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"What's your story?" A life-stories approach to authentic leadership development

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Abstract

In this paper, we first develop the concepts of authentic leaders, authentic leadership, and authentic leader development. We suggest a definition of authentic leaders, which is based on the leader's self-concept: his or her self-knowledge, self-concept clarity, self-concordance, and person-role merger, and on the extent to which the leader's self-concept is expressed in his or her behavior. Following, we offer a life-story approach to the development of authentic leaders. We argue that authentic leadership rests heavily on the self-relevant meanings the leader attaches to his or her life experiences, and these meanings are captured in the leader's life-story. We suggest that self-knowledge, self-concept clarity, and person-role merger are derived from the life-story. Therefore, the construction of a life-story is a major element in the development of authentic leaders. We further argue that the life-story provides followers with a major source of information on which to base their judgments about the leader's authenticity. We conclude by drawing some practical implications from this approach and presenting suggestions for further research.

Keywords: Authentic leadership; Leadership development; Life-story; Self-concept clarity; Self-expression

A review of the literature reveals that there is no single accepted definition of authentic leadership and different authors use the term in somewhat different ways (e.g. Bennis, 2003; Bennis & Thomas, 2002; George, 2003; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Terry, 1993). Certain elements, however, are shared by all

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writers on the topic. Authentic leaders are portrayed as possessing self-knowledge and a personal point of view, which reflects clarity about their values and convictions. They are also portrayed as identifying strongly with their leadership role, expressing themselves by enacting that role, and acting on the basis of their values and convictions. Any discussion of authentic leader development has to focus on how these characteristics are developed.

Here, we suggest that leaders acquire these characteristics by constructing, developing and revising their life-stories. Life-stories can provide leaders with a "meaning system" from which they can act authentically, that is interpret reality and act in a way that gives their interpretations and actions a personal meaning (Kegan, 1983, p. 220). Therefore, leaders are authentic to the extent that they act and justify their actions on the basis of the meaning system provided by their life-stories. This suggestion implies a shift of focus from the current emphasis on the development of skills and behavioral styles to an emphasis on leaders' self-development, and especially to the development of their self-concepts through to the construction of life-stories.

We develop these arguments in this article. However, in view of the lack of accepted definitions for the term authentic leadership, and in view of the possibility that it will be defined too broadly so that it simply replaces such terms as good leadership, moral leadership or effective leadership, it is necessary to start by clarifying our own terms.

1. Authentic leaders and authentic leadership—clarification of terms

We believe that in order for the term authentic leadership to have an added value and be useful, it has to be different than other terms commonly used in the leadership literature. In this regard, definitions that encompass positive leadership qualities that are not directly related to the term authenticity, e.g. developing the leader's associates, or are covered by other leadership concepts, e.g. transformational leadership, may be too broad and non-distinctive to be useful. To be distinctive and useful, the term authentic leadership has to draw attention to aspects of leadership that have not been strongly emphasized by other leadership terms and models.

We start with the term authentic leader, because it is less complex than the term authentic leadership, and because any concept of authentic leadership has to include an authentic leader as one of its components.

1.1. Authentic leaders

All definitions are arbitrary. They reflect choices and cannot be proved or validated. Our own choices are based on the dictionary meaning of the term authentic, namely 'genuine' 'original' 'not a fake', and on those aspects of the term authentic leader, which seem to be shared by other writers who use this term. Following, we suggest that the main defining characteristics of authentic leaders are:

1. Authentic leaders do not fake their leadership. They do not pretend to be leaders just because they are in a leadership position, for instance as a result of an appointment to a management position. Nor do they work on developing an image or persona of a leader. Performing a leadership function and related activities are self-expressive acts for authentic leaders. It is part of

what they feel to be their 'true' or 'real' self. In other words, when enacting the leadership role, authentic leaders are being themselves (as opposed to conforming to others' expectations).

2. Relatedly, authentic leaders do not take on a leadership role or engage in leadership activities for status, honor or other personal rewards. Rather, they lead from a conviction. They have a value-based cause or a mission they want to promote, and they engage in leadership in order to promote this cause or mission. The first two defining characteristics mean that leadership is a eudaimonic activity for authentic leaders. The term eudaimonia originates from Aristotle and means being true to one's true self (daimon). The state of eudaimonia occurs when people's life activities are congruent with their deeply held values (see the discussion by Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005 in this Special Issue). According to recent writers (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Seligman, 2002; Waterman, 1993), when people are eudaimonically motivated, they are fully engaged both in their own self-actualization and in using their virtues, talents and skills in the service of the greater good. That is, authentic leaders are interested not only in being all that they can be but also in making a difference.
3. Authentic leaders are originals, not copies. This does not mean that they are necessarily unique or very different from each other in their personality traits. Furthermore, their values, convictions, cause or mission may be similar in content to those of other leaders and followers. However, the process through which they have arrived at these convictions and causes is not a process of imitation. Rather, they have internalized them on the basis of their own personal experiences. They hold their values to be true not because these values are socially or politically appropriate, but because they have experienced them to be true.

   Of course, leaders are social beings and therefore influenced by societal norms and values, parental and peer socialization, schooling, role models, and other social influences. Therefore, the content of their values and convictions is not likely to be entirely original. However, they have not been passive recipients of these social inputs. They have made these values and conviction highly personal through their lived experiences, experienced emotions, and an active process of reflection on these experiences and emotions. We believe this is what is meant by authenticity as the "owning" of one's personal experiences (Harter, 2002; Luthans & Avolio, 2003).

   This idea is captured by Bennis who wrote that "Leadership without perspective and point of view isn't leadership—and of course it must be your own perspective, your own point of view. You cannot borrow a point of view any more than you can borrow someone else's eyes. It must be authentic, and if it is, it will be original, because you are original" (1992, p. 122). To summarize this point, even when authentic leaders occupy a position in an organization that has been occupied by others or is occupied by others who hold identical positions (a battalion commander, a store manager, etc.) they operate from a personal point of view. This point of view does not have to be dramatically different from the point of view of others who hold or held that position, but it has to be personal in the sense that it has developed from personal experiences, personal reflection and personal learning.
4. Authentic leaders are leaders whose actions are based on their values and convictions. What they say is consistent with what they believe, and their actions are consistent with both their talk and their beliefs. Because they act in accordance to their values and beliefs rather than to please an audience, gain popularity or advance some personal or narrow political interest, authentic leaders can be characterized as having a high level of integrity. Because their talk and actions are consistent with

their beliefs and values, they can also be characterized as being highly transparent (see Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005 in this issue).

