

# DOES FOLLOWER SUBJECTIVITY MATTER IN DEFINING AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP? A CALL FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Justice Owusu-Bempah, Ramzi Addison and John Fairweather

---

## ABSTRACT

Authentic leadership (AL) has been proposed as the new leadership paradigm that can meet the demands of today's organisations. The AL literature suggests that there are three critical aspects before AL will be bestowed: first the espoused values and actions of authentic leaders must be congruent, second, the expectation of the leaders and the followers must be congruent, and third, the leaders must behave with high moral integrity for the good of their subordinates, the organisation and the community. Since these features of AL involve subjective interpretation before authentic leadership is bestowed, it is likely that evaluations of it vary in different settings. This paper argues that to understand AL is to understand follower subjectivity. On that basis, this paper is calling for more research to explore the meaning of the AL construct from the perspectives of leaders and followers in different contexts. The paper suggests Q method as the preferred approach since it is argued as being robust in the measurement of human subjectivity.

**Keywords:** Authentic leadership, perception and expectation, Q method

---

## INTRODUCTION

The revelations of leadership and management scandals and leadership failures in various organisations at national and international levels, (recent examples include: WorldCom, Enron, General Motors and Lehman Brothers) and the accompanying societal challenges facing public and private organisations have drawn both practising leaders (practitioners) and

---

### *About the authors*

**Justice Owusu-Bempah** ([jobempah@yahoo.com](mailto:jobempah@yahoo.com)) is a doctoral student at Lincoln University, New Zealand. His thesis involves a qualitative study on how leaders and followers bestow authentic leadership in Ghana and New Zealand. The material for this article stems from his thesis.

**Dr Ramzi Addison** ([Ramzi.Addison@lincoln.ac.nz](mailto:Ramzi.Addison@lincoln.ac.nz)) is HOD of the Business Management Marketing and Law Dept in the Faculty of Commerce, Lincoln University, New Zealand. He is a Senior Lecturer in Business Management with an interest in cross cultural research in organisations. His latest publication is: Rujirawanich, P, Addison, R & Smallman, C 2011, 'The effects of cultural factors on innovation in a Thai SME', *Management Research Review*, vol. 34, no. 12, pp. 1264-1280.

**Dr. John Fairweather** ([john.fairweather@lincoln.ac.nz](mailto:john.fairweather@lincoln.ac.nz)) is Professor of Rural Sociology in the Agribusiness and Economics Research Unit at Lincoln University. He is a full-time social science researcher working in applied sociology primarily involved in describing, monitoring and interpreting changes in farming and rural society but with additional research activity focused on innovation. Recent publications focus on research methods, farmer resilience, causal mapping of farm systems, environmental orientations of farmers, farming styles, and user innovation.

*Owusu-Bempah, Addison & Fairweather – Does follower subjectivity matter in defining authentic leadership? A call for qualitative research.*

researchers' attention to the ethical challenges in leadership. These behavioural meltdowns at top leadership levels are one of the most important factors that are making researchers question the known leadership theories while at the same time looking for the kind of leadership model that could best suit the challenges faced by the world at this time. This questioning and search by practitioners and researchers led to the 'AL model' (Luthans & Avolio 2003; Avolio & Gardner 2005; Avolio et al., 2004).

AL has been suggested by researchers and practitioners to be the kind of leadership relevant for positive and desirable organisational outcomes in a turbulent and challenging time, as in our world today (Avolio & Gardner 2005). Authentic leaders are said to be true to themselves and are transparent in all situations regardless of cost to them as individuals, and they have the welfare of followers and the organisation at heart (Avolio et al., 2004, Luthans & Avolio 2003; Kernis, 2003b; Gardner et al., 2005).

The leading proponents of AL theory explain that leaders and followers come into an organisation with different expectations and in-built value systems which drive them to act in certain ways. On entry into an organisation, followers make judgements based on these already built perceptions in their minds of how a leader (in this case an authentic leader) should or must behave. Similarly, leaders have in their minds how they should behave and what to expect from followers. Critically important are the interactions between the leaders and the followers as this drive the consequent interpretations and behaviours.

