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### Authentic leadership moments

Omeihe, Ibiyemi; Harrison, Christian

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**Ibiyemi Omeihe**

University of the West of Scotland, School of Business and Creative Industries

Hamilton International Technology Park

Stephenson Place

Blantyre

Glasgow

G72 0LH

[Ibiyemi.omeihe@uws.ac.uk](mailto:Ibiyemi.omeihe@uws.ac.uk)

**Dr Christian Harrison**

University of the West of Scotland, School of Business and Creative Industries

Hamilton International Technology Park

Stephenson Place

Blantyre

Glasgow

G72 0LH

[Christian.Harrison@uws.ac.uk](mailto:Christian.Harrison@uws.ac.uk)

# **AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP MOMENTS: THE IMPACT OF AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOURS IN AN EMERGING ECONOMY CONTEXT**

## **SUMMARY**

The importance of authentic leadership in the current business terrain has been reiterated by both practitioners and scholars, however there is a renewed interest on authentic followership as a core component of the authentic leadership process and development. Insights into the role, followers play in the process need to be uncovered in future studies, particularly empirical insights in order to understand the formation process of authentic relationships between the leaders and followers. This study will examine authentic leadership behaviours through the lens of followers in order to excerpt common ideas peculiar to the developing economy context. The context has been selected based on the dearth of research in cross cultural contexts and a gap in understanding of the followers' process. This developmental paper provides an overview of the extant literature on authentic leadership. Findings from the in-depth review of extant literature will inform the development of an emerging conceptual framework and the subsequent stages of the research.

**Track:** Leadership and Leadership Development Track

**Word Count:** 2339

## **INTRODUCTION**

The end of the twentieth century redefined the business landscape and its associated practices. On one hand, the corporate scandals such as WorldCom, Enron, Tyco International (Ambrose; 2007), rocked the financial scene and the world at large but more importantly brought the ethical conduct of leaders under public scrutiny (Cooper et al., 2005; Gardner et al., 2011; Harrison, 2018) On the other hand, the proliferation of the internet as asserted by Walumbwa et al., (2011) created a new world order. These influences led to the emergence of peculiar leadership requirements in managing the globalised work force. Though, the leadership domain has been replete with diverse leadership approaches, styles, methods in response to organisational necessities (Price, 2003; Yukl, 2002), the rise in corporate misdemeanours and increasing competitive landscape; means more transparency and openness is required to lead corporate organisations successfully. Thus, the emergence of authentic leadership construct within the leadership domain.

Authentic leadership has been described as a value-based approach, emphasising the authenticity and true nature of the leaders (George and Sims, 2007; Cashman, 2008). Scholars have argued that authentic leadership, might be an ideal leadership theory, which has grown out of leadership gaps within the corporate business scene, with an ever-growing expectation for leaders to do the right thing. Surprisingly, interest in authentic leadership was sparked simultaneously by both practitioners and scholars (Luthans and Avolio, 2003; George 2003; George and Sims, 2007; Cashman, 2008). This however, led to the proliferation of research work which has contributed immensely to the development, uncovering of insights as well as the confusion on its conception. Authentic leadership as a construct is replete with theoretical ambiguity as is consistent with new constructs in its early development. The overarching question is “what is authentic leadership”, with ancillary questions such as (1) Are authentic leadership capacities innate or are they skills; (2) can authentic leadership behaviours be learned by new leaders; (3) When exactly does a leader become authentic or inauthentic. Though there are several questions within the field of authentic leadership that require further exploration, this study however aims to uncover what exactly authentic leadership means through the lens of the follower. It seeks to further identify authentic leadership behaviours from the lens of follower; that leads to authentic moments. Finally, this study will attempt to provide clarity on authentic followership development in a developing economy context. The organisation of this paper is structured as follows: firstly, the research background of paper is presented, by giving an overview of the emerging themes in context of study. The second section describes the methodology to be adopted and the final section concludes with a description of research plan and presentation at the British Academy of Management conference. It is expected that the proposed structure would provide an understanding to the aim of the study.