Note that our conceptualization of authentic leaders does not include anything about their leadership style. In that, it differs from most previous typologies of leaders. For instance, transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1998) emphasizes certain leader behaviors. While authentic transformational leaders may be more effective than inauthentic transformational leaders (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004), our conceptualization implies that transformational leadership is not synonymous with authentic leadership. Transformational leaders can be authentic or inauthentic and non-transformational leaders can be authentic. Nor does our conceptualization say anything about the content of the leader's values or convictions. In that, it is narrower than some definitions of authentic leaders (e.g., Luthans & Avolio, 2003), which include considerations of morality that are not derived directly from the concept of authenticity.

Rather, the defining characteristics listed above imply that we define authentic leaders on the basis of their self-concepts and the relationships between their self-concepts and their actions. More specifically, if we translate the above-mentioned criteria to self-concept attributes, we can define authentic leaders as people who have the following attributes:

1. *The role of the leader is a central component of their self-concept.* They have achieved a high person-role merger (Turner, 1978). They do not necessarily have to use the term leader to define themselves. They may use other terms (e.g., 'freedom fighter' Mandela, 1994) but these terms imply a leadership role, and they think of themselves in terms of that role and enact that role at all times, not only when they are officially 'in role'.
2. *They have achieved a high level of self-resolution (*Turner, 1976*) or self-concept clarity*, which refers to the extent to which one's self-beliefs are clearly and confidently defined and internally consistent (Campbell et al., 1996). High self-concept clarity implies strongly held values and convictions and a stable sense of self-knowledge, which several writers (e.g., Bennis, 2003; Luthans & Avolio, 2003) regard as attributes of authentic leaders. The importance of self-concept clarity for authentic leadership derives from the fact that people's self-views reside at the center of their psychological universe, providing the context for all other knowledge. As people become more certain of their self-conceptions, they are more inclined to rely on these conceptions to organize their experiences, predict future events, and guide behavior (Swann, 1990). For these reasons, stable and coherent self-concepts provide authentic leaders with a critically important source of coherence, and a framework for defining their existence, organizing experience, predicting future events, and guiding social interactions (Swann & Schroeder, 1995; Swann, Rentfrow, & Quinn, 2003).
3. *Their goals are self-concordant*. This means that they are motivated by goals that represent their actual passions as well as their central values and beliefs (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001). In contrast, non-concordant goals are ones that are pursued with a sense of "having to", as the person does not really "own" the goals or believe in them. Authentic leaders are self-concordant individuals, namely people who pursue life goals with a sense that they express their authentic choices rather than externally imposed duties or conventions. In other words, the authentic leader is motivated by internal commitment, which, in the final analysis is a commitment to a self-concept (Shamir, Arthur, & House, 1993).

4. *Their behavior is self-expressive*. It is consistent with their self-concepts and is primarily motivated by components of the self-concepts such as values and identities rather than by calculations or expected benefits. One implication of behaving in a self-expressive manner is that authentic leaders are likely to seek self-verification more than self-enhancement in their interactions with others, including followers. According to self-verification theory and related findings (Swann, 1990; Swann & Schroeder, 1995), the more people rely on their actual selves to guide their behavior, the higher their striving for self-verification. Furthermore, the more people have a coherent and stable self-concept, the more they derive a sense of prediction and control from self-verifying rather than from self-enhancing feedback and evaluations and the more they seek social interactions with others who corroborate their self-view rather than with others who provide them with the most positive evaluations or feedback (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992). This implies that authentic leaders do not seek the most admiring followers but rather followers who increase the leader's sense of authenticity by confirming his or her self-concept.

To summarize, our definition of authentic leaders implies that authentic leaders can be distinguished from less authentic or inauthentic leaders by four self-related characteristics: 1) The degree of person-role merger i.e. the salience of the leadership role in their self-concept, 2) The level of self-concept clarity and the extent to which this clarity centers around strongly held values and convictions, 3) The extent to which their goals are self-concordant, and 4) The degree to which their behavior is consistent with their self-concept.

1.2. Development of authentic leaders

Our concept of authentic leaders implies that authentic leader development has four components:

1. Development of a leader identity as a central component of the person's self-concept.
2. Development of self-knowledge and self-concept clarity, including clarity about values and convictions.
3. Development of goals that are concordant with the self-concept.
4. Increasing self-expressive behavior, namely consistency between leader behaviors and the leader's self-concept.

For the present purposes, we assume that authentic leader development is beneficial. This assumption is not based on the positive value currently attached to the term authenticity. Rather, it is based on the belief that authentic leaders are more effective than inauthentic leaders. This belief is based, in turn, on two arguments. First, we believe the leader role is a highly challenging role, which requires a high level of energy, resolve and persistence. To lead effectively, especially when leadership involves the introduction and guidance of societal or organizational changes, people need to overcome resistance, deal with frustrations and setbacks, sometimes make personal sacrifices, recruit support, and energize others. Dealing with such challenges requires a source of inner strength. To find the motivation to lead and the energy to persist in the face of obstacles and setbacks, leaders need to operate from strong convictions and a high level of self-concept clarity. As Swann (1990, pp. 414–415) puts it, "stable self-conceptions act like the rudder of a ship, bolstering people's confidence in their ability to navigate through the sometimes murky seas of everyday life".

For instance, in a recent interview, HP chairperson and CEO, Carly Fiorina was asked where she found the strength and the courage to deal with the strong resistance she had faced in her move to merger Compaq with HP. Here is part of her reply:

> "*. . .I think leadership takes what I call a strong internal compass. And I use the term compass because what does a compass do? When the winds are howling, and the storms are raging, and the sky is cloudy so you have nothing to navigate by, a compass tells you where true North is. And I think when a person is in a difficult situation, a lonely situation. . . you have to rely on that compass. Who am I? What do I believe? Do I believe we're doing the right things for the right reasons in the right way? And sometimes that's all you have" (In conversation with Louise Kehoe, July 21, 2003).*

It is reasonable to assume that leaders who are authentic in the sense discussed here, namely possess a psychologically central leader identity, have self-concordant goals and high self-concept clarity, and express themselves in their leadership role are more likely than inauthentic leaders to find the inner strength and internal compass to support them and guide them when dealing with their challenges. This is our first ground for associating authentic leaders with leader effectiveness.

In addition, authentic leader development is beneficial because of its effects on followers (Avolio et al., 2004; Gardner et al., 2005). Among other things, it may contribute to the development of authentic followership, which is an important component of authentic leadership and has additional benefits, as discussed in the following section.

1.3. Authentic leadership

So far, we have only discussed the concept of authentic leaders. However, equating authentic leadership with authentic leaders is not satisfactory for two reasons. First, it may result in identifying authentic leadership primarily on the basis of the leader's subjective experiences and convictions. This is because the self is a subjective phenomenon. It is impossible to know what is the 'true' or 'real' self or whether such a real self exists. It is only possible to know whether the person experiences his or her actions as stemming from his or her real self or as consistent with his or her true self (Turner, 1976).

