



LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENT &
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

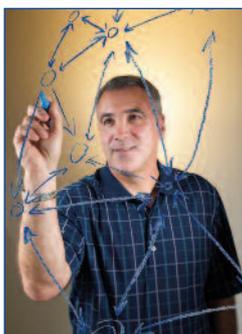
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EXTRACT FEATURE ARTICLE BY PROFESSOR BRUCE J. AVOLIO

Bringing Authentic Leadership into Focus



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Since the early 1980's, I have been involved in examining what constitutes the type of leadership that energizes individuals, teams, organizations and indeed entire societies to perform beyond expectations. During this period of time, the primary measure of transformational leadership has predicted every imaginable soft and hard measure of performance across over one hundred countries around the globe. As the work on transformational leadership matured, we also began to look at whether it could be trained or not, and repeatedly this was found to be true in industry, government and

business organizations. It is interesting to have seen, that over these last thirty years, the transformational leadership construct has become what many authors now refer to as a 'traditional' way of examining leadership.

In the late 1980s a conference was held at McGill University in Canada where a group of scholars from around the globe came together to examine what we knew about charismatic leadership. What we all discovered from the conference over that weekend in Montreal was from an empirical perspective, we didn't know very much about this enigmatic construct. What occurred following that conference was an unprecedented growth in interest in both charismatic and transformational leadership research, which clearly continues on up till the present time.

Just before we adjourned from the Montreal conference back in 1987, one of the participants posed a very interesting comment. He said that he was concerned that as we all learned more about charismatic leadership and began to see whether it could be developed, he worried that some less scrupulous leaders would take this knowledge and use it to manipulate charisma and its intended impact on followers. This comment subsequently led to a stream of work on what has been called *socialized* versus *personalized* charismatic leadership, where Jane Howell and Robert House tried to figure out who were the type of charismatic leaders who would take advantage of such leadership knowledge, which they labeled personalized charismatic leaders versus those who wouldn't, which they labeled socialized. Around that same time, I initiated a conversation with my colleague Bernie Bass and raised the issue of whether there might be authentic and pseudo-transformational leaders. We even developed a measure to differentiate the two and began some pilot work at that time.

In 2001 I moved from the Center for Leadership Studies in Binghamton to the University of Nebraska, to set up a second leadership institute. During the first several months of employment, I thought about what the theme of the new center might be and decided to focus on authentic leadership and its development. Why? I was interested in assuring myself that we were not developing pseudo-transformational leaders, and at the same time, I was also interested in figuring out what 'genuinely' or 'authentically' developed authentic leaders. Combining these two themes seemed a natural for me with my interests in positive forms of leadership and also in life-span development. Also, I had met a number of leaders in Nebraska that exuded authenticity, such as the world famous investor Warren Buffett.

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In 2004, we launched a Summit in Omaha, Nebraska and invited scholars and practitioners from around the globe to examine what constituted authentic leadership and its development. At the same time, our work on positive organizational behavior was taking off, so our inaugural conference had many attendees who were interested in linking to authentic leadership to positive constructs such as hope, optimism, courage, resiliency, efficacy and wisdom. Two publications from this conference, a special issue of the Leadership Quarterly and an edited book of chapters on authentic leadership and its development, provided the foundation for exploring these concepts across a broad range of disciplines. Indeed, one interesting story about the papers that were published from this conference involved the 4 component model of authentic leadership, which eventually became the foundational model for our Authentic Leadership Questionnaire. Specifically, the four component model was independently created by two research groups working completely separately over a 6 month period of time exploring what are the components of authentic leadership. We felt we had even greater confidence in the 4 component model given the independent verification that occurred albeit through serendipity.

Since 2005, we have been refining our measures of authentic leadership and examining how they relate to a variety of individual difference, process and outcome variables. Also, this research work has spawned a great deal of aligned work on models of leader self awareness, the developmental readiness of leaders to be developed, interactional transparency, moral efficacy and potency, psychological ownership and moments that trigger authentic leadership development. Literally hundreds of empirical articles are in the works by researchers (experienced and new), who are focusing on measuring authentic leadership and relating it to a myriad of outcomes across cultures, different languages and organizational types. What we already know about authentic leadership can be summarized briefly below:

- The four component model of authentic leadership comprised of self awareness, balanced processing, transparency and moral perspective has repeatedly held up across a variety of contexts, showing that these 4 components are each important to assessing authentic leadership.
- The measure of authentic leadership has predicted different performance outcomes controlling for close leadership constructs such as transformational and ethical leadership. What this means is that authentic leadership is unique and adds to these other measures in providing a broader picture of what constitutes positive forms of leadership.
- Authentic leadership has been shown to be related to positive emotions, helping behavior, engagement, a sense of belongingness, satisfaction and effectiveness.

- Authentic leadership has also been related to both objective and subjective measure of performance in some instances over a year period of time in military, business and government organizations.

What we are seeing evolve now in the leadership literature is a very serious discussion of what constitutes authentic leadership and how it might be developed. This discussion is paralleled in the practice leadership literature with popular books and articles being written expounding the importance of selecting and developing more authentic leaders. Why? What we are seeing is an increasing prevalence of leaders being less trusted in countries around the globe. This is partially fueled by the growing impatience with despot political leaders who stay way beyond their time and destroy their countries to organizational leaders who say one thing to their shareholders or customers and another to their colleagues when self interest is at stake. Coupled with the growing level of information that everyone has, and movements to share leadership rather than have it reside in one leader, the time is propitious to continue focusing on leaders that do the right thing whether before the cameras or behind closed doors.

Clearly, the research on authentic leadership is still in the early stages of development, and there will be a lot of criticism to overcome in the academic community on how it should be conceptualized and measured. This was true for transformational leadership as well, as the academic community is typically infinitely more skeptical about new concepts than what we find in the consulting and business sector. As a scientist-practitioner, I do prefer a modicum of skepticism to what I see as a less rigorous acceptance in the business and consulting community of concepts with no proven validity. Yet, I also believe that the academic community can do a much better job of linking with the practice community in the role of scientific advisor regarding whether a new concept or measure is ready for broader use in assessment and development. It is clear to me, that we should be both serving the same purpose: Making sure the most authentic leaders are placed in leadership roles and how we work together is clearly relevant to that goal.

In closing, the discussion of authenticity goes back to the earliest moments in human history whether in scholarly discussions among the Greeks and Romans, or simply with someone standing in the woods wondering whether the signs being communicated by another individual or group are genuine or potentially masking a threat. It is impossible for me to envision a field of leadership and practice without a deep discussion of what constitutes authentic leadership and its development. And over the last five years, that discussion is well along the way to enhancing what we will eventually reliably describe as an authentic leader.

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