The key issue here is that the meaning given to authenticity by followers is mainly dependent on their understanding and interpretation of what constitutes it, that is, its subjective component. But, leadership theory has argued that there is a direct relationship between follower perceptions and their cultural and/or contextual background (Lord & Maher 1991; Phillip & Lord 1981; Awamleh & Gardner 1999; Meindl et al., 1985). It is therefore expected that preferred AL attributes may be different in different cultures.

This review will start by discussing briefly the historical overview of various leadership theories and the critiques levelled against them and then compare and contrast AL theory with the known leadership theories and, finally, proceed to critically appraise key aspects of AL theory.

## **HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF LEADERSHIP THEORIES**

The effects and impact of leadership on nations and organisations cannot be overlooked. The successes and failures of nations and multinational companies as well as local organisations could at least partly be attributed to leadership (Yukl 1981). This makes the study of leadership very relevant in our society today.

In a retrospective analysis of leadership models, Clemens & Meyer (1999) drew on leadership literature and identified two eras of leadership development. They separated these two eras as the "old" school and the "modern" school. The "old" school was traced from Plato's period to the early twentieth century while the 'modern' school according to them began with the findings of psychologists like Freud, Jung & Skinner who brought a new paradigm of trait and behavioural dimensions into leadership studies. Alima-Metcalf (1995) however thinks that the "modern" study of leadership rather began with the introduction of trait theory in the late 1920s. Yukl (1989) took a different perspective and categorised the

*Owusu-Bempah, Addison & Fairweather – Does follower subjectivity matter in defining authentic leadership? A call for qualitative research.*

modern school of leadership studies into three streams: the trait, behavioural and contingencies/situational theories and commented that all others are extensions of these three main models. But Chemers (2000) holds that there are five streams in the modern school, adding transformational and charismatic theories as the two additional ones.

For the purpose of this review, the modern schools of leadership will be categorised into early modern theories and recent theories.

## **EARLY MODERN THEORIES**

### **Trait Theory of Leadership**

Trait theory arises from the belief that effective leaders have distinguishing traits making the inherent individual characteristics more important than situational attributes. Trait theory concentrates on the leaders themselves ('great man theory') with the underlying assumption that some people are "natural leaders" and no matter the surrounding circumstances, they will emerge as leaders. Yukl (1989) explains that such persons are assumed to be endowed with certain traits not possessed by other people. Physical characteristics (height, appearance and energy levels featured prominently), personality characteristics (like self-esteem, dominance, emotional stability) and the individual's ability (general intelligence, verbal fluency, originality, and social insight) were the traits that were assumed to be inherent in every leader. The supporters of this theory deny that individuals could be trained to become leaders and the researchers who were in favour of this theory did not consider situational variables or follower characteristics to be significant (Steers et al. 1996).

The second school of thought on the trait theory was the study carried out by Stogdill in 1948. He added a contextual element to trait theory after examining the results of 124 trait studies from 1904 to 1948 and concluded that "A person does not become a leader by virtue of possessing some combination of traits ... the pattern of personal characteristics of the leader must bear some relevant relationship to the characteristics, activities and goals of the followers". Further, individual's social background (such as education, social status, and mobility), the individual's task-related characteristics such as drive to achieve, desire to excel and task orientation are bases that can provide a differentiation of one individual from others when it comes to leadership (Thomas 2001).