However, as argued by Adorno (1973), a purely subjective concept of authenticity would include instances of 'honest' self-delusion, in our case of leaders who truly believe they have been endowed with special qualities not possessed by ordinary mortals and who act on the basis of such a belief. History has shown that such leaders can be very dangerous. If we want to exclude such instances from our definition of authentic leadership, we have to broaden the definition so that it refers not only to attributes of the leaders but also to attributes of their relationship with followers (Also refer to Gardner et al., 2005's discussion of this point in this special issue).

Second, and more fundamentally, leadership does not consist only of leaders, and therefore authentic leadership cannot consist only of authentic leaders. Leadership is always a relationship between leader and followers (e.g., Hollander, 1992; Howell & Shamir, 2005). Therefore, to clarify our construct of authentic leadership we have to bring the followers into the picture. We therefore suggest that for a fuller definition of authentic leadership, the term authenticity should be applied not only to the leaders but also to the followers and to the relationship between the followers and the leader as done in this special issue by Gardner et al. (2005). Following, we suggest that, in addition to authentic leaders, authentic leadership includes authentic followership as well, namely followers who follow the leaders for

authentic reasons and have an authentic relationship with the leader. More specifically, by authentic followership we mean:

1. Followers who follow the leader for authentic reasons, that is because they share the leader's, beliefs, values and convictions, the leader's concerns, and the leader's definition of the situation rather than because of coercion, normative pressures or the expectation of personal rewards.
2. Followers who do not have illusions or delusions about the leader and do not follow the leader because such illusions provide them with a false sense of safety. Rather, they exercise their own independent judgment about the leader and the leader's actions. Such followers have a realistic view of the leader's strengths and weaknesses and do not follow him or her blindly.
3. Followers who authenticate the leader. By that we mean:
   a. Followers who judge the leader's claim for leadership as based on personally held deep values and convictions rather than on mere conventions of an appointed office or the desire for personal power, status or other benefits.
   b. Followers who judge the leader's behaviors as consistent with his or her beliefs, values and convictions.

Following from the previous discussion, the development of authentic leadership does not depend only on the existence or development of authentic leaders but also on followers who authenticate the leader and follow him or her authentically. Furthermore, the authentication of the leader by the followers is an important element in authentic leadership development because it reinforces the leader's authenticity. According the self-verification theory (Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994; Swann, Rentfrow, & Quinn, 2003) people associate self-verifying evaluations with feelings of authenticity and psychological coherence. Thus, leaders' self-concept clarity and sense of authenticity depend to a considerable extent on the authentication of their leadership by their followers.

In the remaining of this article, we focus mainly on the development of authentic leaders, though we also attend briefly to the process by which followers authenticate the leader. The topics of authentic followership and the development of authentic followership will no be addressed here in full (For a broader definition of authentic leadership as a process that involves both leaders and followers, see Luthans & Avolio, 2003 and Gardner et al., 2005).

We focus here mainly on the development of authentic leaders for three reasons: First, it is a narrower and less complex topic than the full development of authentic leadership. Second, authentic leaders are a necessary component of authentic leadership, and therefore clarifying the process of authentic leader development is a necessary step toward a fuller understanding of authentic leadership development. Third, we believe that the existence or development of authentic leaders increases the likelihood (though by no means guarantees) of the development of authentic followership. There are reasons to expect authentic leadership to be contagious. Leaders who are authentic may serve as role models to their followers. They may give license or even encourage others to behave authentically as well. For instance, transparent leaders who admit their weaknesses and expose their vulnerability may encourage followers to behave in a similar manner because trusting others is likely to be reciprocated. Thus, our second reason for regarding authentic leader development as beneficial is that such leaders are less likely to produce blind followership and more likely to produce authentic followership as defined above.

After clarifying our terms, and in view of the considerations presented above, the remaining part of this paper is devoted to the argument that the development of authentic leaders is achieved through the

development of their life-stories and that the life-story is a major way by which followers authenticate their leaders.

2. The role of life-stories in the development of authentic leaders

2.1. Life-stories as a source of self-knowledge and self-concept clarity

We defined authentic leaders as having, among other things, self-knowledge and self-concept clarity. Our thesis is that they achieve such knowledge and clarity through the development of a life-story.

Self-knowledge consists, first of all, of the answers the person gives himself or herself to the question "Who am I?" According to the "narrative mode of knowing" (Bruner, 1986), these answers are often organized in the form of life-stories. Life-stories express the storytellers' identities, which are products of the relationship between life experiences and the organized stories of these experiences. Author Isak Dinesen is quoted as saying: "to be a person is to have a story to tell" (Simmons, 2002). Several authors (e.g. Bruner, 1991; Gergen & Gergen, 1986, McAdams, 1990) advocate that personal narratives are people's identities because the life-story represents an internal model of "who I was, who I am (and why), and who I might become". Identity is a story created, told, revised and retold throughout life (Pallus, Nasby, & Easton, 1991). We know or discover ourselves, and reveal ourselves to others, by the stories we tell about ourselves (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998, p. 70).

Leaders' life-stories are self-narratives. According to Gergen & Gergen (1986), self-narratives "refer to the individual's account of the relationships among self-relevant events across time. In developing a self-narrative the individual attempts to establish coherent connections among life events. Rather than seeing one's life as simply 'one damned thing after another' the individual attempts to understand life events as systematically related. They are rendered highly intelligible by locating them in a sequence or 'unfolded process'. One's present identity is thus not a sudden and mysterious event, but a sensible result of a life-story" (p. 255).

In other words, highly developed self-knowledge in terms of a life-story provides the authentic leader with self-concept clarity because it organizes life events into a gestalt structure that establishes connections between those events so that the person's life is experienced as a coherent unfolding process. Furthermore, the life-story provides the authentic leader with a "meaning system", from which to feel, think, and act. It enables him or her to analyze and interpret reality in a way that gives it a personal meaning (Kegan, 1983, p. 220).

Life-stories provide authentic leaders with a self-concept that can be expressed through the leadership role. For instance, they provide the leader with knowledge and clarity about their values and convictions. This is captured by Pearce (2003), who writes: "Your passion about what you want to change grows from the foundation of values that have been formed by your life experience. These values are vital to you personally, not because they are socially acceptable, although they might be—and certainly not because they look good on a plaque on the wall, but because you have actually experienced them to be true" (p. 18) and "Every idea you hold passionately has a background in your personal experience" (p. 21). As an example, Pearce brings Howard Schultz, the founder of Starbucks who watched his father losing jobs because of ill health and being worn down by the system: "As a kid, I never had any idea that I would one day head a company. But I knew in my heart that if I was ever in a position where I could make a difference, I wouldn't leave people behind" (Schultz & Young, 1997, p. 4).

