

TRAINING AUTHENTIC LEADERS: RESEARCH-BASED APPLICATION

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ABSTRACT

The study of the theory of authentic leadership is in its infancy, but the practical application of the theory is available today. Authentic leadership is seen as a positive form of leadership that has roots in transformational, ethical, charismatic, and servant leadership. In an increasingly volatile organizational climate, the call for developing leaders – particularly authentic leaders – is on the rise. In this paper, the authors review authentic leadership theory and provide a research-based application designed for practitioners to train authentic leaders for internal professional development or as a training program for adult learners.

INTRODUCTION

The world landscape is increasingly filled with polarized views of government, business, and even non-profits (Yaacoub, 2016). In all parts of the world, there is division and protest and a call for leaders to showcase transparency, responsibility, and value to stakeholders (Yaacoub, 2016). The concept of authenticity has roots in Ancient Greece with the idea of being ‘true to oneself’ (Novicevic, Harvey, Buckley, Brown, Evans, 2006). In management and organizational studies, Novicevic et al. (2006) point to Chester Barnard (1938)’s classic works of executive leaders displaying authenticity for the benefit of individuals and organizations. More modern theorists have begun to study the theory of authentic leadership as a contribution to the body of knowledge on leadership studies (Novicevic et al., 2006). As the research continues, the idea is to connect theory to reality and develop applications for leaders and organizations to implement into their training of tomorrow’s leaders. With authentic leaders, perhaps the organizations of the future will find synergy where there is polarization and find unity where there is division.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The search for meaning is a natural phenomenon that occurs both in humans and in organizations. Sagnak and Kuruoz (2017) describe it as a “universal human motive” and one of the “basic mechanisms that make work meaningful” (p. 447). Authenticity and its connection to leadership is a paradigm that has been reviewed in academic literature for about three decades. In the early 1990’s, Terry (1993) released one of the first “how-to” books regarding authentic leadership and the search for meaning within self. Terry (1993) developed a diagnostic tool called the Authentic Action Wheel to help leaders appropriately select a response that most accurately found the root of management problems and would result in more authentic leadership. The Authentic Action Wheel categorized organizational problems into six categories including meaning, mission, power, structure, resources, and existence (Terry, 1993). This instrument was designed to help leaders frame the questions “What is really, really going on?” and “What are we going to do about it?” (Terry, 1993). Under Terry’s (1993) theory, leaders could locate their

problem on the wheel and select a strategically appropriate response that benefitted the leader, the group, and the organization.

According to Terry (1993), authenticity is at the center of effective leadership. While Terry's (1993) authentic leadership model offers a practical, action-oriented tool that could be useful for leaders in daily management practices, the Authentic Action Wheel is not an evidence-based measurement model. Furthermore, Terry (1993) lacks an operational definition that can be easily measured.

A decade later, Luthans and Avolio (2003), whose work on authentic leadership was spearheaded out of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln in the Gallup Leadership Institute, first wrote about authentic leadership development as a model of leadership that was more ethical and concerned with the human condition. Luthans and Avolio (2003) describe authentic leaders as "confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, transparent, moral/ethical, future-oriented, and gives priority to developing associates to be leaders" (p. 243). The authentic leader is concerned with his or her followers and the connection between leader and follower. Luthans and Avolio (2003) defined authentic leadership as "a process that draws both from positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering self-development" (p. 243). The Luthans and Avolio (2003) authentic leadership concept includes interpersonal, intrapersonal, and developmental definitions by including the leader, followers, and the organizational context.

Significance of Gallup Leadership Institute

As mentioned, Luthans and Avolio (2003)'s work grew out of the Gallup Leadership Institute. At the time, the Gallup Leadership Institute was a part of the Department of Management in the College of Business Administration at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. At its inaugural leadership conference in June 2004, organized by leadership experts Bruce Avolio and William Gardner, more than 250 scholars, business leaders, undergraduate and graduate students came together to discuss the emergence and development of authentic leadership and authentic followership to produce greater organizational outcomes (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). A small number of scholarly papers selected from the summit appeared in a special edition of *The Leadership Quarterly* on authentic leadership development. The first-ever opinion poll on attitudes toward authentic leadership in the U.S. were released at the summit (Hoskins, 2004). The purpose of the biannual poll, which was developed to highlight the need for further research in this area, was to track how leadership in American organizations changed over time (Hoskins, 2004).

