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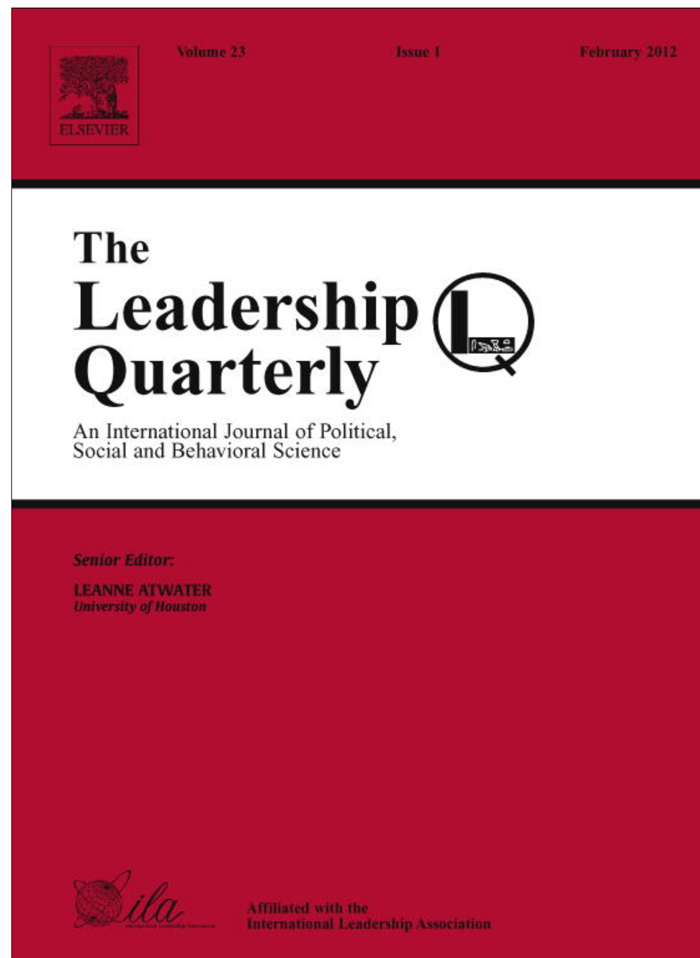

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Radical Authentic Leadership: Co-creating the conditions under which all members of the organization can be authentic

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ABSTRACT

Recently, in response to ethical challenges and loss of meaning within business, leadership theory and research has seen a proliferation of literature on 'Authentic Leadership'. In this paper we argue that Authentic Leadership (AL), in the way it is currently theorized, is in danger of not reaching its stated objectives. We systematically address the "paradoxes" and shortcomings in current theory and suggest an extended focus of study. To do so, we draw on four existential authenticity themes: 1) inauthenticity is inevitable; 2) authenticity requires creating one's own meaning; 3) authenticity does not imply goal and value congruence, 4) authenticity is not intrinsically ethical. We systematically pursue the implications of these themes for the future development of Authentic Leadership theory and propose a more radical form of AL in which the focus of study shifts from the individual leader to understanding the conditions under which all members of the organization behave authentically. We suggest this is more likely to achieve the objectives of Authentic Leadership theory.

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Recently there has been a proliferation of literature on 'Authentic Leadership' (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner, Avolio, & Walumbwa, 2005; Hofman, 2008; Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008). The objectives of Authentic Leadership (AL) theory are twofold; 1) AL is to address the ethical crises in corporations. It is to be a "moral compass" (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing and Peterson, 2008), help battle corporate scandals and management malfeasance (C. D. Cooper, Scandura, & Schriesheim, 2005), foster ethical climates (Gardner et al., 2005) and aid to conduct business in an ethical and socially responsible manner (May, Hodges, Chan, & Avolio, 2003); 2) AL is to help people find meaning and connection in their work (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Illies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005) and increase the well-being of organizational members (Illies, et al., 2005). Ethical challenges as well as increased employee anxiety, mistrust and lack of meaning (W. L. Gardner & Schermerhorn, 2004) collectively "call for a renewed focus on what constitutes genuine leadership" (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 316).

In this paper we set out to systematically address the tensions in the current Authentic Leadership theory through comparing the concept of authenticity as used in leadership theory to that of the concept of authenticity as used in existential theory (D. E. Cooper, 1990; Earnshaw, 2006; Guignon & Pereboom, 1995; Heidegger, 1962; Heine, 1985; Jackson, 2005; Kelly & Kelly, 1998). We suggest that unless these tensions are systematically addressed AL theory is unlikely to reach its stated objectives. We offer an expanded focus on authenticity that does systematically address such tensions but does not place the capacity and responsibility for authenticity with the individual leader but rather with every member of the organization. In this way we also aim to shift the current focus of AL on the individual and psychological aspects of authenticity to an expanded understanding of authenticity as a relational and structural concept.

The first central thesis of our paper is that, in its haste to be operationalized, the concept of authenticity as it is currently used in authentic leadership is limited as there have not yet been sufficient attempts made to gain an understanding of the ontological

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roots of authenticity. Yet, the concept of authenticity goes to the heart of what it is to be human and hence dwelling on 'what it is to be authentically human' before asking 'what is it to be an authentic leader' seems, to us, to be essential to theory building. We aim to show that an exploration of the existential roots of the concept of authenticity holds great promise for achieving the original objectives of AL and therefore needs to be properly understood. While the roots of the concept of authenticity are somewhat contested, it has been most consistently and extensively theorized in existentialism as a way to distinguish unconscious living from a way of 'being' that is based on taking responsibility for one's life through awareness and conscious choice. Existentialists explain that an authentic state of being is desirable over a non-authentic existence and are concerned with understanding the extent to which people realize and accept responsibility for being in their own life.

As Heidegger (1962), in whose work the concept of authenticity is explored in most depth, writes:

> The question of Being aims therefore at ascertaining the *a priori* conditions not only for the possibility of the sciences which examine entities as entities of such and such a type, and, in so doing, already operate with an understanding of Being, but also for the possibility of those ontologies themselves which are prior to the ontical sciences and which provide their foundations. Basically, all ontology, no matter how rich and firmly compacted a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains blind and perverted from its ownmost aim, if it has not first adequately clarified the meaning of Being, and conceived this clarification as its fundamental task (p. 31)

There are increasing attempts to develop techniques to create and measure AL while the ontological question of 'what is it to be authentically human' has not yet been systematically pursued. Yet, as we will argue, this question goes to the heart of AL.

A second central thesis to this paper is that while the self is an important reference point for assessing authenticity, it is not the only, and possibly not the most important reference point for AL. Authenticity is not just a question of 'being true to self', but also of being true to "self-in-relationship" (Erickson, 1995, p. 139) as well as to "self *and* world" (Terry, 1993, p. 141). Even though current AL recognizes authenticity as a relational concept, it primarily focuses on such concepts as self-awareness, self-development and self-regulation. The emphasis is on both the positive and psychological dimensions of 'being true to self, and how this can be transmitted from the authentic leader to the follower. In exploring the concept of existential authenticity we address an important concern currently expressed in relation to AL theory (and leadership theory in general) that "the emphasis on leaders being true to themselves so that they can influence others through displays of their values and beliefs remains curiously one-sided" (Eagly, 2005, p. 460).