2.2. Life-stories as self-justifications

Another defining characteristic of authentic leaders is a high person-role merger. For authentic leaders, the role and the self are relatively undifferentiated (Gardner & Avolio, 1998). Enacting the leadership role is in itself a form of self-expression for the authentic leader (Bennis, 1992). For that to happen, the leader must believe he or she has not only the ability but also the right to play a leadership role. In other words, to lead authentically, leaders need to justify to themselves the social position they claim for themselves, and their sense of self-confidence, self-efficacy, and knowing better than others where to go or what to do.

It is through life experiences and the way they are organized into life-stories that people can develop a self-concept of a leader that supports and justifies their leadership role because the life-story not only recounts but also justifies. Life-stories are not only 'who am I' stories but also 'why am I here' stories (Simmons, 2002). They include at least implied answers to the questions, "how have I become a leader?" and "why have I become a leader?" In other words, in constructing their life-stories leaders explain and justify their present self, which includes their leadership motivations "for, more than many forms of speech, autobiographical discourse expresses more directly than other discourses one's sense of self, identity, and motivation for acting in the world" (Illouz, 2003, p. 12).

Evidence in support of this claim can be found in a recent study by Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, & Adler (2005) who carried out a study of leadership development themes in leaders' life stories in order to examine how leaders' life stories account for and justify their leadership. Their purpose was not to study specific individuals in their particular context, but to discover broad leadership development themes that transcend particular contexts. For this reason, they used two very different types of life stories: leaders' published autobiographies and interviews with leaders. Eleven autobiographies of recognized leaders in the political, military, and business spheres were read. The autobiographies were deliberately selected to represent a variety of spheres of influence, gender, and cultural origins. Sixteen in-depth interviews with organizational leaders were conducted. Interviewees were relatively young (in their 30 s) managers from medium to large size high-tech organizations who were identified by their organizations as high performers who have already demonstrated leadership qualities and have further potential for leadership.

Shamir et al. used the narrative method (Lieblich et al. 1998) to analyze the leader's life stories. The narrative method views individual descriptions, explanations, and interpretations of actions and events as lenses through which to access the meaning which human beings attribute to their experience. Following, Shamir et al. approached the stories as "depositories of meaning" (Gabriel, 2000, p. 15) and read them from the perspective of asking about the meaning of the story from a leadership development point of view. Their aim was to distil from the many stories they studied the central themes of leadership development. To perform this process, they read and re-read the life stories produced by both methods of data collection and tried to identify major themes of leadership development that emerge from the stories. This was done in an iterative manner until some saturation was achieved in the sense that no other major categories were identified. Further details about the method can be found in Shamir et al. (2005).

They found that accounts of leadership development in leaders' life stories are organized around four major themes or proto-stories: leadership development as a natural process, leadership development out of struggle and hardship, leadership development as finding a cause, and leadership development as a

learning process. All four themes serve as bases for authentic leadership. In the remaining of this section we substantiate this claim and offer examples from the life-stories interviews, which are not reported by Shamir et al. (2005).

2.3. Leadership development as a natural process

This story manifested itself either as a story of a born leader whose leadership was evident from a very early age or as a story of a 'late bloomer' who had inherent talents and tendencies that were discovered when the opportunity presented itself.

The perception of being a natural leader provides a potential basis for authentic leadership as the terms natural and authentic are closely linked (as are the terms artificial and inauthentic). Stories of leadership development as a natural development have a quality of obviousness, sometimes an almost fatalistic quality. The obviousness of the leader's leadership and the fact that in many cases the life-story indicates that it had been manifested in his or her being 'special' in some respects from an early age, provide 'proofs' that the leader indeed has the ability to lead and the right to lead. Here are two examples from the life-stories interviews:

> "*It is a sort of a tendency that was inherent in me. At certain stages of life, I wasn't aware of that, but with time you become aware of it and even try to reinforce it... It is something that is built-in, I can't explain why, I just know it is built-in, as if it was obvious*".

> "*It is not that it comes from the outside... I never fought for it... it simply came... I also love it, I cannot live without it... I have to, I must lead*".

2.4. Leadership development out of struggle

These stories stand in contrast with the harmonious story of natural development. In these cases, leadership development is attributed to what Bennis and Thomas (2002) have called 'crucibles' or defining experiences, usually ordeals that transformed the person. In such stories, the motivation to lead is often attributed to the need to overcome some injustice (e.g., stemming from a disadvantageous ethnic or economic background). They also often contain a moral element stemming from the fact that the reported life experiences offered easier, but less moral, ways of coping (e.g., becoming a drug dealer), which were not taken by the leader. In addition, because they are usually stories of victory over enemies or debilitating circumstances, they attest to the existence in the leader of many qualities that are considered necessary for leadership—strong will, self-confidence, proactivity, ability to take on big challenges and cope with difficulties, independence, and toughness. In many respects, such life-stories are good stories to lead from.

Here is an example of authentic leadership development out of struggle taken from the interviews conducted by Shamir et al. (2005):

> "*There was a continuous struggle that I had to fight all over the years with the environment...the struggle that... formed me ... There was nothing but me... At least that's what I put into my head and I understood that the environment is hostile to someone like me, that is society is hostile to someone like me, and it was clear that in order to develop in such a society...* ***it had to be a hundred percent me***" *(Our emphasis).*

In political leaders' stories, the story of struggling with difficulties and disadvantages is not only a personal story but also a collective story. In these narratives, the leader's story represents the struggle of a group. When the stories represent a collective struggle, such as in the cases of Mandela (1994), Golda Meir (1975) or Gary Adams (1996), they provide an additional justification for the need to lead, namely fighting to promote collective purposes. In this respect, such stories are similar to the third type of leadership development story identified by Shamir et al. (2005).

2.5. Leadership development as finding a cause

Life-stories of leadership development as the finding of a cause often combine a personal story with a collective story of a movement. These stories present leadership development in terms of developing identification with a movement and a cause and finding a sense of direction through the development of a political or ideological outlook. For instance in Anwar Sadat's (1978) autobiography, titled "In search of identity", the growing recognition of the necessity of a revolution and armed struggle against the British is related in terms of finding a life goal and therefore an identity. Once he found that identity he felt a sense of destiny and a sense of a strong relationship between his personal fate and the fate of his country. Mandela (1994) also tells how he gradually developed or found the identity of a freedom fighter, and once he defined himself as such, this became his main identity and main purpose in life.

