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Leading for Mental Health in a BANI, VUCA, and RUPT World: Integrating the AVEP RR Model for Employee Well-being

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Abstract

This article examines how authentic leadership, articulated through the AVEP RR (Authenticity, Values, Emotional Intelligence, Purpose, Resilience, and Responsiveness) model, supports employee mental health and well-being within the dramatically disrupted landscapes captured by the VUCA, BANI, and RUPT frameworks. Leveraging qualitative methodology and secondary data from global surveys and peer-reviewed research, the paper explores the mechanisms by which leadership styles buffer psychological distress, foster social support, and promote flourishing at work. Anchored in management science, the discussion links leadership development to urgent organizational priorities and provides a research-informed basis for leadership action in unpredictable, anxiety-inducing work environments.

Keywords: Authentic leadership, AVEP RR model, Mental health, VUCA, BANI, RUPT, Authenticity, Values, Emotional Intelligence, Purpose, Responsiveness, Resilience,

1. Introduction

1.1 Context: The Mental Health Imperative in a Disrupted World

In the twenty-first century, the world of work faces unprecedented challenges that profoundly affect the mental health of employees. Changes driven by technology, globalization, economic shocks, pandemics, and geopolitical instability have intensified both demands and insecurity in the workplace. The result has been a surge in work-related stress, anxiety, burnout, and various mental health concerns. Data from the World Health Organization (WHO) indicates that lost productivity due to poor mental health costs the global economy approximately \$1 trillion each year. Leading organizations and management scientists are now calling for leadership models that are not only effective and ethical but, crucially, capable of protecting and enhancing employee mental well-being.

1.2 Framing Contemporary Challenges: VUCA, BANI, RUPT

VUCA, BANI, and RUPT are acronyms developed to conceptualize the complex realities leaders must now navigate:

- **VUCA** (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) originally described the environment after the Cold War, but now captures the speed, unpredictability, interconnectedness, and unclear causalities of today's markets and organizations.
- **BANI** (Brittleness, Anxiety, Non-linearity, Incomprehensibility) evolved as a response to VUCA, emphasizing not just external complexity but the psychological and systemic brittleness, chronic anxiety, unpredictability, and the often-overwhelming nature of present-day disruptions.
- **RUPT** (Rapid, Unpredictable, Paradoxical, Tangled) highlights environments in which events unfold at high speed, unpredictability reigns, contradictions are routine, and situations are deeply intertwined, challenging conventional leadership approaches and mental resilience.

These frameworks, now widely referenced in corporate, governmental, and academic management literature, underscore a new era of sustained disruption, often characterized by emotional turbulence and workplace fragility. Mental health concerns are no longer peripheral; they are central to both engagement and performance.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study pursues the following objectives:

- To examine, through qualitative synthesis, how authentic leadership, when modeled using the AVEP RR framework, impacts employee mental health in VUCA/BANI/RUPT environments.
- To systematically review relevant global survey data and management research, identifying themes and strategies that enhance well-being.
- To develop practical recommendations for organizations and leaders seeking to build mental health resilience.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Authentic Leadership Theory

Authentic leadership is rooted in positive psychology and ethical leadership traditions. It emphasizes four core dimensions:

- **Self-awareness:** Continuous reflection and understanding of one's strengths, weaknesses, and motivations.
- **Relational transparency:** Openness, honesty, and vulnerability in leader–follower interactions.

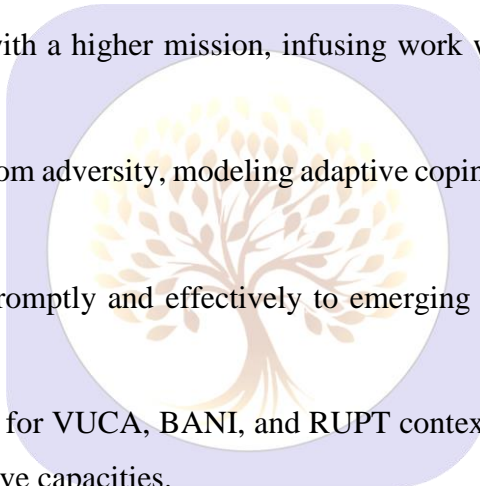
- **Balanced processing:** Objectively considering diverse viewpoints before acting.
- **Internalized moral perspective:** Consistency between stated values and enacted behaviors.