In existential philosophy the concept of authenticity is consistently described in relation to external forces, influences and pressures such as our relationship with others and the material world in which we find ourselves (Heidegger, 1962). This is also succinctly demonstrated in the broad range of descriptions of authenticity across other academic disciplines. In psychology, descriptions of authenticity refer to living one's life according to the needs of one's inner being, *rather than submitting to the conventions of society, one's early conditioning, or an authoritarian system* (Fromm, 1942). In philosophy of art, authenticity refers to art as an expression of the artist's self, *rather than conforming to historical tradition or to that which is valued in the market place* (Kivy, 1995). The second part of these descriptions of authenticity – the inevitable external forces, pressures and influences – are not just an 'add on'. At any time the self acts and changes in response to these pressures in authentic and inauthentic ways. Even though some AL theorists recognize that authenticity "varies as a function of both internal and external factors" (Chan, Hannah, & Gardner, 2005, p. 12), insufficient attention is paid to the impact and complexity of the context in which the individual finds herself. Without proper emphasis on, and exploration of, the effect of such external pressure and influences, the understanding of the concept of authenticity will remain limited.

First, we examine the extent to which the current Authentic Leadership theory is in danger of being reduced to a 'technique', even though at the same time some of the complexities of the concept have also been recognized. This has, at times, led to limited and inconsistent theorizing because such complexities are regularly treated as awkward but small obstacles to be simultaneously mentioned and sidestepped in search of a smooth process of implementation, rather than complexities that are central to any theorizing about what it is to be human. Next, we discuss the concept of existential authenticity. We review the increasing body of literature that suggests that insights from existentialism can assist in developing leadership (and organization) theory. We address some prevalent misconceptions about existentialism and justify the particular focus we take in this paper. In the third part of this paper we compare the concepts of 'authentic leadership' and 'existential authenticity' in relation to four existential authenticity themes: 1) inauthenticity is inevitable; 2) authenticity requires creating one's own meaning; 3) authenticity does not imply goal and value congruence, 4) authenticity is not intrinsically ethical. In the final part of the paper we discuss the theoretical implications of the concept of existential authenticity for expanding Authentic Leadership and ask the question whether, and under which conditions, it can be fixed.

Authentic Leadership as technique

Authentic Leadership (AL) is considered to be a root construct which can incorporate other forms of leadership, such as transformational and ethical leadership (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004, p. 31). "The ultimate goal of scholars in this area appears to be normative in nature" and "proponents of this movement ultimately desire to train and develop leaders who will proactively foster positive environments and conduct business in an ethical, socially responsible manner" (C. D. Cooper, et al., 2005, p. 477). A large amount of quite influential Authentic Leadership theory and research has been generated by a few who appear to share this normative goal.

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AL draws on multiple fields such as ethics, leadership theory and positive scholarship (C. D. Cooper, et al., 2005, p. 477). Initially, AL was defined as a multidimensional and multilevel construct. Luthans and Avolio (2003) define AL as "a process that draws from both 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 positive self-development" (p. 243). It was deliberately defined in this way because "although this poses difficulties for measuring it, starting with this broader and more inclusive definition seemed to make sense given prior criticisms of leadership constructs for not adequately recognizing the complexity of the phenomenon, including ignoring the context in which it was embedded" (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 316). The literature on AL pays homage to the roots of the concept of authenticity. For example, Chan, Hannah and Gardner (2005) start their explanation of the concept of authenticity by referring to existentialist philosopher Sartre. Similarly, in their introduction to a special issue on Authentic Leadership for the Leadership Quarterly, Avolio and Gardner (2005) discuss the conceptual foundations of AL as being located in the work of existential psychologists such as Maslow and Rogers and Erikson, Cooley's work on human nature and Goffman's identity work. Furthermore, the importance of end-values such as justice and dignity is regularly stated (W. L. Gardner, Avolio, & Walumbwa, 2005).

However, in their applied research on the development and validation of a theory based measure, Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson (2008) choose to utilize recent social psychological theory rather than more indicative or philosophical approaches. The rationale given for this is that the psychological approach "focuses explicitly on the development of authentic leaders and authentic followers, which makes it statelike and ultimately something one can develop in leaders" (p. 93). Thus while earlier definitions of authenticity deliberately include the complexity of the concept, later work quickly translates it into a psychological state that allows theorists to arrive at something to develop in leaders.

Within AL, there is "a strong emphasis on the creation of interventions to facilitate the development of authenticity" (C. D. Cooper, et al., 2005, p. 475). Tensions between the concept of authenticity and the emphasis on training and other forms of interventions are recognized. For example, Cooper et al. (2005) acknowledge that authenticity cannot be acquired through "traditional training programs" and that AL leadership training needs to be "genuine" (p. 483). However, the implications of this are not pursued and in the meantime training programs have been developed. For example, in *The High Impact Leader*, Avolio and Luthans, (2006) write that a training program for AL development is not your typical 'learning leadership in one-to-five days' program, as self-awareness requires ongoing reflection. At the same time however, they provide "10 simple rules and a dozen guidelines for effective authentic leadership" (p. xiii).

Initially not only complexity but also the fact that leadership is a multileveled phenomenon was acknowledged. However, in its haste to arrive at suitable measures, in the majority of recent AL articles the focus has been narrowed to individual and psychological constructs such as self-awareness and self-regulatory processes whereby leaders and followers achieve authenticity and authentic relationships. Further review shows that many of such articles, while recognizing that AL is a relational concept, focus on how the leader achieves authenticity and how she then assists the follower in becoming authentic. An illustration of this can be found in Chan et al. (2005) who write: "We recognize that leadership is a multilevel phenomenon. … we choose in this chapter to focus on the intrapersonal processes of the authentic leaders, and limit our examination of the interpersonal aspects of authentic leadership to just the dyadic leader follower relationship" (p. 4–5). From subsequent research questions within this chapter, such as "how does authenticity become manifest through the leader's cognitive and behavioural self-regulation" and "how is authenticity perceived, attributed, and internalized by the follower" (p. 5), it becomes clear that while it is recognized that authenticity is a multilevel and relational concept, the research focus is on the authenticity of the leader. Eagly (2005) writes that in AL literature the relationship between leaders and followers is still framed in a one-sided manner. For example, it is suggested that the leader can role model authenticity for the follower but not that the follower could role model authenticity for the leader. This focus is not specific to AL, Golembiewski (2000) observes that the 'leader–follower' and 'leadership–followership' binaries remain sacrosanct within leadership studies, "[the leader] keeps resurfacing as the subject or object of attention despite periodic putting-in-place of the leader as person" (p. 458). However, as we will see later, such binaries are particularly problematic for AL.

In its haste to be seen to be relevant, current AL theory almost immediately rejects the structural implications of authenticity and with that, as we will discuss in the next sections, its ontological roots. Because much of this literature is also framed in the tradition of Positive Organizational Psychology, it does not usually question how inauthenticity arises in the first place. As a result it is in danger of being reduced to another management or leadership 'technique'.

Driscoll and Wiebe (2007) use the work of Jacques Ellul to draw the distinction between 'technique' and 'central organizing principle'. When a concept is treated as a technique, it is treated as "the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency" (p. 333). They argue that a technique creates "a closed fraternity of its practitioners", who "typically have their own discourse and are obsessed with facts and results" (Ellul in Driscoll & Wiebe, 2007, p. 334). The technician tends to believe that the new method will become the center of things and that there is one best way. According to Ellul, where technique becomes the dominant focus everything serves a limited form of economic rationality, human relations are reduced to a technical form and in that process, what is purported to humanize can potentially become dehumanizing.

