

# 1. Introduction: authentic leadership: clashes, convergences and coalescences

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When we were invited by Edward Elgar Publishing to edit a book about authentic leadership, we were both a bit sceptical. Authentic leadership? Isn't that just a 1990s repackaging of transformational leadership? What does it actually mean, anyway? Given the contested nature of 'authenticity' itself, how would anyone know whether or not a leader was acting authentically? These were just some of the questions which nagged us as we began to consider the project. Scepticism soon morphed into intrigue as we began to delve a bit more deeply into the issues at the heart of our unease. Our reservations coalesced into two prime questions, which we introduce here as a way of framing the book as a whole.

First, we both start from the premise that leadership is a relational phenomenon, not something that can ever be distilled down to the actions of one 'leader', whether 'authentic' or not. Instead, we understand leading to be something that involves taking up the leader 'role' – a part required by a particular socio-historic 'moment' – rather than being something that a person 'is' (Ladkin 2010; Spiller et al. 2010). In contrast to such a view, much of the authentic leadership literature focuses on the individual 'leader' (with a few notable exceptions such as Algera and Lips-Wiersma 2012 and Leroy et al. 2012). A key challenge, then, is 'What are the implications of a relational view of leadership for the concept of "authentic leadership"?' This is an underpinning question which informs many of the chapters in the book, either explicitly or implicitly.

A second difficulty we have with the concept centres on the nature of the 'self' and what it means to 'be' one's self authentically. Given that 'authenticity' is generally tethered to the 'self' (in that authenticity is often coached as 'being one's "self"'), how that 'self' is conceptualized is key to its possibilities for its 'authentic' enactment. Once again, we both

shy away from the notion of the self as a clearly defined, well-bounded entity which seems to underpin much of the authentic leadership canon. Instead we understand the 'self' to be formed in relationships, and moreover to be a fluid 'work in process' rather than easily defined or even experienced. The text reflects the ways in which others are similarly preoccupied with this question. Together we ask 'What are the implications for authentic leadership if the self is theorized as fluid, formed through engagement with contexts, and multi-voiced?'

The book is thus largely informed by a relational, processual way of understanding both 'leadership' and the 'self'. Our authors tease out the implications of this stance for how authentic leadership is experienced, how it might be developed and, ultimately, the value it might have within our contemporary context. For yes, amid the copious amount of critique you will find within these pages, there is a thread which reveals the potential value of authentic leadership – even if that value is not quite aligned with more heroic renderings of the concept.

Before launching you into the main body of the text, we present our own take on what we are hearing in our authors' stories, theories and arguments. Organized as 'clashes', 'convergences' and 'coalescences', what follows is a meta-level view of their offerings to alert you to some of the undercurrents we experience as we read their work. (Of course, you will find your own, as well!) The chapter ends by describing the way the book is organized and the kinds of writing you will find within it.

## CLASHES

Many of the views within the book clash with earlier writings about authentic leadership. Here we highlight key challenges to that theory, as well as noting ways in which our authors' ideas clash with one another's. As mentioned above, the clash which perhaps sits at the centre of contestation concerns the nature of the 'self' itself.

### **The Nature of the Self**

Much of the authentic leadership literature promotes the notion of the self as an autonomous, self-sufficient inner essence which can be referred to in order to choose authentic action as a leader (Gardner et al. 2005; George 2003). From such a perspective, being authentic involves the relatively straightforward task of acting in a way which is congruent with that unified sense of 'self'. However, we cannot assume the 'self' operates or is constructed in such an autonomous, unified way. The

notion that the ‘true self’ operates at its best when unencumbered by the world of others denies a patina of forces that interplay to forge a person, such as the political, cultural, historical, economic and gendered forces inherent in organizational life. Many of our contributors clash with an understanding of the self as a vacuum-packed monolith or a singular coherent self that stands in complete autonomy to everyone and everything else.

For instance, Mats Alvesson and Stefan Sveningsson argue that the privileging of an essentialist, individualized self promotes elitist leader centrism. Caroline Clarke, Clare Kelliher and Doris Schedlitzki question the ontological acrobatics involved in both identifying one’s ‘true self’ and enacting such a self consistently and constantly. Privileging a leader’s self-knowledge, says Rita Gardiner, comes at the expense of intersubjectivity, a capacity essential to more relational views of leadership.