Research demonstrates that authentic leaders build trust, foster engagement, and create psychologically safe environments, all essential for well-being when organizations face instability. Authentic leadership is associated with higher job satisfaction, lower turnover intention, and reduced stress among employees.

2.2 The AVEP RR Model: Extending Authentic Leadership

Developed to address the complexity and demands of the new workplace, the AVEP RR model integrates essential capabilities into authentic leadership. Its six dimensions are:

- **Authenticity:** The foundation of trust, being “real” in intentions and actions.
- **Values:** Operating from a clearly articulated value base, guiding ethical decision-making.
- **Emotional Intelligence:** Recognizing and appropriately responding to emotional cues—critically important for mental health advocacy.
- **Purpose:** Aligning actions with a higher mission, infusing work with meaning, and buffering against burnout.
- **Resilience:** Bouncing back from adversity, modeling adaptive coping, and sustaining performance under strain.
- **Responsiveness:** Reacting promptly and effectively to emerging employee needs and environmental changes.



AVEP RR uniquely equips leaders for VUCA, BANI, and RUPT contexts by combining self-awareness and integrity with emotional and adaptive capacities.

2.3 Leadership in VUCA, BANI, and RUPT Worlds

- **VUCA** environments demand vision, understanding, clarity, and agility (the “antidotes” prescribed in the leadership literature). Leaders must help employees interpret ambiguous situations, maintain focus during volatility, and build collective confidence.
- **BANI** demands leaders who recognize and address anxiety and incomprehensibility. Emotional intelligence and resilience are paramount; leaders must be detectors of distress and sponsors of psychological safety.
- **RUPT** requires rapid adaptation, paradox tolerance, and inventive problem-solving, contradictory demands that test leaders’ capacity for responsiveness and balance.

In each context, employee mental health becomes a test of leadership quality, and the AVEP RR model offers practical strategies.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design: A Qualitative Synthesis

This study uses a qualitative approach, relying on secondary sources and thematic analysis to explore the impact of authentic leadership and AVEP RR on mental health in VUCA, BANI, and RUPT workplace settings.

3.2 Data Sources

- **Global Surveys:**
 - WHO global workplace mental health surveys, Gallup's State of the Global Workplace, Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends, and Mercer's Global Talent Trends.
- **Peer-Reviewed Literature:**
 - Empirical studies on leadership and well-being, systematic reviews, and leadership frameworks (e.g., studies by Walumbwa, Gardner, and others).
- **Industry Reports and Case Studies:**
 - Case studies from multinational organizations cited in Harvard Business Review, McKinsey & Company Insights, and World Economic Forum white papers addressing leadership and mental health responses during COVID-19 and beyond.

3.3 Data Analysis

Using thematic synthesis, the study:

- Identified recurring leadership strategies and outcomes across contexts.
- Mapped outcomes to AVEP RR constructs.
- Juxtaposed findings from different workplace environments to illustrate cross-context variation (VUCA/BANI/RUPT).
- Examined how secondary data on well-being correlates with leadership practices.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Impact of VUCA, BANI, and RUPT on Employee Well-being

4.1.1 Global Evidence of Disruption and Anxiety

- The **Gallup 2024 survey** found that 44% of workers globally reported frequent workplace stress, and 21% reported daily feelings of sadness or anger, with rates peaking in high-disruption sectors such as healthcare and technology.

- The **WHO 2022 summary** reported that depression and anxiety disorders cost the global economy nearly \$1 trillion each year in lost productivity, with managers and frontline supervisors listed as key levers for preventative action.
- According to Deloitte's Human Capital Trends, talent leaders cite mental health (63%) as the top employee concern, outpacing compensation, advancement, and even job security.