The significance of the Gallup Leadership Institute to the advancement of authentic leadership development cannot be overstated. The theory of authentic leadership that would be eventually produced benefitted from conversations that took place at the inaugural Gallup Leadership Institute conference (May, Chan, Hodges, & Avolio, 2003). This institution helped propel the desire shared by scholars to bring a sense of discipline to work in accelerating authentic leadership theory to be grounded in science and becoming evidence-based to advance the science and practice of authentic leadership (Avolio, 2010).

Authentic Leadership Defined

Glowacki-Dudka and Griswold (2016) state that "authentic leadership seeks to bring what is genuine to the forefront" (p. 106). Sagnak and Kuruoz (2017) and others define it as being true

to yourself as an individual and as a leader. It is considered a positive form of leadership that is rooted in positive psychology (Sagnak & Kuruoz, 2017). Shamir and Eilam (2005) agree that authentic leadership relies heavily on the meaning that the leader attaches to his or her life experiences. Shamir and Eilam (2005) argue that leaders' authenticity can be measured to the fidelity of their actions and thoughts to the meanings they create by their life stories. George, Sims, McLean, & Mayer (2007) go a step further by asserting that the journey to authentic leadership begins with understanding one's life story and from it finding the inspiration they need to make an impact in the world.

Bill George, a corporate practitioner and leader, published his first book on authentic leadership as a "business how-to" guide to transparent leadership (George, 2007). In 2010, he added a second book to the literature that outlined five areas of authentic leadership: 1) understand your purpose, 2) practice values, 3) establish relationships, 4) demonstrate self-discipline, 5) lead with heart (George, 2010). George (2010) calls for authentic leadership as an approach to positivity in the workplace and a pathway to help leaders face the tough decisions in a corporate environment that is filled with temptations. By developing an authentic leadership style and commitment, executives establish a foundation from which to make decisions (George, 2010).

Another practitioner perspective comes from Donna Orem (2016), interim President of N.A.I.S., a large non-profit organization within K-12 schools. Orem (2016) summarizes authentic leadership as having four characteristics: "Being self-aware and genuine...Being mission driven, with a focus on results...leading with both the heart and the mind...focusing on the long term" (p. 9). At its core, authentic leadership is about understanding and the self and others (Orem, 2016).

While there are various theories of authentic leadership, the model that will be used herein is the Avolio & Gardner (2005) model. This model takes a developmental approach to authentic leadership by suggesting that interpersonal and intrapersonal behaviors are qualities that can be developed into authentic leadership and these behaviors may be developed over a lifetime or triggered by life events (Mazutis, 2010). The Avolio & Gardner (2005) model of authentic leadership is generally regarded as the most commonly referred to approach of the authentic leadership theory. It relies on four areas of balance:

1. Self-awareness
2. Self-regulation (or internalized moral perspective)
3. Balanced processing
4. Relational transparency

According to Avolio and Gardner (2005), authentic leadership develops over time between leaders and followers as the relationship between them becomes more authentic. These four elements of the Avolio and Gardner (2005) model are grounded in positive psychological capital and positive moral perspective, and provide a starting point to examine development of the theory. Shamir and Eilam (2005) go further to suggest that authenticity also includes the elements of followership:

1. Followers want to follow the leader because they share the leader's values, beliefs, and convictions, and the leaders' concerns. Followers follow the leader not out of coercion or expectation of personal rewards but because of their authenticity.

2. Followers do not hold illusions or delusions about the leader and do not follow the leader because of a false sense of safety. They have a realistic view of the leader's strengths and weaknesses.
3. Followers judge the leader's claim for leadership based on their personally held values and convictions and judge the leader's behavior as consistent with their own beliefs, values, and convictions.
4. Authentic leaders inspire their followers to act authentically at work and thus experience greater meaning by performing consistently with their moral values (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

Criticism of Authentic Leadership

Early criticism of the original authentic leadership model focused on the lack of a clear, measurable definition and whether or not it was something that could be taught (Cooper et al., 2005). The Avolio and Gardner (2005) model offers a theory of authentic leadership that can be measured by the evidence-based Authentic Leadership Questionnaire, which was designed to complement (and accompany) the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), which measures transformational leadership. The ALQ has multi-rater and self-rater versions that may be utilized to measure the degree of a leader's authenticity (Wong, Laschinger, & Cummings, 2010). Therefore, the survey measures are susceptible to social desirability bias both on the part of the leader and their followers. Dunning, Heath, and Suls (2004) indicate that in general, self-assessments of skills, expertise, and knowledge are flawed in systematic and substantive ways with among other things, people being overly confident and overestimating their skills. Additionally, the theory has been thus far only validated by single source data and survey measures. Gardner, Cogliser, Davis, and Dickens (2011) suggest that more rigorous and diverse research methods including experimental designs and qualitative methods should be implemented to legitimize the theory.