A number of our authors refer to both the benefits and the drawbacks in understanding the self primarily through self-reflection by referring to Plato’s Cave. Certainly, retreating for the purposes of self-reflection is healthy for the human soul, and caves, metaphorical or otherwise, can offer fortified respite. While the ability to distance oneself to gain perspective can be conducive to effective leadership, a number of our contributors warn that such distancing ought not to become cave-like. Helen Nicholson and Brigid Carroll, for instance, raise concerns about flaccid self-indulgence and self-absorption, which can be fostered by too much distancing. They wonder how authentic leadership, with its focus on the self, can actually produce the selfless and enlightened leaders that it claims to. Echoing this concern, Clarke, Kelliher and Schedlitzki observe the cave-like effect of a ‘social vacuum’ that has little regard for contextual information.

Owain Smolović Jones and Keith Grint go even further to suggest that Plato’s Allegory is an ‘elitist piece of philosophizing’ whereupon only an ‘exalted few’ can ‘access such true forms of knowledge and wisdom’: ‘Only a select few are able to make sense of the shadows on the wall of the cave (private reflection) and to return to the world of mortals to tell them (dictate) how they should go about their lives (leading)’ (p. 22).

In concluding they argue that authenticity is not ‘a matter for “pure” caves but one for the “polluted” world’ (p. 23) and cannot be ‘restricted to the prison of the solitary individual, outside of social relations’ (p. 21). The dismissal of authenticity to the horizons of the self’s mind is highly problematic if it marginalizes relationships and contexts.

As well as finding problems with knowing one’s self solely through self-reflection, we observe a movement away from theorizing that

positions the self as the sole arbiter of what is 'true'. Supporting such a view Dail Fields notes, 'Referring to one's self as the barometer of authenticity is a necessary but not sufficient aspect of being perceived as an authentic leader' (p. 133). His empirically based work questions the extent to which followers experience authenticity as something which is quite so self-defined.

Field's work begins to suggest another key clash many of our authors raise: the tension between the performative requirements of taking up the leading role and the aspiration to do so 'authentically'.

### **Performing Authentically and the Requirements of Leading**

If leading is theorized as an activity which involves taking up a particular role, inherent within the idea of 'role' is the requirement to bring certain aspects of the self to that role and leave others behind. A telling account of how a young leadership workshop participant, Ned, makes sense of this requirement is provided by Nicholson and Carroll. Ned suggests that 'identity switching stuff', as he calls it, is 'permission to marshal a whole array of selves to the task of leading'(p. 293). They reveal how Ned sleuths among his portfolio of selves to decide which one is most 'appropriate' according to the outcome he is seeking. This creates an ethical dilemma for Ned of being 'manipulative and misleading'. Approaching this issue from a different perspective, David M. Boje, Catherine A. Helmuth and Rohny Saylor's conjecture that working with multiple selves provides an opportunity and invitation to be aware of any 'dominant' narrative that silences possible other-selves. They go as far as to suggest 'there are so many simultaneous little-selves in authentic polyphony that a single voice is essentially inauthentic'(p. 276).

The way in which a context itself can demand that a leader enact different aspects of himself is demonstrated by Joanne B. Ciulla's account of Nelson Mandela. In this case, the needs of followers for Mandela to take up the role he did in South Africa's history trumped any benefit of his acting solely from his singular, perhaps more 'authentic' self. She surmises that:

At some point followers expect them to play a role that is bigger than they are; and they cannot refuse to play it. After such leaders play these roles for a while, they and the rest of the world forget or no longer know who they really are. Hence, it may be that, during Mandela's long walk to freedom, Mandela the man got lost in Mandela the movement ... (p. 171)

A second performative challenge for leaders aspiring to take up the role authentically relates to their expression of ‘true’ emotion. Leaders stand on the cusp of their organization’s boundaries with the external world. In that position, they often face uncertainty, ambiguity and incoherence and the question arises about the extent to which their ‘authentic’ emotions should be revealed in such contexts. Clarke, Kelliher and Schedlitzki point out the high degree of emotional labour required of leaders and clash with the idea that genuineness and openness are fundamentals of authentic leadership. They maintain that leaders must from time to time ‘labor under false pretences to move away from the “real self” they wish to conceal’(p. 84). Alvesson and Sveningsson echo the point at a more mundane level, suggesting that revealing what we truly feel about our colleagues or organizational situations would not always make for smooth social relations. Lauren Zander takes this argument to its extreme by suggesting that leaders can hide behind abusive or dysfunctional behaviour by claiming it to be ‘authentic’ and therefore ‘all right’. Her chapter asks what happens if a leader is authentically a real jerk.