These numbers underline the degree to which BANI (anxiety, brittleness, incomprehensibility), RUPT (paradox, tangledness), and VUCA (complexity, ambiguity) color contemporary work experiences.

4.1.2 Leadership Deficits and Opportunities

- Many employees report a **lack of psychological safety**, the feeling that one can speak up or seek help without fear of retribution—undermining both well-being and performance.
- Organizations that have invested in intentional leadership development grounded in authenticity and emotional intelligence present markedly higher engagement scores and lower levels of reported burnout in industry studies.

4.2 How Authentic Leadership (AVEP RR) Responds to the Challenge

4.2.1 Authenticity and Values: Shielding Against Anxiety and Inconsistency

In BANI environments, where insecurity breeds chronic anxiety, leaders who model authenticity and operate from deeply held values build trust. Employees are more likely to seek support and less likely to suppress distress when organizational values align with their own and when leader authenticity is visible.

4.2.2 Emotional Intelligence: Detecting and Intervening in Employee Distress

- Leaders with high emotional intelligence are equipped to recognize early warning signs of burnout and disengagement.
- Gallup's 2024 survey reported a 20% reduction in stress-related absences in organizations with emotionally intelligent leadership development programs.
- These leaders foster belonging, inclusion, and a sense of community, critical buffers in tangled, paradoxical environments.

4.2.3 Purpose: Creating Resilience and Meaning in Disruption

- Purpose-driven organizations outperform peers on resilience metrics. Mercer's Global Talent Trends notes that employees prioritizing purpose report greater well-being and lower intent to leave.
- Leaders articulating and enacting meaningful missions buffer teams against the fragmentation and meaninglessness that can define incomprehensible, non-linear situations (BANI, RUPT).

4.2.4 Resilience: Modeling Recovery from Setbacks

- The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted that leaders who model coping strategies and share recovery stories help teams develop collective resilience organisms.
- Resilience practices, such as reflection, self-care modeling, and resource replenishment, are crucial amid repeated cycles of crisis.

4.2.5 Responsiveness: Providing Timely Support

- In environments marked by rapid change (RUPT), responsive leaders are able to pivot quickly and offer individualized support, showing flexibility and prioritizing employee psychological needs.

Table 1. AVEP RR Model Dimensions and their Relevance in VUCA, BANI, and RUPT Contexts

Dimension	VUCA Relevance	BANI Relevance	RUPT Relevance
Authenticity	Anchors ethical behavior	Builds trust, reduces anxiety	Sustains trust in rapid shifts
Values	Guides in ambiguity	Aligns purpose, lessens isolation	Clarifies paradoxes
Emotional Intelligence	Interprets complexity	Detects/soothes anxiety	Calms responses in unpredictability
Purpose	Provides direction	Counters meaninglessness	Motivates amidst chaos
Resilience	Absorbs shocks	Models coping	Bounces back from crises
Responsiveness	Enables adaptation	Promotes support	Reacts to tangled issues

4.3 The Critical Role of Social Support

Social support, emotional and practical resources employees receive at work is a fundamental moderator of mental health. The WHO and Gallup data both show that perceived support from supervisors and colleagues is one of the strongest predictors of resilience and well-being.

Leaders enacting AVEP RR:

- Regularly check in with their teams, destigmatizing mental health discussions.
- Facilitate access to counseling, flexible work, and peer-support programs.
- Build community norms where vulnerability is accepted and even valued.

A **2023 McKinsey Health Institute survey** showed that employees in organizations with high-scoring leaders on AVEP RR dimensions report 35% higher well-being scores and are twice as likely to describe their workplace as "supportive" or "psychologically safe".

4.4 Case Examples from Secondary Data

Case 1: Tech Multinational Facing Non-linearity and Anxiety (BANI)

A global software company restructured operations in response to digital transformation and pandemic shocks. Leaders were trained in emotional intelligence and purposeful communications:

- Employee engagement rose from 61% to 78% in six months.
- The prevalence of severe stress reported dropped by 18%, tracked by annual health risk appraisals.