To unequivocally state that this is what AL scholars do would be unfair. Clearly AL originators, in the way the concept was initially defined, foresaw that the concept is intrinsically complex and multileveled. In addition, some critical voices (e.g. Sparrowe, 2005), that we also cite below, have been encouraged in special journal issues on AL. Furthermore, there is inevitably a certain amount of technicalizing in making any concept operational. However, in general, AL theory is currently firmly set in a positive psychological direction, is legitimizing itself by focusing on the benefits of AL to the organization, is theorized by a relatively small, but influential, group of scholars and is primarily leader-centered. While in this literature tensions between human-focused and leader-focused understandings of the concept of authenticity have occasionally been identified (we will provide

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some examples of where AL has identified such tensions in the next section), these are not systematically pursued. As such it appears to us that AL is in danger of becoming just another technique for 'business as usual'. The concept of authenticity has received much attention and holds potential for leadership and organizational theory and practice. We suggest that this potential can be substantially augmented when the focus is shifted from authenticity as technique to be used by the few, to authenticity as a human quality to be understood in relation to all organizational members, and the full implications of existential authenticity are embraced.

The contribution of existentialism to organization studies

We are not alone in exploring the existential perspective in relation to leadership and organization studies. Ford and Lawler (2007) suggest that the existential perspective can offer significant contributions to the study of leadership because it goes beyond the traditional, rationalistic/objectivist approach to the study of leadership and can address some of its limitations. They argue that the existential perspective can deepen the understanding of leadership as it values the individual and the subjective, and acknowledges the inter-subjective dynamics of relationships in leadership. Ashman (2007) suggests that existentialism contributes to the study of leadership by focusing the attention on the everyday experiences of subjects, rather than on the abstract generalizations common to leadership research. Existentialism is increasingly utilized within organization studies and has been argued to be particularly useful in integrating the individual and organizational levels of analysis (Pauchant & Morin, 2008). It has shown explanatory potential with regard to a range of themes like leadership (Lawler, 2005); ethical decision making (West, 2007) and professional competence (Sandberg & Pinnington, 2009).

Existentialism cannot be viewed as a uniform theory. West (2007) focuses on Sartre, as do Kelly and Kelly (1998) and Yue and Mills (2008); MacMillan (MacMillan, 2006, 2009; MacMillan & Mills, 2002) draws principally on Heidegger, but also on Frankl and Sartre; Sandberg and Pinnington (2009) draw exclusively on Heidegger; Reedy (2008) draws on a combination of Sartre, Heidegger and Ricour and Wallace (2009) centers on the work of de Beauvoir. Thus, within organization studies, existentialism is "an eclectic philosophy or a set of attitudes" (Lawler, 2005, p. 216) which has very diverse roots (Pauchant & Morin, 2008). A series of interwoven and recurring topics has been identified with regard to its use in organization studies: responsibility and choice; meaningfulness; solitude and death (Pauchant & Morin, 2008). In this paper, we mainly focus on the first two topics.

While some authors in leadership and organization studies start to integrate a combination of existential perspectives (e.g. Reedy, 2008), the majority justifies the chosen perspective solely on its explanatory potential to leadership and organization studies in the particular phenomena that they focus on. In this paper we follow this tradition in that we do not review the various existential traditions in themselves, but focus on four themes that we have identified to be relevant in distinguishing current AL theory from existential authenticity.

However, in order to show the wider relevance of existentialism to leadership and organization studies it is important to remove two prejudgements against existentialism. The first one is that existentialism denies God, Spirit or the whole human being. While Sartre (whose concept of 'bad faith' is often referred to in the above mentioned literature) might have rejected God, many other existential authors listed in Pauchant & Morin's entry on organizational existentialism in the *International Encyclopaedia of Organization Studies* (2008) such as Buber, Campbell, Kierkegaard, and Tillich, explicitly embraced the spiritual nature of the individual. This is important because otherwise those who believe that the human being is a spiritual being (and that is still the majority of humanity) would reject existentialism on the basis of a limited understanding.

The second misunderstanding is that existentialism is per definition individualistic. While existentialism emphasizes the inescapable solitude of the individual, many existentialists insist that the self is formed in relation to the other (Pauchant & Morin, 2008). In this paper we primarily draw on the Heidegerian, rather than Sartrian, understanding of the self in relation to the other. In relation to organization studies, Reedy succinctly explains their contrasting insights:

> Both stress that determinism and passivity will be prevalent as it is always easier to unthinkingly be moulded by collective norms. Both Heidegger and Sartre refer to the 'they', as this collective Other through which we usually allow ourselves to be formed. However, such passivity is not inevitable, it is rather a failure to choose. Heidegger insists that there is always an option, though usually an agonizing one, to transcend such determinism. Sartre sees autonomy as achievable but only at the expense of the other: 'while I attempt to free myself from the hold of the other the other is trying to free himself from mine; while I seek to enslave the other, the Other tries to enslave me. (2008, p. 64)

Sartre's 'win or lose' approach to human relationships, while interesting, does not provide much explanatory potential for authentic leadership beyond identifying it as an oxymoron. We therefore primarily follow the Heidegerian tradition in this paper because it explicates the self in relation to the other and context.

Finally, in organization studies some authors directly draw on the writings of the existentialists but often use narrow interpretations of such work. Others scholars use secondary sources and these usually provide exegesis, integration and discussions on the contemporary relevance of existentialism. We have chosen the latter. While we cite Heidegger directly, our understanding of his work has been substantially informed by secondary interpretations by contemporary existential philosophers (Guignon, 1986; Heine, 1985; Mulhall, 2005; Vogel, 1994).

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Existential authenticity

As previously explained, existentialism does not offer a fixed set of ideas (Earnshaw, 2006) nor does it propose "a unified doctrine" (Guignon, 1986, p. 73). At the same time, a concern with 'authenticity' can be understood as fundamental and central to existential thought.

The existential concept of authenticity was first introduced and explored by Kierkegaard (Earnshaw, 2006). Later existentialist writers, particularly Martin Heidegger in Being and Time (Heidegger, 1962), further developed the concept of authenticity (Lawler, 2005). The interpretation and practical application of an existential concept like authenticity is not always straightforward as existentialist writers (e.g. Heidegger and Sartre) consider related terms like 'self', 'being' and 'existence' to have no fixed definition: "to exist as a human being is precisely to ask the question 'What is Being?'" (Earnshaw, 2006, p. 2). Therefore, even though in popular jargon authenticity is commonly used and understood in psychological terms, for these existentialist writers any discussion of the 'authentic self' is concerned with the ontological nature of being, reality and existence rather than with the individual psychological make-up (Earnshaw, 2006).

While there is some variety in the perspectives of existential philosophers, we identify four central themes of authentic existence that are particularly relevant to AL: 1) Inauthenticity is inevitable; 2) authenticity requires creating one's own meaning; 3) authenticity does not imply goal and value congruence, and 4) authenticity is not intrinsically ethical. We clarify these themes of existential authenticity by discussing each of these themes in relation to current AL theory.

It should be noted that the boundaries between the four themes are quite fluid in that they follow on from one another and are to some extent overlapping. Therefore, while we discuss the various implications for leadership theory under the, to our understanding, most logical theme, this does not mean that they could not apply to one of the other themes as well nor does it mean that existential authenticity can be adequately captured by these themes. In introducing the themes in this way we make their relevance to AL theory most visible.

We precede the discussion of the themes by a short introduction to the existentialist view on human existence.