## **AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP: EXISTING EVIDENCE**

Luthans and Avolio (2003) emphasised the relevance of a theory driven model for authentic leadership research, in order to avoid pitfalls that occurred in previous studies on leadership. This call is underpinned, by an aspiration to create a guided approach to authentic leadership development. Consequently, a model was developed for this purpose (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al., 2011). The Gallup Leadership Institute summits of 2004 and 2006 was a conscious effort to stimulate scholarly and practitioner interest in authentic leadership. This led to a proliferation of scholarly writings, which advanced the field however, with attendant misconceptions about the construct (Cooper, 2005; Caza and Jackson 2011; Gardner et al., 2011). Extant literature have examined authentic leadership in relation to several paradigms. For instance, Shamir and Eilam (2005) emphasize the importance of life experiences in the

development of authentic leaders, reiterating the significance of the genuine nature of the leader but are silent on the values. However, the reference to ethical frameworks has however declined in recent years (Gardner et al., 2011). Bass and Steidlmeier (2004) argue that authentic leadership is an extension of transformational leadership, though this influence on the development of authentic leadership have been acknowledged by scholars (Luthans and Avolio, 2003). Distinct idiosyncrasies have differentiated between the two constructs, for instance Avolio and Gardner et al., (2005) contend authentic leadership is a root construct for other forms of positive leadership; servant leadership (Gardner et al., 2011). Though more research is required to provide more clarity on the distinct nature of authentic leadership, a dominant theme in the domain of authentic leadership literature is authenticity.

While authentic leadership emerged in the 1990s, authenticity dates back to early Greek philosophers such as Socrates and Aristotle who made references to self-enquiry; seeking alignment of inner values to outward manifestations (Hutchinson, 1995; Kernis and Goldman, 2006). Authenticity can be traced by to the ancient Greek quote: “Know thyself” (Parke & Wormell, 1956; Hutchinson, 1995). More recently, Harter (2002) defines authenticity as being responsible and accountable for one’s personal experiences; this definition suggest that authenticity is a deliberate effort to constantly align experiences, aspirations, values and actions, which require self-awareness to attain (Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Gardner at al., 2011). Similarly, Erickson (1995) argues that authenticity is a continuum; hence it is a consideration of how authentic a leader is as opposed to being either authentic or inauthentic. In line with the arguments above, more recently, scholars have reviewed extant literature in an attempt to describe how a sense of self is constructed.

Accordingly, Kernis and Goldman (2006) identified four components of authenticity based on themes identified in literature. These components include: (1) awareness, (2) unbiased processing, (3) behaviours and (4) relational orientation. Awareness describes the capacity of the individual to know, understand and rely on one’s inner inclinations. Unbiased processing describes an individual’s ability to assess objectively and holistically. Furthermore, behaviours describe an alignment of an individual’s action to values and beliefs. Finally, relational orientation describes transparency exhibited by individuals in their interactions with others. This conceptualization of authenticity as described by Gardner et al., (2011) provided the theoretical underpinnings for authentic leadership theories. Consequently, the table below attempts to summarize the diverse definitions of authentic leadership from literature:

**Table 1: Definitions of Authentic Leadership**

Source	Definition	Components
Avolio et al., (2004)	Authentic leaders are individuals who are self-aware, self-regulated and act in accordance with that knowledge as perceived by their followers.	Self-awareness, relational
Begley (2001)	Leadership that is informed, ethical and competently performed.	Self-awareness, ethical
Begley (2004)	Authentic leadership develops from self-knowledge, emotional intelligence with technical skills reflected in the leader’s actions.	Self-awareness, relational
George (2003)	Authentic leaders are consistent,	Self-awareness, relational