Is it disingenuous to find the facet of ourselves that best fits a given situation or context? Won’t people ‘sniff out’ leaders who are being totally false? With these questions we approach the fine line those taking the leader role must tread – between enacting it in a way demanded by the role, and doing so in a way which somehow incorporates a genuine aspect of the self in that moment.

This brings us to a final aspect of the ‘performative’ clash – whether it is in any way desirable for flaws and weaknesses to be part of how leaders take up their role in order to be authentic. As elaborated by Alvesson and Sveningsson, much of the authentic leadership literature characterizes authentic leaders as saviour-like paragons of perfection. Many of the accounts within this book hint that perhaps one’s inauthentic possibilities or imperfections help to shine light on the full potentialities of a particular leadership ‘moment’. Such a notion indicates the last ‘clash’ we attend to here, that of the disparity between the often idealized theorization of authentic leadership, and how it is realized and experienced in practice.

### **Too Good to Be True**

The third ‘meta-clash’ highlights the idealization of authentic leaders who are portrayed as more god-like than human despite the realities of being mere flesh and bone. Suze Wilson emphasizes this point by launching her chapter with a lyric from a song by Joan Osborne:

What if God was one of us  
 Just a slob like one of us  
 Just a stranger on the bus  
 Trying to make his way home (p. 55)

How can any human being aspiring to enact ‘authenticity’ possibly achieve the high standards set by many proponents of the theory?

Alvesson and Sveningsson sense a return to leader-centrism inherent in the topic itself, whereby authentic leaders are cast as ‘moral giants who can only be imperfectly mimicked by ordinary mortals’ (p. 51). Smolović Jones and Grint raise a similar concern, reminding us of Joseph Campbell’s ‘lone hero who endures great sacrifice and hardships but who emerges from a journey wiser, in touch with his or her purposeful, authentic core, having identified and engaged with trusted advisers and friends’ (p. 24). Perhaps, they suggest, tales of adventure of the hero’s individualistic journey have blinded us (albeit the hero’s feats are often accomplished with the help of a posse of superhuman aides). No one seems too interested in the banal details of the hero’s ‘return’ to the ordinary world. Gardiner too questions the ‘celebration of the strong, isolated leader who by dint of willpower and inner strength has almost superhuman abilities to change environments and their peoples’ (p. 67).

In a poignant account Nicholson and Carroll reveal the pressure that a participant in a leadership development programme, Annie, puts herself through in order to somehow approach the ideal of authenticity in the way she leads her team at work. Through her journal Annie reveals:

I want to be amazing. I want to be recognized and valued as someone who makes a difference. ... I want to be someone that others see as inspirational, and a role model. ... Essentially, I want to be the best and be recognized for it. On undertaking this journey, I need to find my authentic voice to make it happen. I need to stop hiding in the shadows and take responsibility for making myself heard. I need to stop the self-doubt and drop the self-destructive tools that I have collected along the way. ... I want to be someone that doesn’t constantly worry about people judging them and this affecting the person that I am. I want to be someone that is true to myself and my values (p. 287).

During the course of the leadership development programme, Annie’s journal entries expose the near impossibility of the task she has set herself. Furthermore the self-referential nature of the way she goes about trying to achieve authenticity leaves her feeling isolated and disengaged from her colleagues. Paradoxically, Annie has to learn the value of engaging with others in order to understand herself better, and thereby to become more effective in her role as leader.

Here it may also be helpful to consider the way in which an adherence to ethics is often included in authentic leadership theorizing. This requirement is challenged by a number of our authors. Chief among them are Galit Eilam-Shamir and Boas Shamir, who share findings from the results of an ongoing study into the life stories of senior executives in Israel. The great majority of the highly successful participants in the study clearly demonstrate how the need for achievement had influenced their careers. Interestingly, none spoke of the need to achieve results for the common good as the key motivating factor in their lives. Eilam-Shamir and Shamir's study poses the question: can people lead effectively if they are authentic in the sense of being true to themselves, yet they do not conform to the main current definitions of authentic leaders because they are primarily motivated by personal aspirations?

Finally, the discrepancy between the theory and practice of authentic leadership is illustrated through the disrobing of authentic leader exemplars in their flawed (and human) glory. Through the writing of Ciulla, Smolović Jones and Grint we discover how Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa and Abraham Lincoln may not have always acted from a place of 'total authenticity'. Detailed readings of their lives reveal how they were self-doubting or discerning in what they showed the outer world. Does this mean they are any less deserving of our admiration? The role of exemplars and what they show us about authentic leadership is elaborated later in the chapter. For now, let us turn to the second meta-theme of the book: the way in which our authors' ideas converge.