Authentic leadership versus existential authenticity

Within existentialist thought, human existence is characterized by "a profound tension or conflict, an ongoing struggle between opposing elements" (Guignon & Pereboom, 1995, p. xvii). The idea of the human being as being made up of and caught between two dimensions, can be found in most existential writings. On the one hand, there is a certain 'facticity' to life. We are finite beings: natural organisms among other organisms with inbuilt needs and drives not so different from animals. On the other hand, we are different from other natural organisms, we are free insofar as we are capable of reflecting on ourselves in the light of an overarching purpose or vision of what our life is about (Guignon, 1986; Guignon & Pereboom, 1995). As such, as human beings we are concerned with ourselves, our 'being' is an issue for us, we are not just content with satisfying our basic needs and desires but are able to aspire to something beyond these and can regulate our responses in the light of a higher goal or purpose (Guignon & Pereboom, 1995, p. xviii). This duality between being subject and bound to the necessity of needs and at the same time being capable and free to reflect on and strive for a higher concern, creates a constant and lifelong tension at the core of the human being (Weil, 1958). From an existential perspective therefore, life is difficult, a challenge, and there are no final or magical solutions for the human predicament (Pauchant, 1995).

Inauthenticity is inevitable

Existentialism attempts to understand authentic existence and distinguishes it from an inauthentic existence. In authentic existence one is aware of the meaning of one's existence and understands the fundamental structure of life, whereas in an inauthentic existence one is not (Reynolds, 2006). Existentialists contend that the authentic state of being is desirable over a non-authentic existence and they are concerned with making people realize and accept responsibility for their own life. Nevertheless they recognize that people are necessarily embedded and immersed in the world which distracts them from being aware of their own individuality and meaning in life. Generally, it is difficult to question our own existence as "we tend to drift along into public ways of acting, doing what 'one' does, and we assume that our lives are justified so long as we are conforming" to the norms and expectations of our social world (Guignon & Pereboom, 1995, p. xxxi). In addition, "the fact we have to play many different roles in our complex society means that … we tend to be dispersed and distracted, lacking any real cohesiveness and integrity as individuals" (p. xxxi). At the same time, some existentialists argue that "it is on the basis of our belongingness to the public that we can later strive to discover our identity as individuals" (Guignon & Pereboom, 1995, p. xxv). In other words, awareness of inauthenticity is a necessary feature of being part of the world as well as a condition for authenticity; the one cannot exist without the other (Reynolds, 2006). It is therefore inconceivable that inauthenticity is a characteristic of passing social conditions which we can do away with, and for that reason inauthenticity should not be understood as 'bad' but rather accepted as an unavoidable and natural part of human life (D. E. Cooper, 1990, p. 112). Existentialists accept that more often than not, in everyday life the self is not authentic (D. E. Cooper, 1990; Earnshaw, 2006).

AL theory emphasizes the positive characteristics of the authentic leader: "the authentic leader is confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, moral/ethical, future-oriented" (Luthans & Avolio, 2003, p. 243). Authentic leaders are aware of, and true to, their core beliefs and values (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). They "convey those beliefs and values in every possible interaction at every level of the organization" (May, et al., 2003, p. 249), and are "expected to be relatively immune to situational pressures" (W. L.

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Gardner, Fischer, & Hunt, 2009, p. 468). Shamir and Eilam (2005) suggest that authentic leaders lead from their own conviction, they "do not take on a leadership role or engage in leadership activities for honor or other personal rewards" (p. 397). Avolio and Gardner (2005) state, "authentic leadership can make a fundamental difference in organizations by helping people find meaning and connection at work through greater self-awareness; by restoring and building optimism, confidence and hope; by promoting transparent relationships and decision making that builds trust and commitment among followers; and by fostering inclusive structures and positive ethical climates" (p. 331).

Authentic leaders are thus often presented as being superior in their ability to triumph over inauthenticity. They are not only capable of dealing with organizational, societal and personal challenges, but they also have the capacity to do this without a desire for status or personal rewards. From an existential perspective this is a utopian idea of authenticity which ignores the practical and lived reality that the nature of life often promotes inauthenticity over authenticity. The leader is necessarily embedded in the world and cannot be self-aware and authentic all the time. It would suggest that those in positions of formal power are as likely to conform to external norms and expectations as followers are; the norms and expectations might be different for leaders and followers but the temptation to be inauthentic is the same. Leaders (and followers) are immersed in an organizational community as well as a socio-economic environment which has multiple norms, pressures and expectations, which, particularly if they have to pretend that all is well, inevitably distract them from reflecting on themselves and being aware of their own being. At any time leaders (and followers) might encounter internal confusion or doubt and conform to external pressures.

By failing to accept inauthenticity as unavoidable, AL could in fact contribute to inauthenticity in leaders as they might feel pressured into hiding their true selves and pretending or performing positive authenticity.

Even though some theorists on AL (e.g. Chan, et al., 2005; W. L. Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005) acknowledge that people can never be entirely authentic and argue that authenticity in individuals might be "more accurately described as achieving levels of authenticity" (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 320), they tend to describe the authentic leader and the inauthentic leader as two different people. For example, Chan et al. write, "we use the adjective 'veritable'… to distinguish the true authentic leader from the pseudo-authentic leader" (2005, p. 6). Current AL fails to acknowledge that inauthenticity is unavoidable and a part of every human being, and as such make no suggestions of how to address this. In addition, even though AL theorists like Avolio and Gardner (2005) acknowledge some of the implications of inauthenticity when they state, "if the leader is more […] inauthentic, then the vision [of the leader] may be a ruse to manipulate followers to achieve personal aims or goals, and at some point those followers will discover the ruse, become disengaged and long-term performance will suffer" (p. 329), such implications of inauthenticity are not explored further and no propositions are made of how to deal with them (beyond that the leader, somehow, needs to get more authentic and that this will, somehow, transfer to the followers).

The way AL theorizes the concept of authenticity creates highly unrealistic expectations of both leaders and followers. It tends to simply judge inauthenticity as bad, rather than accepting inauthenticity as a natural and unavoidable part of organizational life.

Authenticity requires creating one's own meaning

Existentialists see human beings as capable of, and responsible for, creating their own meaning in life. Each person is *solely* responsible for how she attempts to resolve the fundamental tension and for realizing her potential (D. E. Cooper, 1990; Earnshaw, 2006; Reynolds, 2006). Guignon and Pereboom explain that "We can either recoil from our responsibility for our lives, pretending that we are forced to act in certain ways by circumstances beyond our control. Or we can embrace our responsibility for self-fashioning and seize on our lives with clarity, integrity, and courage" (1995, p. xxi). Human beings constantly express the aspiration for some ultimate meaning through their choices and actions (Guignon, 1986, p. 74) and it is these choices and actions that define the person rather than intentions or an enduring set of characteristics (Ford & Lawler, 2007; Guignon & Pereboom, 1995). However, even though people are capable of creating their own meaning, existentialists contend that people generally fail to see that they are self-creating and try to avoid facing up to this responsibility by identifying too easily with the 'communal character' of their existence (D. E. Cooper, 1990; Guignon & Pereboom, 1995; Reynolds, 2006). By trying to fit in and conform, the individual loses what is unique about herself and is alienated from her own self (D. E. Cooper, 1990, p. 109). This alienation from the own self is considered by existentialists as inauthentic. On the other hand, the individual who takes responsibility for her life and gives it focus by her own beliefs, values and ultimate concern, can be considered authentic (Baldwin, 2005).

From an existential point of view, it is highly undesirable, even dehumanizing, if certain values or 'truths' are imposed on the individual (Jackson, 2005). Without individual freedom nothing in the world has meaning; "there is no more obnoxious way to punish a man than to force him to perform acts which make no sense to him" (de Beauvoir, 1964, p. 30). Authenticity or meaning can therefore never be 'given' to or 'created' for the individual.