	have integrity and constantly improve themselves as individuals while developing enduring relationship with people based on transparency and openness.	
George and Sims (2007)	Authentic leaders are unpretentious individuals who are self-motivated and driven by their desire to serve others.	Self-awareness, relational
Ilies et al., (2005)	Authentic leaders are shaped by their values, include self-confidence, dependability which propels them to action. They create positive organizational climates and focus on developing their followers.	Self-awareness, relational, Organisational context
Shamir and Eilam (2005)	Authentic leaders are defined by four main characteristics, which are self-concept, self-clarity, alignment of clarity and values, consistency of actions and self-concept.	Self-awareness
Luthans and Avolio (2003)	Authentic leadership in organizations is defined as a symbiosis between the positive psychological capacities of the leaders and followers within a developed organizational context.	Self-awareness, relational, Organisational context
Whitehead (2009)	Authentic leaders is an individual, who is self-awareness, builds the followers, is bound by moral and ethical constraints in the attainment of organisational goals.	Self-awareness, relational, ethical, Organisational context

Drawing from the definitions above, Begley (2001) suggests that authentic leadership be equated with effective ethical leadership though this was applicable to the education sector. This supports the proposition that authentic leaders are genuine; further identifying components of authentic leadership such as hopefulness (Luthans and Avolio, 2003), visionary etc. Self-knowledge though described in many forms is consistent in all the definitions above, which Gardner *et al.*, (2011) argues is also a central theme in conceptions of authenticity in wider literature (Shamir and Eilam, 2005; Kernis and Goldman, 2006; Luthans and Avolio, 2003). Similarly, George (2003) attempts to describe the authentic leader primarily shaped by his practitioner outlook as described in Table 1 above. This description aligns with components of authenticity identified by Kernis and Goldman (2006).

It is apparent from the diverse discussions on authentic leadership that literature on the role of the follower is limited, as it appears authentic leadership is viewed as occurring primarily among leaders (Yammarino *et al.*, 2008; Sidani *et al.*, 2018). These broad claims require further examination both theoretically and empirically as the limited amount of empirical research makes it problematic to assess the validity of assertions regarding the positive effects of authentic leadership advanced by scholars (Azanza *et al.*, 2013; Harrison, 2018)

Interestingly, a major outcome of the Gallup Leadership Institute summits of 2004 and 2006 was the development of a model of authentic leadership based on the earlier propositions of Kernis (2003) conception of authenticity (Gardner *et al.*, 2011). A revised definition of authentic leadership was advanced by Walumbwa *et al.*, (2008) which identifies four components: self-awareness, balanced processing, relational transparency and an internalized moral perspective. These components have been refined from Kernis (2003) earlier conceptions to reflect additional insights such as unbiased processing was renamed balanced processing in order to account for the inherent bias nature of human beings (Tice and Wallace, 2003); the component of behaviour was renamed internal moral perspective to emphasize the importance of ethical values. Likewise, Shamir and Eilam (2005) propose life stories; which are the lived experiences that facilitate self-reflection, as being essential in the development of authentic leaders. Their views on authentic leadership capture the perceptions of the followers' labelled authentic followership. Several conceptualizations of authentic leadership have affirmed that it generates positive outcome for organisations thus further clarity would have positive implications for practitioners and scholars. Discussions on authentic leadership have focused on the components, but not necessarily who they are and their distinct behaviours. Accordingly, Avolio *et al* (2004) suggests that process linking authentic leadership to followers' behaviours require clarity and understanding. Essentially investigating the follower's perception of values and behaviours of authentic leaders (Sidani *et al.*, 2018).

## **METHODOLOGY**

Extant literature on authentic leadership has mostly relied on quantitative methods such as cross sectional and structured surveys (Glynn and Raffaelli, 2010; Lowe and Gardner, 2010). Scholars argue that qualitative research should be adopted for constructs with limited extant literature to base hypothesis as well as contextually rich constructs such as leadership (Conger 1998; Cooper *et al*, 2005; Endrissat *et al*, 2007). Qualitative studies that aim to understand authentic leadership in terms of in-depth meaning assigned by the research subject themselves are limited. Interestingly, as authentic leadership behaviours are perceived to be dynamic, it therefore supports the adoption of qualitative techniques which would allow interviewees to narrate and relate their own experiences (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Creswell, 2016; Kings and Horrocks; 2012). This will offer insights on how leaders are assessed as being authentic and how authenticity is developed. Authentic leadership behaviours are not easily studied because they are inherently ongoing. Therefore, these behaviours are not readily captured in anonymous play over one or two interactions. It will take repeated and iterated interactions between the leaders and followers to study authentic leadership behaviours. It is recommended that these authentic behaviours be studied in various real-world context in which the risk of default is high. Hence the relevance of the developing economy context which this study explores.