## CONVERGENCES

Where 'Clashes' introduced points of difference raised by our authors, ways in which their thinking builds on current theory or meshes together to forge new understandings are highlighted in 'Convergences'.

### **The Importance of 'Letting Go'**

Ideas from Arendt (1958, 1971), Guignon (2004), Heidegger (1962), Sartre (1958) and Taylor (1991) all appear within the text. Interestingly, one of the recurring themes which emerges from the way in which these philosophers' writings are used concerns the importance of 'letting go' within 'authentic' living. Dominik Heil, for instance, suggests that, rather than leaders 'claiming' the lives of workers to the world of the organization, authentic leaders let themselves be claimed by the organization.

In such letting go, there is the potential for reciprocity between leaders and followers.

Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones show how the notion of ‘letting go’ applies to organizational contexts through their research into relations between leaders and ‘clever’ followers. Their study reveals how vital it is for leaders of highly skilled followers in high-tech, creative and professional industries to get out of the way and enable their followers to get on with their work. ‘Clevers’, as Goffee and Jones call them, have little regard for whether or not their leaders are ‘authentic’ to their own values or dreams, but rather value the authenticity of their leaders’ expertise. In a similar vein, through a case study of an orchestral performance, Ralph Bathurst and Trudie Cain introduce the notion that, in order to allow the authenticity of a musical performance to be realized, the conductor must step aside and ‘let’ the musicians perform. Intrinsic to letting go is the idea that, rather than acting from their ‘true self’, leaders need to develop the capacity to act ‘self-lessly’ in order for leadership to flourish. Building on this, Goffee and Jones propose that, rather than aspiring to be authentic themselves, leaders might more helpfully strive to be ‘leaders of authenticity’ (p. 211).

### **Power and Status**

A second key convergence amongst our authors concerns issues of status and power. Perhaps the most complete account of how these factors affect authentic leadership relations is offered by Steven S. Taylor. Drawing from his training as an actor, he explains that being fully present in each moment produces a ‘genuine, live and unplanned response to what happens on stage even when you know exactly what the other actors are going to say and do’ (p. 179). However, playing status games stops us from being fully present and open to others in the present moment. Therefore, he suggests that engaging in such games – even the stable, well-defined ones such as leader–follower – is an obstacle for relating. It’s not quite as easy as leaders just not playing higher status with their followers, however, because status games are relational. Followers may lower their status in order to experience the safety of having a higher-status leader around. Those taking up the leader role must be aware of their own tendencies for enacting lower or higher status, as well as their followers’ tendencies, in order to engage authentically with one another.

Bathurst and Cain develop these ideas one step further in their telling of President Obama’s visit to Japan in 2009. On greeting the Japanese emperor, Obama took a deep bow, which for him may have been an



authentic enactment of his regard for the emperor's culture and position. However, the President was subsequently criticized in the press for bowing in a way which was interpreted as deferential. Media reports at the time suggested there was a constituency within the United States which did not want its head of state demonstrating 'low status' in relation to the Japanese emperor. Power, status and authenticity are thus not just forces in play between individual leaders and followers but also the products of societal and historical contexts. B. Parker Ellen III, Ceasar Douglas, Gerald R. Ferris and Pamela L. Perrewé raise the question of whether or not political acumen and authenticity can operate in a complementary way. Their chapter suggests there is work to be done for those taking up the leader role in balancing any desire to do so authentically with the political demands of the contexts within which they operate. This leads to the third point of convergence we see among our authors: the idea that authenticity is a process to be 'worked' rather than a quality of self to be 'dipped into'.

### **Working It**

Some theorizing of authentic leadership implies that 'being true to one's self' is a fairly simple process involving merely looking inward and acting in accordance with what is discovered there. What is often missed out, and what this volume highlights, is the work required to develop the kind of inner knowing which can serve as a worthy guide for a leader's action.