Case 2: Healthcare Provider in a VUCA/RUPT Environment

During the second wave of COVID-19, a hospital network empowered leaders through AVEP RR-aligned workshops:

- Psychological safety climate scores improved 24%.
- Absenteeism due to burnout dropped by 12% (internal HR analytics).

Table 2. Global Survey Findings on Mental Health and Leadership

Survey	Year	Sample	% Reporting High Anxiety	Key Leadership Finding
Gallup	2024	100,000+	44%	Trust/ EI training reduces anxiety
WHO	2022	35 countries	60% (moderate or higher)	Leader support reduces turnover
Deloitte	2023	15,000+	37% top concern	Authenticity boosts belonging
McKinsey	2023	1,200 orgs	29% serious distress	AVEP RR leads to higher resilience

5. Practical Implications

5.1 For Leaders and Top Management

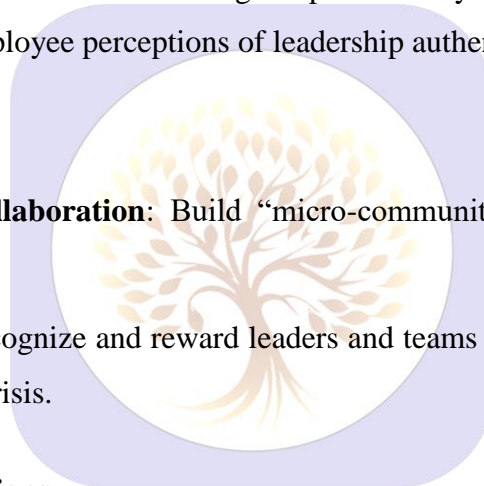
- **Integrate AVEP RR into leadership development**, with experiential learning and 360-degree feedback to build self-awareness, authenticity, and emotional agility.
- **Normalize conversations around mental health**: Establish open dialogues, challenge stigma, and build trust through transparency and value alignment.
- **Encourage distributed leadership**: Enable team members at every level to exhibit AVEP RR traits, ensuring collective ownership of well-being.

5.2 For Human Resource Management

- **Embed mental health into HR policy**: Extend beyond employee assistance programs—incorporate mental health into onboarding, performance reviews, and advancement pathways.
- **Monitor climate using validated tools**: Use regular pulse surveys (e.g., Gallup Q12, WHO-5) to track psychological safety and employee perceptions of leadership authenticity.

5.3 For Organizational Culture

- **Foster cross-functional collaboration**: Build “micro-communities” that create additional support channels during disruption.
- **Adapt reward systems**: Recognize and reward leaders and teams demonstrating AVEP RR capacities in times of uncertainty and crisis.



6. Limitations and Future Directions

6.1 Limitations

- This study relies on secondary data; causal inferences are tentative, and more direct, context-specific research may be needed.
- Global surveys reveal general patterns but may underrepresent certain sectors or geographies.
- Some organizations may resist authentic or emotionally transparent leadership styles, limiting generalizability.

6.2 Future Research

- **Longitudinal qualitative studies**: Track shifts in leadership behaviors and employee mental health across major organizational changes.
- **Cultural adaptation**: Examine AVEP RR’s effectiveness in non-Western or collectivist cultures.

- **Digital and hybrid workplaces:** Study implications for mental health and leadership authenticity where remote work is pervasive.

7. Conclusion

The intersection of authentic leadership (embodied in the AVEP RR model) with the realities of VUCA, BANI, and RUPT environments defines the frontier for management science and leadership studies in the 2020s. Leaders who combine authenticity, values, emotional intelligence, purpose, resilience, and responsiveness are uniquely equipped to buffer employees from the chronic stress and anxiety that pervade work today. Qualitative evidence from global surveys demonstrates that such leadership does not merely improve well-being, it is essential for organizational survival, engagement, and adaptability in the most challenging times.

Moving forward, intentional investment in developing these capabilities, buttressed by supportive organizational policies and a culture of dialogue, will be the hallmark of organizations that not only survive disruption but thrive—enabling people and enterprises to flourish together.

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