijd?

- o Onder 18
- o 18 – 24
- o 25 – 34
- o 45 – 54
- o 55 – 64
- o 65 – 74
- o 75 of ouder

Wat is uw hoogst genoten opleidingsniveau?

- o geen/ lager- of basisonderwijs (1)
- o VMBO/MAVO/LBO (2)
- o MBO (MTS, MEAO) (3)
- o HAVO/VWO (HBS, MMS) (4)
- o HBO (HTS, HEAO, etc.) (5)
- o WO (universitair) (6)

Wat is uw dienstverband?

- o Loondienst (1)
- o ZZP (2)
- o Zowel loondienst als ZZP (3)
- o Anders, namelijk... (4) _____

Hoeveel uur werkt u per week?

- o 8 - 16 uur (1)
- o 16 - 24 uur (2)
- o 24 - 32 uur (3)
- o 32 - 40 uur (4)
- o > 40 uur (5)

In welke sector bent u werkzaam?

- o Chemie, Olie & Energie
- o Agrarisch & Milieu
- o Architectuur / Design
- o Automotive
- o Banken
- o Betting & Gaming
- o Beveiliging
- o Bouw
- o Defensie

o   Dieren & Verzorging

o   Engineering

o   Facilitaire dienstverlening

o   Fashion & Styling

o   Finance

o   FMCG

o   Gemeente

o   Gezondheidszorg & Farmacie

o   Handel / Groothandel / Detailhandel

o   Horeca

o   ICT

o   Industrie / Productie

o   Juridisch

o   Kunst, Cultuur & Entertainment

o   Life Sciences

o   Luchtvaart & Zeevaart

o   Marketing & Communicatie

o   Media / Journalistiek

o   Non Profit

o   Onderwijs

o   Onderzoek

o   Overheid/Semi-overheid

o   Politie / Beveiliging

o   Reizen & Recreatie

o   Techniek

o   Transport & Logistiek

o   Vastgoed / Makelaardij

o   Voeding / Beweging

o   Werving & Selectie

o   Zakelijke dienstverlening

Hoe lang werkt u onder uw huidige direct leidinggevende? _____

Wilt u kans maken op de bol.com bon dan heb ik uw e-mailadres nodig om achteraf contact met u op te kunnen nemen: _____