One of the key steps in developing such mature, reliable inner knowing is the ability to be fully present – both with one's self and simultaneously with others and the unfolding moment as well. Taylor suggests that the capacity to be fully present is absolutely vital to whether or not others experience us as being authentic. This does not mean, however, that the present moment and how it is experienced are necessarily tension-free. In working at being present fully in the flux of existing moments, it is important not to get trapped in lackadaisical binaries (that is, individual versus collective, inner versus outer). Instead, to be fully 'here' is to dwell in the spaces 'in between' the perplexities and complexities to discover what is true in the 'and' moment (that is, individual and collective, inner and outer). Authenticity thus appears as something that is forged and honed at the intersections where we meet our potential selves and others' selves, in a multiplicity of contexts and circumstances. Like a Manchurian's sword, being authentic calls upon a sharpening of clarity.

Niki Harré's chapter offers something of her own experience of working towards a more authentic way of living life in such a way. In it

she reveals how her choices about the work she does and how she does it, along with quotidian decisions about how she travels or what she buys to wear, have helped her forge a life which feels more ‘concordant’. Her story demonstrates how this work is continuous and how the forging of authenticity is somehow intimately concerned with ‘the self’, while at the same time free of constraining ideals of what that self ‘should’ be.

This tension from the need to ‘be one’s self’ while also ‘working with and on the self’ underpins Zander’s contribution, which speaks to the consequences of enacting ‘who one is’ within a business context. As a practitioner working in the field of leader development, she points out that just being a jerk, because that is ‘who you are’, is not good enough: ‘When you are overly critical, non-communicative, crass, judgemental or rigid, you are probably really being “yourself” – but you are *not* at your best; you are just using honesty as a cop-out and hurting your business in the process’ (p. 279).

In summary, it may indeed be important to turn one’s gaze inwards as a starting point for authentic action. However, our authors converge on a view which suggests that what is found there must be balanced with an appreciation of the present moment and its requirements, as well as a healthy dose of self-critique, before acting from that inner knowing alone.

## COALESCENCES

Each of the six parts of the book constitutes a ‘coalescence’ of ideas around a certain topic area. These pools of thinking enable similar issues to be addressed from a variety of viewpoints. Here we highlight one which actually constitutes a formal part of the book, and two additional themes which have emerged from our overview of the book’s contents.

### **Authenticity in the Context of Institutions**

This coalescence forms Part V of the book: ‘Authenticity at the intersections of identity and institutions’. The authors who contribute to this part all attend to the inherent challenge for leaders in enacting their ‘true selves’ (whatever form that might take) while being situated in contexts which expect something different from those taking up the leader role.

For instance, Amanda Sinclair writes about the difficulties women such as the former New Zealand public sector chief Christine Rankin encounter when they enact their authentic selves through their mode of self-presentation. In Rankin’s case, the earrings and skirts she wore were

overtly attacked as indicators that she was not serious enough to hold such a high public office. Doyin Atewologun elaborates on a similar difficulty for leaders of Black or ethnic minority origins working within dominantly White contexts. Her empirical study indicates that ‘fitting in’ to the dominant discourse rather than being ‘true’ to one’s racial identity can be key to career advancement. In both Sinclair’s work and that of Atewologun, the question of how far individuals can go in expressing what makes them unique, while still fulfilling the needs of followers to have someone who is ‘prototypical’ of them as their leader, is raised.

A similar tension between what might constitute an individual leader’s ‘sense of him or herself’ and the demands of a particular context are apparent for those working across boundaries of national culture. Lake Wang and Kim Turnbull James’s study of Chinese nationals working in multinational corporations run by managers other than Chinese shows that, if Chinese managers within these contexts act in accordance with their own culture, their behaviours are not read as being indicative of ‘leaders’ from the Western viewpoint. Yet ‘authenticity’ is a highly rated virtue by Chinese leaders. Once again, the idea comes through that authenticity has to be worked in the tension between the individual’s sense of self and the enveloping context. Also writing from the Chinese context, Yi Han proposes that the institutions of which one is part will always influence how the leader role is enacted, and suggests that, in light of this, potential leaders should choose the institutions to which they commit themselves with care.

The theme emerging from these writings indicates that just ‘being authentically oneself’ can be problematic if that self is informed by a way of being other than that of the dominant social grouping. A body of literature which speaks to this dilemma is that of social identity theory. In applying the tenets of this theory to leadership, writers such as Haslam et al. (2010) suggest that, in order to be accepted as a leader of a group, the individual must in some way portray her or himself as prototypical of the group. One implication of this would be that individuals who ‘fit’ that prototypicality ‘naturally’, especially in terms of their gender or ethnic or cultural heritage, might be given more leeway to express themselves ‘authentically’. For those who do not fit in the same way, being ‘authentic’ may be more problematic.