The theory also fails to draw deeper connections to specific aspects of foundational leadership theory. For example, the study of ethics appears to be closely linked to that of authentic leadership (Wilson, 2014). The theory has fundamental grounding within the ethical aspects of leadership and the paradigm of virtue ethics but, according to Wilson (2014), little work has been done to build a framework for the connection. More needs to be done to differentiate the theory as its own track of study within the literature.

Relationship to Other Leadership Theories

While it is postulated that authentic leadership stands alone as a distinct theoretical element, authentic leadership certainly does incorporate various other forms of positive leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Both transformational and authentic leaders are likely to stimulate personal identification among their followers so that followers' beliefs and values become more similar to those of the leader (Bass, 2010). Transformational and authentic leaders have the enhanced ability to show individualized concern among their followers (Pierce & Newstrom, 2011). Transformational leaders help followers find meaning in their tasks and evoke a sense of trust in leadership (Sun, Chen, & Zhang, 2017). The primary difference between the two types of leadership is that the transformational leader intentionally transforms their followers' values to be congruent with their own, whereas the authentic leader focuses on followers' collective value (Yaacoub, 2016).

Similarly, authentic leaders have high levels of emotional intelligence, optimism, and compassion for others. Both charismatic and authentic leaders aspire and use role modeling as a leadership strategy. However, authentic leaders will influence followers based on their individual characteristics rather than using rhetoric like charismatic leaders (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Authentic leadership is also closely linked with ethical forms of leadership, including servant leadership (Wilson, 2015). Leaders are often in positions of power and have a responsibility to use this power for the good of the organization and often the good of the individual (Wilson, 2015). The idea of service to others is related to an altruistic sense of giving of oneself as a positive form of leadership (Pierce & Newstrom, 2011). Service and authentic self as a form of ethical leadership contribute to followers and to organizations in positive capacity. Ethical leadership “makes good business sense” because positive forms of leadership typically have higher returns than corruption or deceit (Wilson, 2015). Yaacoub (2016) asserts that what differentiates authentic leadership from transformational and servant leadership is that authentic leadership is at the root of positive leadership in any form. Therefore, a leader may be more or less authentic and possess various characteristics of each of the aforementioned leadership models.

DISCUSSION

Wilson (2014) asserts that ethical leadership is increasingly important in numerous fields, including education and other industries. As public scandals and a loss of trust in the corporate sector rises, so does the need to promote ethical forms of leadership (Wilson, 2014). According to Cooper et al. (2005), the decline in ethical leadership accompanied by increased societal challenges necessitates the need for positive relationships now more than any other period in history. Proponents of authentic leadership believe that organizations should conduct business in a socially responsible and ethical environment (Cooper et al., 2005; Wilson, 2014).

According to the Avolio and Gardner (2005) model, authentic leaders foster trust in leadership, which is associated with positive employee attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and retention. Gardner and Avolio (2005) assert that through increased self-awareness, self-regulation, and positive modeling, authentic leaders facilitate the development of authenticity in their followers, which contributes to sustainable performance.

How do leaders accomplish these areas? The Avolio and Gardner (2005) model developed greater theoretical support for the theory of authentic leadership, and much has been written since then calling for additional empirical evidence of both the model and the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (Wilson, 2014). In fact, Wilson (2014) states “such research is in its infancy with more to be done to establish firmer theoretical foundations of leadership ethics in general and authentic leadership in particular” (p. 492). The application suggested here was developed based on the research currently available, and it is suggested that these types of practical applications can be implemented and tested to build evidence of the theory in practice.

THE APPLICATION

George (2003) states “to become authentic, each of us has to develop our own leadership style, consistent with our personality and character.” Developing leaders is a common practice in business, and the literature seems to suggest, then, that training or personal development are activities that will produce leadership growth. Yaacoub (2016) specifically states that “authenticity in leaders can be developed rather than having it as an innate trait for a fortunate few” (p. 48).

