



The Authentic Leadership Inventory (ALI): Development and empirical tests

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the development and preliminary validation of a new measure of authentic leadership, the Authentic Leadership Inventory (ALI). It also assesses the recently developed Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ). Results indicate some concerns with the ALQ but support the content validity, reliability, factor structure, convergent and discriminant validity, concurrent validity, and freedom from impression management response bias of the ALI. Confirmatory factor analyses also do not support treating authentic or transformational leadership as universally global constructs. Instead, it is argued that future research would better be served by using separate authentic and transformational dimensions (rather than aggregate or global measures) to understand the unique aspects of both leadership constructs.

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Open any newspaper and it will be replete with examples of corruption and greed at the very top ranks of U.S. corporations. Is it any wonder, then, that the general public, as well as scholars, have become enamored with finding authenticity in leadership? A critical dilemma, of course, is for researchers to operationally define the key behaviors and dimensions of such leadership (Cooper, Scandura, & Schriesheim, 2005). As Yukl (2010) aptly notes, “Until differences in the definition of authentic leadership are resolved, and differences between authentic leadership theory and other theories of leadership...are resolved, it will be difficult even to determine what should be included in the research” (p. 425).

There have been, however, numerous attempts to explicate the concept of authentic leadership within the last decade (for a current and more in-depth review, see Gardner et al., *in press*). One of the first perspectives was put forth by Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) and suggests that authenticity is an extension of transformational leadership. Specifically:

“Leaders are authentically transformational when they increase awareness of what is right, good, important, and beautiful, when they help to elevate followers’ needs for achievement and self-actualization, when they foster in followers higher moral maturity, and when they move followers to go beyond their self-interests for the good of their group, organization, or society” (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 9).

In Bass and Steidlmeier’s (1999) view, authentically transformational leaders display the four major transformational leadership dimensions of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. An authentic transformational leader is essentially a “moral agent” who empowers followers to take actions that are noble, fair, and legitimate (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).

Although Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) view authenticity as simply an extension of transformational leadership (Yukl, 2010), current elaborations consider authentic leadership as a “root concept” that underlies the positive aspects of charismatic, transformational, spiritual, and ethical leadership theories (Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005). Luthans and Avolio (2003), for example, state that the “authentic leader is confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, moral/ethical, future-oriented, and gives priority to developing associates to be leaders. The authentic leader is true to him/herself” (p. 243). This latter description is also incorporated

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into Kernis's (2003) work on self-esteem, which stresses that authenticity entails the "unobstructed operation of one's true, or core, self" (p. 13) in everyday living. Similarly, Shamar and Eilam (2005) contend that an authentic leader has a "high level of self-resolution or self-concept clarity" (p. 399), in addition to self-concordant goals, self-expressive behavior, and the held belief that the leader role is central to their self-concept.

Utilizing findings from positive psychology and related fields, as well as previous operationalizations (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; George, 2000; Kernis, 2003; Luthans & Avolio, 2003), Ilies, Morgeson and Nahrgang (2005) developed a four-dimensional model of authentic leadership. This multi-factor conceptualization includes *self-awareness* ("one's awareness of, and trust in, one's own personal characteristics, values, motives, feelings, and cognitions;" p. 377); *unbiased processing* ("not denying, distorting, exaggerating or ignoring private knowledge, internal experiences, and externally based evaluative information;" p. 378); *authentic behavior/acting* ("whether people act in accord with their true self as opposed to acting merely to please others or to attain rewards or avoid punishments through acting 'falsely';" p. 380); and *authentic relational orientation* ("involves an active process of self-disclosure and the development of mutual intimacy and trust so that intimates will see one's true self-aspects, both good and bad;" p. 381). While the Ilies, Morgeson and Nahrgang (2005) four-dimensional model successfully built upon prior theory to describe the potential behaviors, antecedents, and outcomes associated with authentic leadership, research cannot advance in any area without appropriate and psychometrically sound measures (Cooper, Scandura & Schriesheim, 2005).

Reflecting this, construct development and measurement validation for authentic leadership was recently addressed at some length by Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, and Peterson (2008). Assimilating research from social psychology, moral and ethical philosophy, and the contributions noted above, the authors proposed a four-factor Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) and presented preliminary psychometric evidence for its future usage. Essentially, their higher order, multi-dimensional authentic leadership construct consists of the following four factors:

- Self-Awareness (S) demonstrating an understanding of how one derives and makes meaning of the world and how that meaning-making process impacts the way one views himself or herself over time. It also refers to showing an understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses and the multifaceted nature of the self, which includes gaining insight into the self through exposure to others, and being cognizant of one's impact on other people (Walumbwa et al., 2008, p. 95).
- Relational Transparency (R) presenting one's authentic self (as opposed to fake or distorted self) to others. Such behavior promotes trust through disclosures that involve openly sharing information and expressions of one's true thoughts and feelings while trying to minimize displays of inappropriate emotions (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing & Peterson, 2008, p. 95).
- Balanced Processing (B) showing that they objectively analyze all relevant data before coming to a decision. Such people also solicit views that challenge their deeply held positions (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing & Peterson, 2008, pp. 95–96).
- Internalized Moral Perspective (M) refers to an internalized and integrated form of self-regulation. The sort of self-regulation is guided by internal moral standards and values versus group, organizational, and societal pressures, and it results in expressed decision making and behavior that is consistent with these internalized values (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing & Peterson, 2008, p. 95).

After a deductive and inductive content analysis process, Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing and Peterson (2008) ultimately generated sixteen items for incorporation into the ALQ, followed by preliminary assessments of their instrument's construct validity.

A major contribution of Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing and Peterson (2008) is the fact that the operationalization of authentic leadership employed in developing the ALQ is based on a thorough review of theoretical contributions encompassing multiple disciplines. This is a first step in construct development and validation and it is absolutely necessary to establish the psychometric soundness of any new measurement instrument (Hinkin, 1995; Schriesheim, Powers, Scandura, Gardiner, & Lankau, 1993). However, as Cronbach (1984) states, "Construct validation is a fluid, creative process....no interpretation can be considered the final word, established for all time" (p. 149). Thus, a closer look at the ALQ may be warranted despite the encouraging evidence that currently exists concerning this instrument (see Gardner et al., *in press* for additional discussion of evidence on the ALQ).

One concern about the ALQ is that although eight sample items (from the sixteen used in the instrument) are presented in the Appendix to Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing and Peterson (2008), the full instrument is commercially copyrighted. While it is currently made available at no cost to researchers (see Gardner et al., *in press*), access to this instrument may become problematic in the future. Additionally, although Walumbwa et al. based their initial item generation on an extensive analysis of the literature, the content validation process that was employed relied heavily on the subjective judgments of a small number of doctoral students and other "subject matter experts." In recent years, a quantitative approach to content validation has been developed to help reduce or eliminate subjectivity from scale development and item assessments (Hinkin & Tracey, 1999; Schriesheim, Cogliser, Scandura, Lankau, & Powers, 1999; Schriesheim, Powers, Scandura, Gardiner & Lankau, 1993; for recent illustrations of the application of these methods, see Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008; Schriesheim, Alonso, & Neider, 2008). This quantitative process involves using one-way analysis of variance and factor or component analysis to further refine and strengthen item assignment. Given the importance of measurement in the field of leadership research (Schriesheim & Cogliser, 2010), it is essential that rigorous procedures be used to assess instrument content validity and to refine and/or replace problematic questionnaire items before considerable time, effort, and resources are invested in subsequent research that employs such measures. These issues together led to the development of

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