AL theory assumes that the authentic leader can, and needs to, influence authenticity and meaning in followers. The concept of authentic leadership thus extends beyond the authenticity of the individual leader and includes authentic relationships with followers (W. L. Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, et al., 2005; Shamir & Eilam, 2005). Such authentic relationships are characterized by trust; transparency and openness; guidance toward worthy objectives and "an emphasis on follower development" (W. L. Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, et al., 2005, p. 345). Various AL theorists describe leader influence processes, such as emotional contagion, identification processes and positive modeling (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; W. L. Gardner, Avolio, &

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Walumbwa, 2005; Illies, et al., 2005), through which "followers develop greater clarity about their values, identity, and emotions and, in turn, move towards internalized regulatory processes, balanced information processing, transparent relations with leader and associates, and authentic behavior. They come to know and accept themselves and self-regulate their behavior to achieve goals that are, in part, derived from and congruent with those of the leader… As followers internalize values and beliefs espoused by the leader their conception of what constitutes their actual and possible selves are expected to change and develop over time" (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 326–327). It is assumed here that followers require both influence and guidance in identifying their values, beliefs and meaningful objectives, and that this can be developed in the follower through the influence from the leader (Collinson, 2005).

From an existential perspective however, followers do not *need* the leader's influence as the capacity to create meaning and become authentic is inherent to every human being and is not just reserved for the leader. In addition, even though individuals within the organization might be influenced or inspired in their search for meaning by the leader or other followers, given the individual nature of authenticity it is impossible for the leader to 'make' followers authentic or 'create' meaning in followers. If values or objectives are arrived at without the individual freedom to choose what is important, they will not be meaningful and by adopting them, the individual will immediate become inauthentic. Some awareness of this can be found in AL theory; for example Shamir and Eilam (2005) understand that authenticity is not acquired through "a process of imitation. Rather, they have internalized [their convictions, values and causes] on the basis of their own personal experiences" and "have experienced them to be true" (p. 397). Similarly, Avolio and Gardner (2005) clearly acknowledge the existential understanding of authenticity when they state "authenticity, by definition, involves being true to oneself, not other" (p. 332). While this statement would logically lead to the conclusion that followers whose meanings are strongly shaped by their leaders are condemned to inauthenticity, the possible inconsistencies are currently glossed over. Furthermore, the way in which AL applies authenticity fails to directly address the asymmetries of power which enable leaders to impose their values on others (Amernic, Craig, & Tourish, 2007, p. 1863; Fletcher, 2004; Price, 2003). Leader influence processes and their effect on the authenticity or inauthenticity of the follower cannot be understood without taking into account leader-follower power discrepancies and dependencies.

Even though within AL there is some awareness that authenticity requires organizational members to create their *own* understanding of what is and is not meaningful, the implications of this are not systematically pursued.

Authenticity does not imply goal and value congruence

Existentialists understand authenticity as a highly individualized concept (Guignon & Pereboom, 1995); the authentic life is given focus by the values, beliefs and goals that the individual considers to be meaningful. Existentialists do not view this involvement with the self as "self-absorption and egocentrism" (Guignon & Pereboom, 1995, p. xxxvii), nor do they espouse complete relativism, but they do highlight that the individual nature of authenticity can make it challenging and disturbing to be with others (D. E. Cooper, 1990). After all, an authentic individual does not conform to what is considered 'meaningful' by others or society but acts on the values and goals that she considers to be meaningful. From an existential perspective therefore, alignment of values, beliefs and goals between different individuals or groups is not a necessary outcome of authenticity. At the same time, existentialists suggest that embracing one's own being as an individual does not exclude the possibility of having a sense of community with others (Guignon & Pereboom, 1995, p. xxxv). For example, Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) found that there is commonality in what individuals experience as meaningful (and meaningless) in work and hence they may have similar goals (e.g. to develop their full potential or to make a difference). However, from an existential understanding, such goals would have to be self-chosen to be meaningful and goal commonality could not be considered a permanent state as individuals might change their view on what holds meaning for them.

AL theory, similar to other positive scholarship theory, puts great value on harmony. It assumes that in authenticity, the goals of leaders, followers and the organization are congruent and values are overlapping. Avolio and Gardner (2005) "expect an authentic relationship between the leader and followers to emerge which is characterized by open and positive exchanges as they pursue shared and complementary goals that reflect deeply held and overlapping values" (p. 327). Similarly, when Gardner et al. (2005) write that authentic relationships between authentic leaders and followers are characterized by "guidance towards worthy objectives" (p. 345), they appear to assume that in authenticity leaders and followers will agree on what might be considered "worthy" goals. From an existential point of view however, such agreement is unlikely and goal divergence is considered as an inherent part of human relationships and as such of organizations. Assuming otherwise is not only unrealistic but would also ignore the reality that at times misalignment might be problematic. Even in the unlikely situation that all organizational members are authentic at the same time, goals and values will most probably diverge. The higher concern or goal of an authentic follower will not necessarily be aligned with the goal of the authentic leader which means that being authentic can actually be a challenge in leader–follower relationships. Alternatively, the higher goal of the authentic leader or followers might not be in line with the goal of other stakeholders, such as business owners. For example, while it might be authentic for a CEO to put the interests of employees over those of the shareholder, this might not be congruent with the goal of the authentic shareholder. Similarly, the goals and values between authentic followers cannot be assumed to align. These challenges are currently not acknowledged and addressed within AL. In addition, even if alignment of goals or values occurs, this might not unambiguously lead to agreement on how these should be reached or understood (Sparrowe, 2005). According to Price (2003), "most leaders can be said to support the values of authentic

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leadership. They disagree widely, however, on the specific demands of honesty, loyalty, and fairness as well as on what constitutes justice, equality and human rights" (p. 79).

Authenticity is not intrinsically ethical

From an existentialist perspective, the concept of authenticity does not necessarily have ethical implications (Guignon & Pereboom, 1995). Even though the ideal of authenticity calls on the individual to live a more focused life that integrates her deeper beliefs, values and concerns in a unified whole, "there is no reason to believe that a person who is authentic necessarily will be a more benevolent or more principled person" (p. xxxiv). Similarly, authenticity might not have any moral implications for the nature of the objective or purpose the individual strives for. What is true or good from the perspective of the authentic individual might not be in line with what is considered as ethical or moral by another human being or by society.

At the same time, even though existential authenticity does not have any immediate ethical implications, for most existentialists "becoming authentic is supposed to push one into a transformed understanding of human relationships" (Guignon & Pereboom, 1995, p. xxxv). Because as soon as the individual realizes the importance of his freedom and commits to his own meaning in life, he is driven to "guarantee for others what he necessarily claims for himself. And as others claim their authenticity, he in turn is more assured of achieving his own possibilities" (Terry, 1993, p. 141). In other words, authenticity can increase the consideration for the other and can as such "enhance[s] self *and* world" (p. 141).