Pierce and Newstrom (2011), among other authors of leadership development readings and self-assessments, provide numerous applications for self-reflection and self-study of leadership practice, action, and uses in practice. In fact, many scholars refer to leadership as a journey and often a process of discovery (Pierce & Newstrom, 2011).

At the start of the journey, the leader examines critical life events. The application begins with identification of roles that might signify or relate to one's approach to life and the various aspects of one's segmented areas of identity. By listing roles, the individual completing the application can begin to segment their various paths and life events. This helps begin the process of self-discovery.

Next, the application asks for reflection on triggers. George (2003) notes several negative events in his life that were triggers on his path towards authentic leadership. In college, he lost six consecutive elections in his fraternity, and he did not understand why. He was later told that his egotism and arrogance might be qualities that were holding him back, and he later won an election after modifying his behavior (George, 2003). The loss of his mother and his fiancé early in his professional career were even more powerful triggers for George. He describes these events as emotional moments that "caused me to look inside myself, acknowledge my shortcomings, and realize I was on the wrong path" (George, 2003). These triggers led to his growth as an authentic leader. Triggers are often seen in psychological literature and adult learning theory (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). Transformational learning asks us to examine the triggers and past events to identify historical patterns that may be influencing our current actions (Merriam et al., 2007). Just as George (2003) examined his triggers, so too can an individual on a quest for self-reflective knowledge.

Next, authentic leaders are defined by their humility, which in turn promotes trust. Morris, Brotheridge, and Urbanski (2005) states that humility "is expected to generate servant leader-type behaviors such as engaging in supportive relationships, presenting a socialized power motivation, and leading through participation" (p. 1343). Developing this humility comes from careful evaluation of one's own mistakes and challenges as recognition of the imperfections of others. Ego tends to pass judgment on others while humility understands and evaluates logic. Therefore, the next stages of the application examine weaknesses, values, and personal definition. These areas help create transparency for the self and the uniqueness of one individual in the exercise. Each person's analysis and humble reflection will be different, and this, in turn, leads to a unique picture of what authenticity means for the individual.

The application ends with action. In other words, after self-assessment of the various aspects of the application, the individual creates action steps to put into practice. This step is established to bring the application full circle from concept to reality.

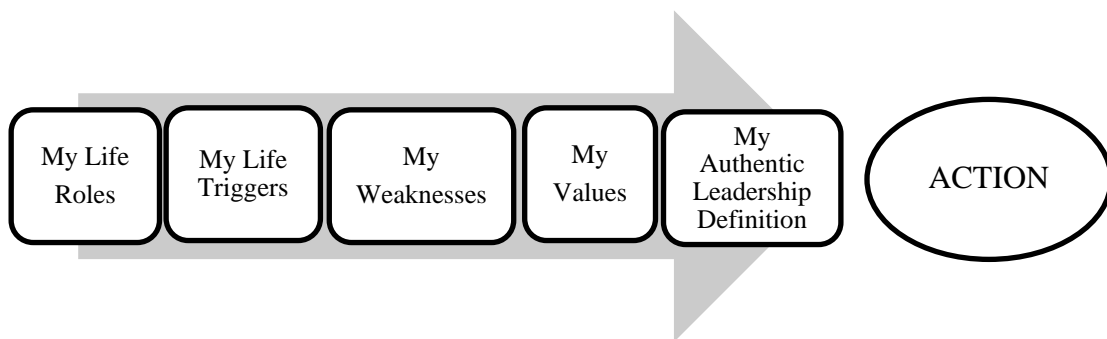
Figure 1 outlines the application designed to develop an authentic leader in the following steps:

- (1) An authentic leader is self-aware, and must recognize how their various life roles create their identity (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).
- (2) An authentic leader is self-regulated and recognizes the various triggers or critical life events in his or her life (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).
- (3) An authentic leader is balanced and understands his or her weaknesses (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Recognition and overcoming weaknesses creates balance and also helps create self-control (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

- (4) Authentic leaders possess relational transparency (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). By creating value statements, he or she creates commitment to his or her core morals that will help create transparent relationships (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).
- (5) Finally, the individual creates a personal definition for authentic leadership. In this way, the individual more fully understands his or her place in leadership and creates a transparent, trustworthy relationship with followers (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).
- (6) The “Action” at the end of the application are the culminating items for the individual. How will they put their definition for authentic leadership into practice?