2.6. Leadership development as learning from experience

The fourth and final theme identified by Shamir et al. (2005) in leader's published and oral life-stories is leadership development as learning from experience. Several leaders perceive and relate their life-story as a series of learning or training experiences, for instance learning from failures or mistakes or learning from positive and negative role models. In such stories, the leader bases his or her self-knowledge and convictions directly on lessons learned from his or her life experience. For instance one of the managers interviewed by Shamir et al. related a story from his military service. As a deputy company commander during a war he tried to persuade the company commander to take a certain path but failed.

The result was a grave navigation error:

> "*We entered an ambush and were wiped out… This is the kind of story that has to influence a person, to mould him… I learned some of my behaviors from this story, my aggressiveness, my not giving in… I am not yielding. I am seen as someone who is too stubborn. One who checks everything before he is ready to step aside… And that is what I try to explain in this story, why I am so obstinate sometimes, why I am not ready to give up checking and re-checking everything… If I believe I am right-no compromise! And that is how I educate everybody here. This is how I worked, how I work. I teach my son: check everything thoroughly. Even an order. Check every order, don't do anything blindly*".

2.7. Non-leaders

The importance of a life-story as the basis for leadership and for a leadership-based self-concept is also highlighted by the cases of managers who did not have a coherent story to tell. These managers held a formal title of a leadership position, performed leadership functions, and were seen by other members

of their organizations as performing a leadership role, but these positions, roles and functions remained external to their core self-concepts. They expressed self-doubts, ambiguities and ambivalence regarding their ability to be leaders and their motivation to embrace such a role. Such managers clearly found it difficult to lead. Here are two examples:

> "*I don't know if I am considered a leader... They sent me to the course because they came to the conclusion that someone has to manage human resources in the company... Some people say I was more lucky than anything... I advanced very fast because there was a series of positions that bounced me upwards and also an element of luck... I am not sure I have enough of it [leadership]*".

> "*I have another characteristic, something that I feel inside me, some kind of insecurity in my abilities or in who I am... All the time I try to prove more and more... I live with this dilemma, how people perceive me and my lack of confidence that says, why do they look at me so highly, when I am... less than that, I live with this... gap*".

The life-stories of these managers were patchy and less organized than the stories of the other leaders. In contrast with the main leadership development themes presented above, which place the locus of causality in the leader's traits, efforts or actions, these stories emphasized an external locus of causality. They conveyed a sense of being pushed or pulled into leadership role. For instance, the first manager quoted above attributed his being sent to a leadership development course (and therefore "posing" as a leader) to company needs, and attributed his successes to luck.

2.8. Self-development as the development of a life-story

How do authentic leaders develop the life-stories that provide them with self-knowledge, self-concept clarity and strong convictions? Life-stories are not testimonies to the objective events that happened, but the manifestation and expression of the events as perceived and interpreted by the individual that experienced them (Widdershoven, 1993, p. 2). Personal narratives are much more than remembered. They are constructed (Neisser, 1994). This storied construction of reality has less to do with facts and more to do with meanings. Life-stories are not 'free' constructions, they are constrained by the events of life, but authentic leaders select the elements of the story to confer meaning on prior events-events that may not have had such meaning at the time of their occurrence (Josselson, 1993).

Constructing a coherent life-story involves highlighting certain participants and parts and ignoring or hiding others. This does not mean that authentic leaders lie while constructing their life-stories. Rather, they are constructing their truth by legitimately selecting and emphasizing certain events and participants in the service of this purpose. As one authentic leader, Mahatma Gandhi (1949), wrote in the introduction to his autobiography, titled "The story of my experiments with truth":

> "*I understand more clearly today what I read long ago about the inadequacy of all autobiography as history. I know that I do not set down in this story all that I remember. Who can say how much I must give and how much omit in the interest of truth?*"

The traditional approach to leadership development uses leader's life-stories in order to discover actual events and experiences that had contributed to the leader's development. Many researchers and writers have focused on events and experiences in the leader's early life or early career such as

the loss of a parent, the successful resolution of an early life crisis, difficult or nurturing family circumstances, high parental expectations, travel outside the homeland, relationships with mentors or role models, and involvement in many leadership roles early in life. They have attempted to connect these events and experiences with the development of relevant leadership traits and skills, such as self-confidence, independence, risk-taking, achievement motivation, and power motivation (e.g., Avolio & Gibbons, 1988; Burns, 1978; Conger, 1992; Kets de vries, 1988; Kotter, 1988; Zaleznick, 1977).

In contrast, we suggest that the events and experiences chosen by authentic leaders to appear in their life-stories reflect the leaders' self-concepts and their concept of leadership, and allow or enable them to enact their leadership role. For instance, Bennis & Thomas (2002) explicitly refer to the crucibles and defining moments in leaders' lives as places or experiences from which one extracts meanings that lead to new definitions of self. According to Bennis and Thomas, crucibles are places where essential questions are asked: Who am I? Who could I be? Who should I be? How should I relate to the world outside myself? From the point of view of self-development and self-concept clarity the events or experiences themselves are less important than the meaning the leader conferred on those experiences. As Bennis (2003, p. 334) says, "authentic leaders create their own legends and become the authors of their lives in the sense of creating new and improved versions of themselves."

The same principles apply not only to crucibles but also to other, more mundane experiences, for instance to learning from role models. According to Shamir et al. (2005) study, many leaders' life-stories emphasize learning from role models of various types: historical or public figures, literary figures, parents, siblings and other family members, teachers, mentors, superiors and peers. In the case of authentic leaders, these models are not imitated. Rather the leader constructs his or her self-concept with reference to these models. Perhaps the purest demonstration of this construction was given by some of the managers interviewed by Shamir et al. who could not identify clear and salient role models. Rather, they perceived the influence of role models as a kind of collage work in which they selected and assembled learning experiences from contacts with teachers, bosses and colleagues, as well as from world leaders and literary figures. This was described as a gradual process of self-clarification, which started from a vague self-identity and progressed through encounters with various real and fictitious characters, which the leader actively, though often intuitively and in an eclectic manner, used to arrive at greater self-concept clarity.

Here are two quotes that demonstrate this process:

> "*I don't think I ever preferred a single role model, but a little from here and a little from there… what seemed appropriate in a certain area, not the 100 %, only those parts that seemed to me important, that appealed to me*".

> "*I did something that is comfortable for me, that I didn't know how to figure out clearly or put into words… When I saw a movie I took away one sentence or one scene… and the same if I read a book… and I chose to remember out of understanding that those specific… elements in the book — them I want to remember and them I want to adopt, and they fit into the puzzle,* ***into the pattern that I… with time, create*** *(*our emphasis)*… All along the way I find for myself those people that when they say what they say it fits the way that I… These characters expressed sometimes in a couple of words or a number of words, what was in my belly, and… they didn't create anything new, they just framed what was clear to me*".