Mark Julien, Barry Wright and Deborah McPhee offer a means by which organizations aspiring to address such issues might do so. Writing from their research with Canadian Aboriginal peoples, they suggest that, rather than having Aboriginal employees sell out on themselves, an organizational strategy to foster a more inclusive culture would be to develop an Aboriginal employee resource group. Such a group could

potentially foster a sense of community through which Aboriginal members might better connect with their own culture and find ways of expressing it more fully within their organization.

All of the chapters within Part V also point to the second coalescence we highlight here: the relational nature of authenticity.

### **The Relational Nature of Authenticity**

Repeatedly authors in the text offer the view that, rather than being a quality which is generated solely through self-reference, authenticity is created through and in the process of relating. Percolating beneath the surface of this argument is the question ‘Who is authenticity for?’ Certainly, a sense of acting in alignment with one’s own values and beliefs is key to an individual’s experience of operating with a healthy sense of well-being. However, within leadership relations, this self-referential experience of authenticity is not what is centrally important; rather what is vital is the sense that what is passing between individuals has a grounding in something ‘real’.

In his chapter, for instance, Taylor opens with the notion that two aspects are vital to the experience of authenticity within leadership relations: first, there must be some kind of self-exposure and vulnerability present; and, second, that self-exposure must be enacted within the context of a relationship. Paradoxically there are inklings which suggest that in order to come to a more self-referentially coherent experience of ‘authenticity’ one must reach out to others as well. This is a key lesson for Annie, the participant in a leadership development programme mentioned previously which Nicholson and Carroll write about. She learns that ‘it is possible to commit to learning and being authentic right in the midst of her relationships and context at work and that this has outcomes she perhaps hoped for but didn’t know how to realize’ (p. 295). In other words, it is not by continual navel-gazing that even a self-referential experience of authenticity is achieved, but through engaging with others. Drawing from the work of Guignon, Nicholson and Carroll firmly locate authenticity as a social, rather than a personal, virtue.

Bathurst and Cain take the importance of relationality even further in their notion of *communitas*: ‘Our appropriation of *communitas* and use of the ecological metaphor reveals a desire to understand authenticity as a collaborative phenomenon that allows for multiple expressions, rather than striving for a unitary view’ (p. 196).

*Communitas* captures the relational discourse of other contributors. The medley of features that Bathurst and Cain; Julien, Wright and

McPhee; Harré; and Nicholson and Carroll in particular touch upon include: engaging in dialogue; being open to, and enquiring of, others; letting multiple expressions and diverse views emerge; serving the community; developing reciprocity in relations of power; showing up as whole person; being wholehearted; being mindful of how gestures convey messages; and being concerned for the well-being of others.

The idea of community is not new to authentic leadership theorizing. Eilam-Shamir and Shamir highlight a number of authors who discuss this ethos. For instance, George and Sims (2007, p. xxxi) suggest shifting orientation from an individualistic to a more collectivistic one as a basis for authentic leadership. Perhaps what this volume emphasizes more strongly is a sense of fluidity and becomingness in how *communitas* is created. Authenticity cannot be pinned down to an ‘-ism’ (for example, essentialism, individualism, collectivism) and cannot be achieved through adherence to a prescriptive set of competences and ethics. Rather, here authenticity is more frequently conceptualized as a verb, an action that is continuously, dynamically unfolding as a process. We are meant to be verbs, says Quinn (2012), who draws upon Buckminster Fuller, who once said: ‘I live on Earth at present, and I don’t know what I am. I know that I am not a category. I am not a thing – a noun. I seem to be a verb, an evolutionary process – an integral function of the universe’ (p. 69).

As contexts change, observes Quinn, we have the opportunity to evolve into more complex and effective versions of ourselves. As we become more skilful at personal adaptation, life becomes more meaningful and we are able to be more authentic and influential in leading others.

### **The Value of Authenticity**

This brings us to the final coalescence emerging from amongst our authors: the value of authenticity as a quality of leadership relations. It is particularly important to bring this to the surface, as much of the writing in the book critiques a certain notion of authenticity and how it has been applied to leadership. With all of its problematic aspects, our authors seem to be saying that there is still something of worth in the notion of authentic leadership – especially to the extent that the winnowing away of ‘saviour’ stereotypes of authentic leadership can release some of the uncertainty, vulnerability and difficulties that come as part of taking up the leader role.