Figure 1

Application: Developing an Authentic Leader



The training program is flexible and can be delivered in a variety of ways. For example, individuals can use this tool as a self-directed program for individual growth. It is also useful in a group setting to promote team building and leadership development. Either way, participants work through the steps of the application by considering each aspect of their own authentic self. In a group setting, participants can then share experiences to hear examples of how others might define and describe aspects of the application. The sharing of the experiences creates group dialogue that help individuals process their own progress and will possibly help trigger new learnings.

The student reflection workbook is a training tool used in hard copy format to help the participants reflect on their learning. The primary components of the workbook are outlined in Table 1. This workbook creates a record of their activity and an opportunity for post training reflection. The participants write about their life roles and their life triggers, and they reflect on how these roles and triggers have helped shape them as a person and a leader. The participants are asked to consider their weaknesses. They create value statements. The program culminates with each participant writing their own definition of authentic leadership and then outlining up to five action items they plan to take after they leave the workshop. The learning objectives include: (1) The learner will be able to outline, in writing, a personal reflection on life roles, life triggers, personal weaknesses, value statements. (2) The learner will describe a personal definition of authentic leadership. (3) The learner will outline specific action steps they will apply to their work setting. The student reflection workbook can be modified to fit the needs of an organization. For example, if an organization has defined work roles, these roles could be the focus of an activity rather than simply personal roles.

Another area of applicability for the application and the workbook is in coaching and mentoring sessions. Leadership preparation programs in the form of coaching are an expanding area of individual development (Celoria & Roberson, 2015). New learnings from these sessions help promote self-growth and goal achievement (Celoria & Roberson, 2015), and this application could serve as a tool to enhance knowledge of the authentic self.

Table 1
Student Reflection Workbook

Section 1			
List your roles Personal: (e.g., child, parent, friend) Professional (e.g., employee, boss...) Volunteer (e.g., board, committee...) Other (e.g., other roles...)	How does this role help me be a leader?	How does this role hinder me from being a leader?	Rank this role in your life
Section 2			
Trigger Moments	What lesson did this moment provide me?	How did this moment help me grow as a person?	What "life roles" did this moment effect?
Section 3			
Weaknesses	Why do I consider this a weakness?	How can I turn weakness into a strength?	Tools to help me conquer this weakness.
Section 4			
Values	I believe in this value because...	This value matches these roles in my life...	Rank these values
Section 5			
Action Items	In what role(s) will I incorporate this action?	When will I complete this action?	How will I hold myself accountable?

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

As noted throughout this review, the theory of authentic leadership is relatively new in the literature. There has also been some criticism in the literature on the approach to empirical studies of the paradigm. Future studies should seek methodologies that provide clear evidence as to the validity of the foundational elements of being authentic or true to oneself. It is important to add studies that explore quantitative elements of both the theory and the practice of authenticity.

Novicevic et al. (2016) suggest future research in the area of measuring individual factors that might lead to the success or failure of an authentic leader. To further this idea, future studies should focus on the specific factors that might identify an authentic leader vs. an ethical leader or a servant leader. While early studies began some of this work, much of the comparison was based on aspects of the previous developmental theories rather than the work that has been completed and validated in the past decade. In addition, perhaps future studies might focus less on the distinctions between theories and more on the similarities and cross-over relational aspects of various forms of positive leadership. Novicevic et al. (2016) also point to organizational aspects that might influence authenticity as a concept. Therefore, future studies might compare individual factors vs. organizational factors and the link or disparaging effects on authenticity. There exists

some intersect here between studies in organizational development and leadership theory. The intersection of the two fields creates a fruitful opportunity for continued exploratory studies.

The application and suggestions for implementation presented in this paper are based on research aspects, but they have not been studied in practice. Methodologies that observe and measure the results of the exercises would provide evidence of the ability to provide professional development related to building authenticity. Qualitative students of individual's emotional connection to the application might also add value to the positive psychological implications of working to become an authentic leader.

The theory of authentic leadership may be in its infancy, but the application to leadership development can begin now. The training program described herein is based on the research conducted thus far, but much more can be done to provide empirical evidence to the literature. In the meantime, self-reflection through the use of this application and workbook can begin to help leaders think introspectively about their own approach to leadership to begin to develop more transparent and authentic approaches. As organizations seek leaders to lead through crisis and tumultuous times, the practice of working toward authenticity can add value to workplace.

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