In sum, we have argued in the previous section that authentic leader development can be conceived of as the development of role-person merger, self-knowledge, self-concept clarity, self-concordance, and self-expression in the leadership role. In this section, we have claimed that such development is achieved through the construction of a life-story that confers meaning on experienced circumstances and events and organizes them in a meaningful and coherent way. The life-story conveys the leader qualities, including both strengths and weaknesses, explains the leader's values, convictions and justifies his or her vision and claim for leadership. It provides the meaning system from which the leader acts and thus makes his or her actions self-expressive. This approach to authentic leader development has both practical implications and implications for future research but before discussing these implications we wish to present another claim, namely that the leader's life-story is a major way by which followers authenticate the leader thus contributing not only to authentic leader development but also to the development of authentic leadership.

2.9. Life-stories as the basis of leader authentication

Our definition of authentic leadership included the authentication of the leader by the followers, namely the judgment by followers that the leader's claim for leadership is based on personally held deep values and convictions rather than on mere conventions of an appointed office or the desire for personal power, status or other benefits, and that the leader's behaviors are consistent with his or her beliefs, values and convictions. According to many authors, followers' trust is a prerequisite for leadership (e.g., Shamir & Lapidot, 2003). To a great extent, followers' trust is based on judgments of authenticity, which are based on the leader's life-story and its consistency with the leader's messages and actions. To be an authentic leader it is not sufficient that the leader has a high sense of self-concordance (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). The leader also has to be judged as self-concordant by others.

How do followers decide about the authenticity of the leader? First, they are likely to evaluate the life-story itself: its coherence and believability. Second, life-stories probably function as 'narratives of origin' often used in the art world to authenticate the artist's work (Fine, 2003). In art, like in leadership, it is often difficult to distinguish the real from a copy. Artists and their promoters therefore use the artist's life-story in order to claim authenticity for the artist and his or her work, while critics and collectors rely not only on the work of art presented to them but also on the artist's life-story to base their judgments of authenticity. In a similar vein, the life-story is perhaps the most legitimate and convincing means by which leaders can convey their claim for authenticity, more legitimate and convincing than directly declaring their traits, values and convictions. Followers are therefore likely to look at the leader's life-story in an attempt to assess whether the leader's traits, values and convictions are convincingly explained and justified by his or her life-story.

Third, followers can be expected to look for 'authenticity markers' (Pittinksy & Tyson, 2004) in the leader's life-story, namely elements that justify the leader's claim to speak for the group. For instance, the recently offered social identity theory of leadership (van Knippenbrg & Hogg, 2003) implies that the followers identify with the leader to the extent that the leader is prototypical of the group, that is to the extent he or she embodies and represents central group values and characteristics. Followers' judgments about the prototypicality of the leader are likely to be based on his or her life-story: The more the story presents the leader as similar to the followers in terms of background, values and other central characteristics, the more likely are followers to perceive the leader as authentic and as a 'representative character' worthy of identification and trust (Shamir et al., 1993).

More broadly, to lead effectively, the leader's story and the collective story should be similar in some respects (Gardner, 1995). The leader's story should capture not only the leader's self-concept, but also the followers' values, identities and desires. It should be embedded in a collective story of which followers are a part, and should provide an answer not only to the question, 'what am I here for?' but also to the questions 'what are we here for?' Authenticity markers provide the basis for judging the leader's story as an authentic representation of the collective story.

Fourth, in evaluating the life-story as a narrative of origin and in searching for authenticity markers, followers may compare the leader's life-story as told by the leader to the leader's life-story as told by other sources: family members, associates, teachers, bosses, journalists, etc. Fifth, and perhaps most importantly, the life-story serves as a template against which followers compare the leader's decisions and actions. The followers can be assumed to constantly monitor whether the leader's actions and behaviors are consistent with the traits, values and convictions implied by his or her life-story in order to judge the authenticity of the leader and find justifications for their own followership role.

Of course, leaders, who are aware of the potential effects of their life-stories on followers' authentication process, may fabricate such stories to increase followers' identification and trust. For instance, Jesse Jackson used to tell stories about growing up in poverty and about Martin Luther King dying in his hands and passing the torch to him (Shamir, Arthur, & House, 1994). At least some sources (e.g., House, 1988) claim that these stories were exaggerated for the purpose of gaining followers' identification and trust. We can therefore assume that authentic followership is a continuous process of comparing the leader's life-stories as told by him or her with information about the leader's life-story obtained from other sources, as well as a process of comparing the leader's life-stories with the leader's other messages and actions. In this sense, authentic leadership does not reside only in the leader.

In addition, as suggested earlier in this article following self-verification theory (Swann, 1990), authentication by followers is likely to contribute the leader's self-concept clarity and sense of authenticity thus further reinforcing the development of authentic leadership. However, a full treatment of followers' role in the development of authentic leadership is outside the scope of this paper.

3. Practical implications

3.1. Assisting the development of authentic leaders from the life-story approach

The life-story approach to authentic leader development suggests that self-knowledge, self-concept clarity, and the internalization of the leader's role into the self-concept are achieved through the construction of life-stories. In this regard, it is different from most leadership development programs, which tend to focus on the acquisition of concepts, skills, and behaviors either in courses and workshops (Conger, 1992) or through on-the-job experiences, mentoring and coaching (Day, 2000). In addition to the different focus, the life-story approach to authentic leader development implies that the development process is highly personal and furthermore may have to be largely natural in order to be authentic. Therefore, unlike the acquisition of concepts, skills or behavioral styles, this process cannot be expected to gain much from a standardized training program carried out within the framework of the leadership development "industry''. We should be especially wary of standardized programs because authentic leaders as defined in this paper do not follow fads, yet the yearning for authenticity, in leadership and elsewhere, is currently such a fad.

These considerations set limits to the extent to which authentic leader development can be planned and guided. However, this does not mean that it cannot be assisted. The process does not always happen fully naturally. There may be ways to assist it or facilitate its unfolding. It is reasonable to assume that many people aspiring to be authentic leaders may have fragments of a life-story in their minds that do not add up to a coherent story and do not yet provide them with a sense of self-knowledge and self-concept clarity. Some people are action-oriented and less reflexive than others.

In addition, the action demands of many tasks and circumstances may not provide the time and state of mind for reflection, as evidenced by the fact that many leaders (e.g., Mandela, 1994; Sadat, 1978) report that much of their self-development occurred during periods of forced 'time-outs' when they had to spend time in prison. Throwing leaders into prisons may be a little too extreme way of assisting them in self-development. However, there are perhaps other ways by which people can be assisted in drawing personal meanings from their experiences and authoring their life-stories to achieve greater self-knowledge and clarity and thus develop their potential to become authentic leaders.