Many authentic leadership theorists, however, "assume that the true selves that authentic leaders discover … is an ethical self as they increase self-awareness" (C. D. Cooper, et al., 2005, p. 486). They uncritically assume that the authentic leader or follower will be have "high moral and ethical standards" (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 191) and will be 'more moral' than the inauthentic leader or follower. The authentic leader will know "what is good, important, and beautiful" (Bass, 2004, p. 171) and will "exhibit a higher moral capacity to judge dilemmas from different angles" (May, et al., 2003, p. 248). In addition, "authentic transformational leaders, as moral agents, expand the domain of effective freedom, the horizon of conscience and the scope for altruistic intention. Their actions aim toward noble ends, legitimate means, and fair consequences" (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 211). There are notable exceptions to this within AL, for example, Shamir and Eilam (2005) explicitly state that their concept of the authentic leader does not "say anything about the content of the leader's values and convictions" (p. 398). Critical voices that question the equation of 'authentic' with 'ethical' have also been published in special journal issues on AL. For example, Sparrowe points out that "the problem in arguing that authenticity is intrinsically ethical is that 'to thine own self be true' is resolute in its indifference to moral postures" (2005, p. 424). Some AL theorists acknowledge this challenge but attempt to work around it by creating concepts or criteria which can classify a 'bad' leader like Hitler as inauthentic and a 'good' leader like Mother Therese as authentic (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). However, as discussed under earlier themes, authenticity is not a state-like quality and it cannot be assessed by anyone other than the individual, hence it is not possible to classify someone as 'authentic' or 'inauthentic'. From an existential perspective, a leader should therefore always be morally cautious and not automatically assume that the greater good will be achieved through the authentic and 'good intentions' of herself. As Price (2003) suggests, "to dismiss the importance of this challenge is to give leaders and followers false confidence in the normative force of their own value commitments" (p. 79).

In addition, even if the authentic leader has high moral standard, making ethical decisions will be challenged by external pressures, like those of the market. Current AL also fails to address the implications of the profit demands of the market place on the capacity of the leader to act morally or ethically.

Table 1 below provides an overview of the key distinctions between the existential and AL perspective on authenticity for each of the existential themes.

Table 1
A summary of the key distinctions in the assumptions underpinning Existential Authenticity and Authentic Leadership Theory.

Existential Theme	Existential Perspective	AL Perspective
In-authenticity is unavoidable	Leaders cannot be authentic in relation to all individuals and all situations at all times as the practical reality of life promotes inauthenticity over authenticity	Emphasis on the positive qualities of the authentic leader and authenticity is understood as a state-like or permanent quality
Authenticity requires creating one's own meaning	Authenticity or meaning cannot be given or created by anyone else, each person is responsible for creating their own meaning in life Each human being is *capable* of creating their own meaning in life & realising their potential	Authentic leader can influence authenticity and meaning in followers (here leader-follower power discrepancies and dependencies are not taken into account) Followers *need* both influence and guidance in finding values, beliefs and meaningful objectives
Authenticity does not imply goal and value congruence	Goals and values of organization, leader and follower are not necessarily aligned. Goal and value divergence is likely	Authenticity will lead to an alignment of goals and values (between organization, leader and followers)
Authenticity is not intrinsically ethical	Authenticity does not necessarily have ethical implications for the character or objectives of the leader/follower	An authentic person is a more benevolent or moral person than the non-authentic person

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Discussion

As noted in the introduction, the objective of AL is to promote ethical business conduct and meaningful work. We have shown that compared to the existential perspective on authenticity, AL, as it is currently being theorized, contains some fundamental 'paradoxes' and shortcomings which quite possibly undermine its original objectives. By failing to acknowledge that inauthenticity is a natural part of organizational life, AL has unrealistic expectations of leaders and followers which in fact could create inauthenticity as it pushes people to hide their true selves. By assuming that authenticity can or needs to be created by the leader, AL is in danger of developing 'dehumanizing' leadership practices which might in fact provide barriers to finding meaning in work for followers. By failing to acknowledge that goals and values are likely to be divergent in organizations, AL has unrealistic expectations of goal and value harmony and might develop leadership practices which push for harmony at the expense of authenticity and meaning in followers. And by assuming that authenticity leads to ethical behavior, it creates false moral confidence in authentic leaders and followers.

We agree that the original objectives of AL are important and worthy objectives to strive for but we fear that they will not be reached if AL theory progresses the way it has in the past. As we have shown, currently within AL the complexities of being human within organizations and its implications are often not acknowledged. Where such complexities and inconsistencies are in fact recognized, AL theorists appear to 'gloss over' them or 'address' them by suggesting that AL can be augmented with additional practices. For example, Avolio and Gardner "propose environments that provide open access to information, resources, support, and equal opportunity for everyone to learn and develop will empower and enable leaders and their associates to accomplish their work more effectively" (2005, p. 327). It is possible that organizations that focus on employee learning, equal employment and workplace empowerment positively contribute to the leader's commitment to be authentic. At the same time however, in seeking solutions in this way AL theorizes through an *a priori* and unquestioned understanding of being that is framed by the science it is in (Heidegger, 1962) without really questioning the root causes when such science fails to meet its objectives. For example, Fineman (2006) suggests, "however well-meaning the intentions of empowerment programs, they will always be constrained by managerial/executive prerogatives and notions of inclusivity – who is, and who is not, to 'be' empowered and in what form" (p. 277). This way of theorizing limits AL's solutions to the status quo rather than pursuing in greater depth what authenticity may have to uniquely contribute to organization studies.

The value of existential authenticity lies in that it provides a deeper understanding of the human experience which has long been ignored in leadership theory. If AL theory embraces its existential roots and hence the complexities of being human rather than glossing over it, a substantial contribution to leadership theory can be made even though this will indeed also require more complex research designs (we will come back to this later). To quote Oscar Wilde: "the way of paradoxes is the way of truth. To test reality we must see it on the tight-rope. When the verities become acrobats we can judge them" (2006, p. 43). The verities to be examined below are that all the four existential themes emphasize the importance of individual freedom and personal responsibility in being authentic, but they *also* emphasize that authenticity requires the interaction and connection with the collective, with others. Therefore to enhance ethical conduct and meaningful work, individual responsibility *as well as* collective responsibility needs to be supported within the organization. Below we examine the implications of this in more detail in relation to each of our existential themes.

If we stay present to the complexity of inauthenticity being unavoidable, the natural consequence is that this accounts for leaders and followers alike. Therefore all members of the organization as a whole bear the responsibility for understanding and managing authenticity and inauthenticity. If the individual attempts to portray a picture of herself that is perfect at any level of functioning, such lack of self awareness is likely to be damaging to others working with this person. At an individual level, confronting inauthenticity enables all organizational members to grow into more differentiated and integrated human beings who can find meaning for their life in the full consciousness of their limitations (Schwartz, 1995, p. 233). If the organization as a collective consciously (or unconsciously) attempts to portray a picture of itself as perfect and this is inconsistent with the participants' experience of the interpersonal or organizational reality, this creates a sense of meaninglessness for organizational participants. For example, this might occur through organizational communication that focuses on reinforcing the 'positive' and all that is ideal within the organization rather than giving an honest representation of reality. Schwartz (1995) argues that "the capacity to accept human reality for what it is, in oneself as well as others, makes for the possibility of an identification with others that is more real and therefore more profound than that of mutual idealization in the ego ideal". At an organizational level, ethical awareness is created when inauthenticity is collectively and openly confronted. There needs to be acknowledgement throughout the organization that neither organizational members nor the organization as a whole can engage in authentic action at all times. Goodpaster (2000) writes, "companies that have the courage to articulate their core values and to communicate them clearly to insiders and outsiders are inviting the charge of hypocrisy on a regular basis. None of us is immune to observations of disconnection between aspiration and action" (p. 197). Thus at an organizational level, engagement with the fact that inauthenticity is inevitable, would lead to on-going and collective reflection on possible disconnects between aspiration and action.