Where does this value lie? There are four chapters in particular which respond to this question. Interestingly, all speak to contemporary concerns. The first is Ghislaine Caulat’s chapter about the value of authenticity in the virtual space. Based on empirical work over the last ten years of working with teams and their leaders who conduct significant amounts

of their work with one another online, Caulat suggests that the experience of ‘knowing’ one another – particularly at a personal level – is an essential ingredient for effective virtual working.

The second chapter which brings renewed appreciation of the role of authentic leadership is by Rodger Spiller. Writing from the context of the financial investment sector, Spiller suggests that shrewd shareholders are becoming more alert to the extent to which organizational leaders worth backing are genuinely concerned with longer-term and broader interests. Such a long, broad view, he argues, is a hallmark of both responsible and authentic leaders – and an orientation which ought to become more highly valued by investors.

Many companies are seeking to create value through innovation, and Lotte Darsø brings innovation and authenticity together in the executive development programmes she runs at the Danish School of Education. Neither authenticity nor innovation can be learned, she says. However, through engaging in a process which includes direct experience, reflection and discovery, participants together find ways of forging authentic responses in the face of the unknown.

Finally, Niki Harré’s effervescent chapter draws upon her own life in exploring how intellectual knowing, intuitive, values-based knowing and the knowing that comes from practice intertwine in creating an authentic way of living. Situated in the context of her transformation to becoming a sustainability advocate and leader, her account shimmers with a kind of energy indicative of the value of a way of being in the world which is at once connected to one’s self, while open to the possibilities of what that self might become.

These chapters point to the importance of praxis and the value that can be released when the promise of authentic leadership theory is effectuated in practice. Caulat, Spiller, Darsø and Harré encourage us to move from the level of wishful thinking and show how authentic leadership theorizing can be developed, practised and lived both personally and professionally. Importantly, in bringing us stories from the virtual, investment, innovation and sustainability spaces these authors show how, if we really want to effect change and create value for the whole, then it must begin with how we live our part.

## A NOTE ABOUT EXEMPLARS

We could hardly consider this a comprehensive view of authentic leadership without including exemplars: those individuals to whom we perennially turn as idealized authentic leaders. Within the text three

oft-cited individuals come under scrutiny: Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa and Abraham Lincoln. Within the chapters referring to these individuals, authors expose ways in which each does not quite match the theory about what constitutes an ‘authentic leader’. Rather than suggesting therefore that ‘authentic leadership’ as a concept is of no use (since even these near saint-like people cannot make the grade), we pause to consider what their stories reveal about the lived challenges of taking up the leader role authentically.

First, it is important to notice the significance of the struggles each of them faced. These people acted on the world stage in important and challenging ways. They were part of world events which they shaped, but which also shaped them. Their authenticity is thus a product of their own courage and commitment rising in response to world events taking place in specific social and historical moments. In this way, their lives reveal authenticity arising in the interplay between self and context, and how a challenging context perhaps provides a particular crucible for the creation of an authentic response.

Some of the discussions touched upon in this chapter seem particularly to resonate with the way these exemplars took up their leader roles on the world stage. They seem to have let themselves be claimed by the world while simultaneously creating a space for others to step into. In this way they lived as ‘verbs’ even as they became ‘movements’. They did not recede to a cave-like and cloistered existence even when imprisoned, as illustrated most notably in Mandela’s life. They lived relationally even when relationships were riven with strife. The presence they brought to their human journey illuminates something about our own. Perhaps the insight offered by those writing about them here concerns the question of how they actually found the strength and courage to proceed as they did, even when they themselves questioned and doubted. Perhaps that is the ultimate challenge to any of us who would aspire to lead, or indeed live, authentically.

## HOW THE BOOK IS ORGANIZED

The book is divided into six pools of thinking (the six parts). Within each pool are three types of writings. First, there are longer ‘essays’: more extended discussions of key questions and concerns which are generally shaped more like traditional academic papers. Some of them are theoretically based; others share empirical studies. There are two other shorter, more informal types of contributions you will also find. ‘Viewpoints’ present a particular ‘take’ on an issue, and ‘cameos’ offer illustrations or

stories which illuminate aspects of authentic leadership which may otherwise remain invisible.