It follows from our discussion of authentic leader development that one of the major ways to assist people to develop their potential to become authentic leaders is through a guided reflection process. Reflective thinking is "the process of creating and clarifying the meaning of experience (past or present) in terms of self" (Boyd & Fales, 1983). The process involves returning to the experience (replaying it in the mind and/or recounting it to others), attending to the feelings accompanying the experience and its memory, re-evaluating the experience and drawing lessons from it. Through this process people learn about their strengths, weaknesses, motives and values and come in touch with their 'true' self in the sense of separating who they are and who they want to be from what the world thinks they are and wants them to be (Bennis, 1992).

Previous works (e.g., Bennis & Thomas, 2002; Luthans & Avolio, 2003) have emphasized the role of the life events as "triggers" that stimulate development and growth. However, just encountering some impactful experience is not enough; the experience must be reflectively worked into the life story such that the story, and identity, is revised or redirected (Pallus, Nasby, & Easton, 1991). This can happen close to the experience but may also happen later in life. In other words, because life stories are continuously constructed and revised, the "lessons of experience" (McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988) can be learned not only close to the experience but also much later. Following, the life-stories approach to leader development assumes that in addition to the immediate impact of the experience, there are opportunities for growth and development in engaging in what McAdams (1990) has called a life review, namely the process of reflecting upon, elaborating, editing and extending one's life story.

A guided life review process can start with asking people to draw a life-line, identify major events and turning points and reflect on them with the help of questions asked by a facilitator, a counselor or sometimes even a researcher, as has been done by Tichy (1997) and Bennis & Thomas (2002). Such a process often focuses on the leaders' 'defining moments' (Badaracco, 1997), 'epiphanies' (Denzin, 1989) or 'crucibles' (Bennis & Thomas, 2002): events or circumstances in which they were presented with dilemmas or difficult choices and which provide them with an opportunity to learn from the choices made and the actions taken about their values, motivations, priorities, abilities, and shortcomings. Such reflection does not amount to the authoring of a full life-story. Often, however, considerable potential for self-knowledge may reside in less comprehensive stories and, furthermore, reflection on defining moments may provide the anchors for developing a more complete story and a fuller sense of self-concept clarity.

Because we defined authentic leadership as characterized by person-role merger, and because we view leader development and self-development as closely related, we do not believe reflection should be restricted only to leadership experiences or even to career related experiences. Furthermore, defining moments do not necessarily have to be associated with the overcoming of difficulties or hardships. As suggested by Luthans & Avolio (2003) there is considerable potential for leadership development in positive life events.

It has recently been suggested (Spreitzer & Grant, 2004) that people may be challenged by "positive jolts", namely unexpected events of a positive nature such as unique experiences of success or appreciation. Such experiences generate positive emotions such as joy, pride, interest and elevation. According to Fredrickson's (1998; 2001) broaden-and-build theory, such emotions broaden people's thought-action repertoire by creating a tendency to explore and take in new information and experiences and by enabling the person to envision even greater achievements in the future. These tendencies in turn may build enduring personal resources by broadening the person's self-concept to include qualities and strengths the person had been less aware of before the positive jolt, reinforcing the person's sense of agency and efficacy, and adding newly imagined "possible selves" (Markus & Nurius, 1986) to his or her self-concept.

Such a process can be facilitated for the purpose of aiding leader development. Luthans & Avolio (2003) advocate exposing people to planned positive trigger events. An example is provided by Roberts, Dutton, Spreitzer, Heaphy, & Quinn (in press) who have developed an assessment called the reflected best self (RBS), which asks people to obtain short descriptions of who they are and what they do when they are at their very best from a diverse array of significant people in their lives (Spreitzer & Grant, 2004). Roberts et al. demonstrate how reflecting on the RBS helps people grow because it activates the process described above.

The life-stories approach implies that similar outcomes may be achieved by making use of positive jolts that already happened. Rather than obtaining a reflected best self from current associates, leaders may be asked to construct a "reflexive best-self" by identifying positive jolts in their life-stories and reflecting on them to discover their strengths and contributions and broaden their self-concept. In view of the reported success of the RBS technique and the fact that reflecting on unique events in life stories, including positive jolts has been used successfully in psychotherapy (e.g., Freedman & Coombs, 1996; White & Epston, 1990) we speculate that such an approach may also be useful in leader development.

In a similar vein, leaders may gain self-knowledge and self-concept clarity from reflection on their role models: people whom the leader believes have influenced him or her or whom he or she perceived as worthy of emulation and identification. Shamir et al. (2005) discovered that many leaders put an emphasis on role models in their life-stories. If leaders attribute much of their development to role models, perhaps more emphasis should be given to this aspect in the guided development of authentic leaders. This process can follow a similar pattern to the one suggested above with respect to defining moments. Leaders may be invited to list their role models and then reflect on the reasons for choosing these models, the feelings associated with these choices and the motives and values reflected in their choices. Thus, they may start to define or re-define themselves through their role models.

In addition, leaders may be assisted by an invitation to discuss and reflect on other leaders' life-stories, not necessarily those they have identified as their own role models. One way to do so would be to work with leaders or aspiring leaders on other leaders' life-stories. Reading biographies or extracts of biographies, watching biographical films, discussing them and reflecting on other leaders' life-stories, defining moments and development patterns might be helpful in authentic leader development because,

as Sparrowe (2005) has argued, people may need a variety of alternative plots and characterizations as templates against which they can construct their own past, imaginatively represent their own future, and narrate their own development as leaders. Exposing leaders to other leaders' life-stories and reflecting on them, may assist leaders in gaining self-concept clarification through the process of collage work as described by some leaders interviewed by Shamir et al.'s (2005) and quoted earlier in this paper.

Other ways of assisting the development of authentic leaders can be suggested. For instance, guided reflection on current events and challenges facing the leader can be used to draw self-knowledge and self-related meaning from the feelings associated with them, the action alternatives considered by the leader, and the choices made by him or her. Guided reflection on current actions and decisions may also help managers and other leaders to find ways to better express their 'true' self in their role, and find the courage to present themselves to others in a more transparent and authentic manner.

Furthermore, authentic leader development is not performed only in the leader's head. Authentic leaders find their 'voice' by acting in the world, receiving feedback, and reflecting on the consequences of their actions. We should not forget that lives are not only constructed as stories, they are also lived, and people can shape their biographies, not only the way these biographies are constructed into life-stories (Avolio, 1999). If we assume that leaders lead by virtue of their actual biographies no less than by virtue of their life-stories, they should live and act as authentic leaders if they want to develop their potential to become such leaders. Authentic leader development therefore includes reflecting on the past, acting in the present, and reflecting on present action, and all aspects should be attended to in an attempt to facilitate the process.