Accordingly, an exploratory approach will be undertaken, through an interview-based study of Nigerian leaders via the lens of followers. These authentic leaders will be sole or part owners of oil and gas marketing companies in Nigeria. Following Saunders *et al.*, (2016) a purposive sampling would be used in the selection of these companies. The choice of a purposive sampling follows from the advice of Marshall and Rossman (2016) which suggests that sampling frame should be chosen accordance with the research objective. With this in mind, the sample selection will be chosen purposively based on the needs of the research. This will include relying on population demographics, sectoral variations and business acumen. This variation indicates the need to avoid chance associations (Yin, 2014). In-depth

semi structured interviews will be conducted with 40 respondents, which will be split between 20 leaders and 20 subordinates in the place of business, with questions focusing on both the leaders and followers. Interviews would be recorded and transcribed accordingly. Upon completion of transcription, it is expected that the data will be analysed and coded using the QSR-Nvivo TM (version 11) software package. Following the advice of Boyatzis (1998) and Braun and Clark (2006), thematic analysis will be adopted since it provides a structured methodology, which is useful in highlighting key themes within specific data sets. This will involve searching for patterns and meanings. As the themes emerge, the study will adopt a constant comparative, iterative approach (Silverman, 2005).

Consequently, the findings that emerge will be considered in relation to literature aiding links between data and literature to be explored. Within this qualitative explorative investigation, the aim is not to generalize findings back to theory (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007) but to ensure credibility within the planned study. Additionally, issues of preconceptions and biases will be mitigated through reflexivity and bracketing. With regards to reflexivity, the goal is to take journal note keepings and daily introspections of field activities. In this vein, it will be easy to highlight the key findings on the research phenomenon through the lens of the local actors. Bracketing would also be adopted towards achieving a clear understanding of the narratives of the interviews (Cypress, 2017). In this light, the analysed findings from the empirical consideration will be discussed back with the respondents, in order to capture valid and reliable accounts of their experiences. Overall it is expected that the above insights will establish the quality of this study.

#### **FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

Scholars have affirmed there is a dearth of qualitative research as compared to quantitative studies on authentic leadership (Glynn and Raffaelli, 2010; Lowe and Gardner, 2000). Correspondingly, there have been calls for more qualitative studies to provide clarity on the complexity of authentic leadership, authentic followership, processes, contexts from varied perspectives (Bryman, 1995; Conger, 1998). Insights into the role followers' play need to be uncovered in future studies (George, 2003; Gardner et al., 2005; Shamir and Eilam, 2005), particularly empirical insights as emphasized by Avolio and Reichard (2008) in order to understand the formation process of authentic relationships between the leaders and followers.

The examination of authentic leadership behaviours through the lens of the followers will be the subject of empirical research. More specifically, research aims to explore 4 research questions: (1) What is authentic leadership; (2) What authentic leadership behaviours do authentic leaders exhibit in organisations; (3) How do these authentic leadership behaviours impact the follower's perception of authenticity; (4) How might these authentic behaviours impact the development of authentic followership? These questions will be explored through semi structured interviews and facilitated discussion with leaders and followers. Where appropriate, we will also draw on the stories of the leaders. This study however is at an emerging stage. Consequently, it is expected that a comprehensive literature review would be conducted. This will inform the development of the conceptual framework, which will guide this research and possibly future empirical studies. It is expected that this conceptual framework will be presented at the British Academy of Management conference in September 2020.

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