If we stay present to the complexity that the creation of meaning is a human (rather than a leader) capability and responsibility, it follows that everyone has to be able to participate in articulating meaning and the conditions under which it is gained and lost. At an individual level, work becomes more meaningful to the extent that the individual is aware of what makes work meaningful to her, whereas work becomes less meaningful when roles are unconsciously taken on (e.g. the person accepts increasingly more management responsibilities even though she knows the work does not really engage her); when meaning is uncritically adapted from others (e.g. 'to make a career here you have to take on more management roles') or when the individual cannot freely reject that which others deem to be important (e.g. 'it is your turn to take on a leadership role'). At the same time,

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even though every individual is capable of creating her own meaning in life, individuals often try to avoid this responsibility. In an organizational context, organizational members might gravitate towards handing over responsibility for meaning to leaders, therefore the attempt of leaders to provide meaning gives the organizational member further excuse to avoid responsibility for creating her own meaning. As Briskin (1998, p. 183) writes, "the paradoxical expectation of the leaders was to foster dependency on the one hand – fill the worker's void of meaning with corporate purpose – and on the other hand to promote independence and the perception of self-determination". Organizational understanding of how to return responsibilities to employees who have often been disempowered is crucial in enabling the experience of meaningful work. Similarly, since an organization requires collective meanings and commonly agreed upon principles, it is important to understand how such meanings and principles can be identified in a way that recognizes that individuals already have meanings. As Lips-Wiersma & Morris (2009) write, "subjective work meanings such as vision, values and principles can and should not be *provided* by those in positions of power, but rather *emerge from the collective being of everyone in the organization regardless of formal power positions*" (p. 508, italics added). Lips-Wiersma & Morris (2009) suggest that to be responsible, all members of the organization need to learn how to voice what is meaningful to themselves and others. In other words, the individual needs to have enough understanding of what is personally meaningful to know what organizational practices, work or career choices enhance meaning or detract from it. At the same time the organizational culture needs to legitimize conversations about meaning rather than seeing these as merely private concerns or issues that distract from 'real' concerns.

If we stay present to the complexity of the fact that goal alignment between leaders and followers (and various other stakeholders of the organization) cannot be naturally assumed, it follows that that authentic leaders are no more likely to know the value of the most desirable designated outcomes than followers. In addition, existential authenticity suggests that even if congruence in goals and beliefs exists, this will not be a permanent state or condition and as such renegotiating goals will be an ongoing task. For the individual, her task and responsibility is to assess on an ongoing basis the extent to which her goals or values still align with those of the organization. However, many individuals become so immersed in the workplace that too little of themselves is available for the full continuum of living (Briskin, 1998) and it often takes a significant life event, such as a health scare, for them to take other responsibilities seriously. Individuals are also responsible for expressing a lack of goal or value alignment within the organization, rather than giving the impression that their personal goals or values are aligned with those of the organization. For example, when opportunities for input are provided within the organization, individuals are also responsible for making use of such opportunities, rather than staying silent (or only engaging in negative feedback in the corridors once the meeting is over). Even though there are issues of power and fear here, which can hinder individuals to express themselves openly, individuals are still responsible for taking, rather than ignoring, genuine opportunities for input when they exist. Similarly, while it is the reality for many employees that they feel overwhelmed by the multiple demands placed on them, which can distract them from reflecting on their situation, individuals still have the responsibility to ask 'how do I see my role and what do I see as important?'.

As a whole, the organization needs to acknowledge goal divergence, rather than pretending goals are always aligned, and needs to take responsibility for goal alignment. In the short term it may appear that members in the organization settle for "a convenient story, an easy rationale, a new inspirational motto", but continuously ignoring goal divergence "results in a kind of deadening of feeling toward work itself" (Briskin, 1998, p. 184–185). While the actions of the organization are generally guided by an overall long term objective and strategic direction, the organization as a collective of individuals still needs to continuously reflect on, and negotiate, what is of importance. Goodpaster (2000) suggests that organizations need to take time out from "goal-directedness and busy-ness of everyday worklife" to reconsider goals on an ongoing basis (p. 196). This requires reflectiveness and openness by all members of the organization and is not assisted by impatience for immediate results. He argues, "organizations, like persons, can suffer from the pathology of activism, the misplaced devotion of never stopping to reflect on their missions. An organizational culture can be too busy or too focussed to think – to be aware of what it is doing" (p. 197). An understanding is also required of how the organization can address goal and value divergence that honors the individual as well as the collective and what kind of processes can be put in place that, when goals diverge, enable negotiation on equal footing.

If we stay present to the complexity that what is true or good from the perspective of the (authentic) individual is not necessarily in line with what is considered ethical by others or society, it follows that organizational members, as well as external stakeholders, should collectively reflect and decide on the ethicality of organizational decisions and actions. This responsibility too rests with both the individual and the collective in that it involves co-deciding what is ethical as well as 'keeping one another ethical', rather than relying on an ethically superior individual. On an individual level, the employee is responsible for becoming ethical in her own actions; for this she needs an in the moment awareness of how her speech and actions affect others based on some conscious or subconscious awareness of the existential significance of such actions (H. Gardner, 1999). Work then also becomes more meaningful for the individual if it supports the moral development of employees (Bowie, 1998). In addition, the individual is responsible for choosing organizations that support their ethical choices and for reflecting on the ethicality of the behavior of others within the organization and voicing ethical concerns.

The organization as a collective is responsible for not diminishing the moral capacity of the individual as well as creating consensus on what is, and what is not, considered ethical. The moral capacity of the individual is diminished when talk about moral issues is avoided or when the organizational environment places constraints on people's ability and readiness to voice, hear, and see moral concerns (Bird, 1996, p. 187). In addition, the ability to act morally can be constrained through either too much control (in the case of e.g. stringent codes of ethics) or implicit or explicit encouragement of immoral behavior (for example when unethical behavior suits the political agenda of superiors or the instrumental objectives of the organization). Clegg, Kornberger, & Rhodes argue that, "there are unavoidable limitations and inherent contradictions in the ideas and norms that guide our actions,

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and these need to be recognized in such a way as to keep them open to constant questioning and continual revision" (2007, p. 118). Therefore, according to Clegg et al. (2007), business ethics might be better conceptualized as a collective practice, which allows collective confirming and clarifying of the ethical stance and values of the company in specific contexts on an ongoing basis. By inviting feedback, or even criticism, from external stakeholders, such a collective practice might extend beyond the organizational members. Price (2003, p. 79) writes that moral requirements originate "as part of a much larger social and moral framework that binds the behavior of all actors." An atmosphere of reflectiveness, as well as an openness in communication between different stakeholders, helps the organization "ensure their ethical integrity more than any preoccupation with rules, laws, and programs for policing wrongdoing" (Goodpaster, 2000, p. 197). In addition, the organization as a whole is responsible for taking into account the wider economic context in which corporations are currently operating and needs to consciously address the ethical dilemmas that might arise between the normative and instrumental claims on the organization.

A discussion of complexities in relation to all the four existential themes emphasizes the importance of both *personal* responsibility and *individual* freedom as well as the *collective* responsibility and interaction as dimensions of and conditions to authentic behavior.

Power, purpose and time: Implications for the study of Authentic Leadership

Following from the discussion, in order to understand authenticity as both an individual and collective responsibility, further study would need to focus on exploring the potential organizational barriers and enablers to such authenticity. For example, further study could address: which organizational structures or processes might enhance individual and collective reflection on mistakes and shortcomings? how can the organization encourage open and honest expression of individual meaning and purpose? which organizational practices can facilitate constant reconsideration and realignment of goals and values? how can ethical conversations be promoted? However, even though these are important questions for AL to address, we argue that they need to be understood and explored within the complex and constantly changing context in which the individual and collective find themselves.