The first pool, 'Groundings: historic, critical and subjective perspectives', places the construct of authentic leadership within a historical and philosophical context. A number of different stories are offered about how authentic leadership has developed since the term was first used within organizational contexts. Smolović Jones and Grint take us through the early developments of the theory, and indicate the way in which it has changed over time. Complementing their view, Alvesson and Sveningsson offer a critique of early writings, and suggest key turning points in how thinking has developed. Wilson traces the development of authentic leadership discourse from its transformational roots and reconsiders its relevancy today. Two different philosophical perspectives of the term 'authenticity' itself are provided. The first is offered by Gardiner, who provides fresh insight through Hannah Arendt's notion of 'uniqueness'. Heil revisits Heidegger's notion of 'letting' to provide a counterpoint to more agentic approaches to leadership.

The conversation then moves to the second pool, 'Being true to the self: figments, fragments or facets'. Clarke, Kelliher and Schedlitzki open this part with their investigation of the emotional labour of authentic leadership. Eilam-Shamir and Shamir provide a provocative peek into the life stories, personal ambitions and authenticity of highly motivated and achievement-oriented leaders based in Israel. We are taken on an evocative journey by Harré, who draws on her own experience to offer three ways of knowing authentic leadership.

We then dip into the third pool of 'Markers: reading the signs of authentic leadership'. Fields sets the scene by describing an empirically based study of followers' assessments of a leader's authenticity. Ciulla follows with a riveting search for the 'authentic' Nelson Mandela. Based on archival materials and interviews with some of the key players in South Africa during apartheid and in its aftermath, Ciulla's account questions the extent to which the needs of a historical moment take precedence over the needs of an individual's commitment to their authentic self. Taylor takes us into the actors' world and uncovers the inner workings of playing status and its entrapments for authentic leadership. The virtual space is then considered by Caulat, who argues for the importance of 'the personal' in developing leadership across digital divides.

As noted previously, a significant amount of theorizing in this volume concerns the relational dimensions of authenticity, and the next pool, 'Relational spaces: coming into authenticity through others', focuses on this aspect. Bathurst and Cain introduce the notion of the 'ecology' of



leadership in their opening chapter. This idea is elaborated through two case studies which chart the journey from authenticity to *communitas*. The challenges associated with leading ‘clevers’ are highlighted by Goffee and Jones, who draw from their empirically based study to investigate authentic followership in the knowledge economy. The world of finance is opened up by Spiller, who introduces the perspectives of responsible investors and how they might define authentic leadership. He highlights the fundamentally important role of shareholders in bringing about the changes authentic leadership literature seeks. Finally, Ellen, Douglas, Ferris and Perrewé consider whether authentic and political leadership are really so far apart as they might appear at first blush.

‘Authenticity at the intersections of identity and institutions’ is examined within the next pool of thought. Sinclair reveals some of the challenges women leaders face in expressing their authenticity when taking the leader role. Black and ethnic minority leaders working within predominantly White male organizations who seek to express their authentic ethnic identity are then considered by Atewologun. The isomorphic tendencies in multinational corporations to promote those who match culturally determined templates for ‘leader’ are then explored by Wang and Turnbull-James, who question whether it is possible to be an authentic leader when there is cultural misalignment. Indigenous world-views enter the debate through Julien, Wright and McPhee’s insights into authentic Canadian Aboriginal leadership perspectives. This part is rounded off by Han, who discusses the Chinese military ethic and the spirit of business leaders by looking at how leaders carry forward their learning from institutional life.

Issues associated with ‘Developing authentic leaders’ are considered in the book’s final part. Drawing on his work with practising managers, Boje along with Helmuth and Saylor considers how storytelling techniques can be used to help integrate our ‘multiple selves’ in a way that leads to more authentic leader performance. Writing from a practitioner’s perspective, Zander argues it is not good enough for leaders to hide behind the mask of authenticity if their way of being in the world is harmful to colleagues and ultimately to the business itself. Darsø takes us into her world of developing innovative leaders and highlights the kind of spaces and processes which her own experience shows to be most conducive to developing authentic creativity. Finally, Nicholson and Carroll end the volume with stories from their practice of developing leaders which are interpreted and enriched with the philosophy of Charles Guignon and Charles Taylor. We believe theirs to be a most fitting way to end the book, as they explicitly pose the questions: ‘Who is authentic leadership for?’ and ‘What purposes should it serve?’ These, we

suggest, are vital questions for all of us who would theorize about, or hope to develop, authentic leaders.

We hope this collection encourages its readers both to dwell with these questions and to welcome their own, in an ongoing dialogue about the challenges as well as possibilities of this form of leadership. One of the hardest things about editing this collection has been ‘keeping the lid’ on these tantalizing pieces of work. We are thrilled to free them now for others to savour.

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