The processes of aided leader development described above are personal and probably most appropriately performed in individual counseling. Some of them, e.g. the discussion of leader biographies, films, etc., may benefit from a small group framework. Not all managers can become authentic leaders through such processes and many are likely to benefit from such help only in certain stages of their life or career. Some will discover that they cannot authentically incorporate the leadership role into their life-stories and self-concepts. Others might become more authentic people but not necessarily more authentic leaders because they lack some necessary leadership attributes and skills.

However, it is believed that assisting leaders in guided reflection as described above may help many of them to identify and define their convictions, gain greater self-clarity, and come to view life as an unfinished project or set of projects (Denzin, 1989), thus assisting them in finding an 'internal compass' and becoming more authentic leaders. This process does not guarantee the development of authentic leadership because leadership depends on followership. Cervantes' Don Quixote, for instance, has been presented as an authentic person who has a clear internal compass (March & Shechter, 2003). We doubt, however, if he qualifies as a leader because he has almost no followership. In spite of this qualification, we believe the process described in this paper is a necessary component of authentic leader development and may be as important as the acquisition of skills or the learning of an appropriate behavioral style.

4. Research implications

Our arguments here are largely speculative though they draw on previous research (e.g., Bennis & Thomas, 2002; Gardner, 1995; Shamir et al., 2005; Tichy, 1997). Research on leadership from a life-story point of view is still scarce in general, and virtually non-existent with respect to the topic of

authentic leadership development. Both the explicit arguments and the implied propositions presented in this paper need to be substantiated and tested.

In contrast with previous biographical studies of leadership that have used leaders' life-stories as windows to their lives, the theoretical considerations presented above imply we should view leaders' life-stories as stories that are constructed for self-knowledge, self-clarification, self-presentation, and self-expression. These considerations suggest a narrative approach, which does not focus on life histories but on life-stories. From this perspective, leaders' life-stories should be approached as "depositories of meaning" (Gabriel, 2000, p. 15) and analyzed to discover those meanings. The data for such analysis can come from various sources: written biographies and autobiographies of leaders, interviews in the media, interviews conducted for research purposes with leaders, colleagues and followers, and observations of leaders' public appearances and other occasions in which leaders' share their life-stories with others.

Many lines of inquiry can be suggested from this perspective. Leaders' life-stories can be compared to others' life-stories, e.g. artists, scientist, or just ordinary people, to examine the proposition that they contain specific leadership related contents. For instance, assuming that one of the functions of the life-story is to justify the leader's position, leaders' life-stories can be analyzed and compared to others' stories to discover the answers that leaders give to the questions "why did I become a leader?" and "how have I become a leader?" Similarly, to test whether leaders' life-stories are indeed selectively constructed by the leaders, the life-stories of leaders as told by themselves should be compared with the stories that others—family members, colleagues, and followers—tell about the same leaders' lives.

A different line of inquiry would focus on the process of constructing life-stories by leaders. From the life-story perspective, leadership development is to a great extent the development of self-knowledge and clarity through reflection, interpretation and revision of life-stories. Therefore, the construction of life-stories is what studies of authentic leader development should focus on. This construction can be assumed to be an on-going process, which is performed not in isolation but in interaction with others, and which is influenced by others' responses to initial versions of the story. Certain elements may be deleted or de-emphasized in successive version of the story, while others may be added or emphasized. New self-relevant meanings may be discovered or constructed in this process. Following different versions of the same leaders' life-stories (for instance, in newspaper interviews given by the leader at different periods) may provide some clues to this process.

While the study of leaders' life-stories may offer many insights, it is not sufficient. Since leaders may be aware of the impact of their life-stories on followers, they may fabricate life-stories to project an image of authenticity. Methods have to be devised to distinguish authentic stories from inauthentic stories and authentic leadership from inauthentic leadership. A starting point would be to test our arguments about the relationships between leader's life-stories and their self-concepts. For instance, do leaders who have coherent life-stories experience a greater self-role merger? Do they have greater self-concept clarity? Greater self-concordance? A clearer sense of direction? More intense commitment to their missions? Such investigations should not be restricted only to leaders' self-reports about their self-concepts, goals and values but should corroborate them with assessments from colleagues and followers.

Followers' responses to leaders' life-stories, and the effects of these stories on followers should also be studied. In regard to the arguments advanced in this paper, the process by which followers judge the authenticity of the leader's life-story and of the leader should receive special attention. For instance, to what extent are followers influenced by the leader's life-story in evaluating his or her authenticity? What are the 'authenticity markers' that followers look for in leaders' life-stories? Does the demonstration of

vulnerability on the part of the leader by the inclusion of stories of failure and weakness increase followers' trust in the leader? Do followers'reciprocate the authenticity of the leader as reflected in his or her life-story and behavior? More generally, do authentic leaders produce authentic followership as defined in this paper?

Such investigations can be carried out in field studies that examine the relationships between leaders' life-stories, leaders' authenticity, and followers' reactions. Perhaps they can also be carried out experimentally. While manipulating authenticity is a contradiction in terms, it may be possible to manipulate the contents of leaders' life-stories, randomly expose different samples of participants to different versions of life-stories and study experimentally the effects of these versions on people's reactions to the leader, including the extent to which they perceive him or her as authentic. It may also be possible to expose different samples of participants to the same arguments and messages presented by authentic and inauthentic leaders. For instance, a message about an environmental initiative presented by a leader whose life-story based self-concept centers around environmental issues versus a leader whose self-concept does not include deep conviction about these issues.

Finally, the cross-cultural generalizability of the ideas presented in this article should be investigated. To begin with, the concept of authenticity may not be valued similarly in all cultures or, which is more likely, may carry different meaning and manifested in different ways in different cultures. For instance, followers in some cultures may not expect leaders to be self-expressive or transparent. Indeed, they may even react negatively to such leaders. The processes by which followers authenticate the leader may also differ among cultures. In addition, the guided life review process suggested in the practical implications section may not be equally applicable in all cultures either because it violates norms of privacy or intimacy or because it focuses on the individual and relies on a relatively independent, rather than interdependent concept of self (Markus & Kitayama 1991). As a method of inquiry, the life-story approach has been used extensively by anthropologists in many cultures (e.g., Crapanzano, 1977; Peacock & Holland, 1993). Its applicability to the investigation and development of leadership remains an open issue.

As we suggested in the introduction, the concept of authentic leadership will be useful to leadership scholars and practitioners to the extent that it highlights aspects of leadership that have not been emphasized by extant theories of leadership and suggests new directions for research and practice. Our purpose in this paper has been to contribute to these outcomes by advancing a self-concept based definition of authentic leaders, articulating on the basis of this definition a thesis regarding the central place of leaders' life-stories in the development of authentic leaders, and deriving from this thesis some practical and research implications, which, while perhaps not totally new, have hitherto been neglected by students of leadership and leadership development.

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