As we have seen in our exploration of authenticity, the inherent complexity of being human within organizations sits at the heart of an organizational understanding of authenticity, and this complexity is permanently present within organizations. As such, we argue that implications for further study are best explored in the light of some structural tensions which reflect the ongoing nature of this complexity, rather than simply search for solutions which will permanently overcome barriers and tensions.

On the basis of the previous section, in which we stayed present to the complexities raised by our existential themes, we found that several recurring, structural tensions are made visible when authenticity is conceptualized as an individual *and* collective property. These tensions are related to power, purpose and time:

The tension between authenticity and power within organizations

Authenticity requires the ability to freely discover and express that what is meaningful and ethical. However, the autonomy and freedom required for the expression of authenticity will always be restricted and challenged by the need for coordination and direction within organizations. Within organizations, such coordination and direction is seldom established without the expression of power. For example, individuals want to be self-directed and at the same time organizational direction might be required when they do not step up to their responsibilities; within organizations a degree of accountability is necessary and at the same time, if accountability results in managerialism or surveillance, it will impede on individual freedom and responsibility; organizations need a common set of goals and at the same time goals require constant reconsideration and negotiation to remain meaningful.

The tension between authenticity and the instrumental purpose of organizations

Authenticity involves a connection to, and expression of, a higher aspiration or purpose. However, the extent to which organizational members, or the organization as a whole, are able to act in accordance with what they consider to be important and ethical will generally be restricted and challenged by the organizational demands related to survival and profit. For example, the organization may want to openly engage about where it does not live up to its own ethical standards and at the same time such openness might cause an adverse market reaction; the organization might truly value their employees and at the same time, lay-offs could be required in a bad economic climate; the organization may identify, and live up to, a purpose beyond profit and at the same time shareholders might become nervous about such a purpose if the financial health of the organization is deteriorating.

The tension between authenticity and time as a scare resource

Awareness of authenticity requires time and space to reflect on individual and collective goals, meaning and ethics. But the extent to which the individual and the collective are able to reflect will always be restricted and challenged by the limits of available time. For example, collaboration and collective input are will slow down the speed at which decisions are made; CEO's are recruited to promote a long term vision and at the same time such appointments are often short-term and frequently result in

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short-term agendas; the organization needs to be flexible and adaptable and time is required to integrate best practice; organizational members need time to reflect and at the same time are required to meet multiple deadlines or be available 24/7.

Currently, AL is primarily concerned with the leader and how the leader can develop self-awareness to attain authenticity. We suggest that because authenticity is an inherently multileveled concept, an expanded AL will need to be concerned with how both individuals, as well as the collective, can continuously stay aware of structural tensions in relation to authenticity. The focus will as such not be on looking for solutions which will permanently overcome barriers to authenticity but on staying present to the tensions and constantly re-assessing the best solution within a new situation or context. After all, authenticity is expressed anew in every new decision and every new action, as Tourish writes, "each time that one discursive ambiguity is put to rest, a fresh one steps forward to take its place" (2008, p. 3). As human beings are generally uncomfortable in the presence of ambiguity and tend to either seek to solve it or ignore it, this individual and collective awareness of tensions will require a certain measure of awareness of all organizational members. Therefore, further research into the individual and collective ability to consistently remain aware of the structural tensions and research that can interrogate actions and decisions within the organization in the light of these tensions is required.

Clearly, questions that address both the complex and multileveled nature of authenticity lead to more complex research approaches. Until we have more insight in the phenomena at large, these questions are likely to move away from clear causal connections or precise relationships between dependent and independent variables and include whole systems research, longitudinal research, sample groups which are representative of all members of the organization and qualitative approaches to research. These research methods will require considerable commitment and it is therefore important for AL theorists to consider how committed they are to the original purposes of contributing to meaningful work and more ethical behavior. After all, the concept of existential authenticity is not an instrumental concept to enhance organizational performance, rather, it is a concept which enhances the understanding of human reality and as such raises questions about human reality within organizations. The majority of organizations however are not created to enhance human authenticity, they were created for commercial purposes and even those that were not formed to make a profit, often have similar efficiency and effectiveness drivers. A vast amount of leadership research has been designed to support such purpose and drivers. Therefore, adopting the concept of existential authenticity means questioning the very nature of leadership research itself and which organizational purpose it seeks to support. AL is likely to have practical appeal if a relationship between authenticity and the bottom line can be established and yet organizations are also to meet higher aspirations as clearly articulated in the original objectives of AL. Any attempt to initialize important shifts towards humanizing organizations is in constant danger to be hijacked by an instrumental ways of thinking about organizations. The challenge for leadership theory in adopting a concept like authenticity is for it to be relevant for business practice without becoming a technique that loses the core intention of the concept. We do not believe that there is an immediate or permanent solution to this, it seems to us that if AL research wants to be authentic towards its roots, it needs to stay present to this challenge and conscious decisions need to be made and justified with regard to engaging with complexities. Practices which result from research that embrace such complexities are more likely to serve practitioners within organizations than practices that promise fundamental shifts to central issues and concerns but ignore complexities.

While we argue that AL can possibly be amended, our analysis begs the question as to whether 'leadership' would still be the most useful and appropriate label for an ensuing theory that understands authenticity as both an individual and a collective responsibility. As we have seen, AL is not alone in finding it almost impossible for leadership theory to move away from the person of the leader. Yet the very label of 'leader' (and possibly also 'leadership' as long as we are not able to separate it from 'the leader') can create inauthenticity when it sets intentions or behaviors of some human beings apart from that of others, or when it labels human contributions as 'leadership' only to the extent that they meet the objectives of the organization. Once authenticity is recognized as an inherently multileveled concept and it is understood that everyone in the organization is concerned with the questions such as 'who do I become as a result of working for the organization?'; 'is it worthwhile what we do here?', and 'who benefits from this?', the boundaries between leader and other organizational members, as well as the boundaries between the organization and the community of which it is part, open up. We therefore suggest that research on authenticity also explores the extent to which there is still a role for the single leader. For example, will organizations still require a single leader to make certain decisions, to champion certain values or interests and to inspire the collective or can this be done by collective (leadership) teams? Or will the single leader simply be required as an enabler who is focused on removing barriers to authenticity? Similarly, further research could question the extent to which the label of leadership itself is a barrier to obtain a more thorough and sensitive understanding of the individual and collective human processes at the core of organizational functioning as it currently puts *a priori* limits around the focus and design of the inquiry. In summary, we envision a radical AL that challenges some of the fundamental verities of current leadership theory.

Conclusion

In this paper we argued that in its haste to be relevant, Authentic Leadership is in danger of ignoring the very ontology of being human that makes authenticity a powerful concept. We have shown that even though Authentic Leadership initially acknowledged authenticity as an inherently complex and multileveled concept, the implications have been glossed over and have not been followed through. We argue that continuing along these lines would lead to AL as a management technique and would undermine AL's original objectives of enhancing meaningful work and ethical behavior. We sought to examine the claims of AL through an existential concept of authenticity. We identified four existential themes that emphasize the importance of individual freedom and personal responsibility in being authentic but they *also* emphasize that authenticity requires the connection with

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and the responsibility of the collective within the organization. We suggested that for AL to be theorized in relation to both these responsibilities it needs to ask questions about how both individuals *and* the collective can stay present to the three structural tensions of power, purpose and time that will always challenge authenticity in organizations. We recognized that this would lead to more complex and time consuming research agendas yet argued that the very purpose of AL is important enough to warrant the dedication that such research requires and that this radical AL has the potential to break through some of the current impasses in the development of leadership theory.

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