Trait theory has not gone without criticism; Thomas (2001) said the trait theory has failed to present one trait that can be used as a distinguishing characteristic between those who lead and those who do not. Yukl (1994) also adds that several attempts have been made in research to pinpoint leader traits and characteristics related to effective leadership that are capable of predicting who might be an effective leader. But all these attempts were not able to provide a single trait or a combination of traits that were associated with effective leadership. The implication here is that trait theory has failed to stand up to scientific examination because of the difficulty of consistently identifying traits that are necessary and sufficient for leadership success. However, Ward (2006) suggests that regardless of the critiques levelled against trait theory, it has led to further research into different approaches to the study of leadership today. Steers et al., (1996) claim that some researchers have taken a keen interest in the trait theory despite the criticisms levelled against and have developed improved measurements, better methodological approaches and subjected the trait theory to more rigorous testing. For instance recent implicit leadership theories (Phillip & Lord 1981;

*Owusu-Bempah, Addison & Fairweather – Does follower subjectivity matter in defining authentic leadership? A call for qualitative research.*

Lord et al. 1982; Lord et al. 1984) suggests that some traits are associated with leadership emergence. Their research suggests that people seem to perceive others as leaders when they have certain clusters of leadership-oriented traits called leadership. These studies confirm Bass' (1990) and Dorfman's (1996) findings that traits like intelligence, interpersonal skills, and cognitive skills are related to successful leadership.

## **Behavioural Theory**

The deficiencies in trait theory led researchers to look into the specific behaviours that leaders' exhibit. This gave rise to behavioural theory. Behavioural theory focuses on the effectiveness of the leader based on what they do in a given situation rather than the leader's individual characteristics (Steers et al. 1996). It proceeds from the assumption that different situations call for different behavioural characteristics. Several studies observed different kinds of leader behaviour that had differing effects on outcomes. Typical among these studies were those done at Ohio State University and the University of Michigan that focused on identifying leadership behaviour that is instrumental for the attainment of organizational group goals. Blake & Mouton (1964) concluded that subordinates perceived their leader's behaviour primarily in two distinct categories namely: *consideration* and *initiating structures* – either focusing more on employees (consideration) or on production targets (initiating structures).

These categories, in Yukl's (1989) view, contain varieties of specific behaviours. Consideration included behavioural items concerned with leader supportiveness, friendliness, consideration, consultation with subordinates, representation of subordinates' interests, openness of communication with subordinates etc. These items were classified as relationship oriented and that leaders possessing these characteristics are good in establishing and maintaining good relationships with subordinates. Initiating structures included behaviour items concerned with directing subordinates, clarifying subordinates roles, planning, coordinating, and problem solving, criticizing poor work and pressuring subordinates to perform better. These items are task oriented and are good for utilizing organizational resources efficiently and attaining organizational goals.

Similarly, there was the University of Michigan study which describes leaders' behaviour as relationship-oriented (*employee-oriented*) or task-oriented (*production-oriented*). Steers et al. (1996) mention that employee-oriented describes leaders who show concern for their subordinates and being friendly to them which is similar to Blake & Mouton's (1964) description of consideration. Blake & Mouton's (1964) popular managerial grid derived four leadership styles along the two dimensions of *concern for people* and *concern for production*. The dimensions presented by Blake and Mouton show that a leader who is high on both dimensions is most effective. That is a combination of concern for people and concern for results (Blake & Mouton 1964; Bass 1990) leads to effective leadership.

A number of criticisms have been levelled at Blake and Mouton's theory. First it has been identified that there exists some variability between the correlation of behaviours and organizational outcomes (Yukl 1989; Bryman 1992). Secondly, there has been an oversimplification of the behavioural dimensions of leaders which is viewed as very complex in reality (Nahavandi 2000; Ivancevich & Matteson 1999). Thirdly, no situational variables were included in the analysis of these studies, because different behaviours have been found to be more or less effective in different settings (Ayman et al. 1995; Bryman 1992). Fourthly,

*Owusu-Bempah, Addison & Fairweather – Does follower subjectivity matter in defining authentic leadership? A call for qualitative research.*

the studies on behavioural theory have been found to provide little or no room for cross-cultural dimensions, especially the influence of task orientation which can be very complex in some cultures (Thomas 2001). These criticisms of behavioural theory prompted the rise of contingency theory.

## Contingency Theories

Contingency theories take into consideration the leader, the situation, and follower characteristics when examining leadership. This caters for the major criticism levelled against the behavioural theory (Steers et al. 1996). That is, the optimum leadership style is believed to be dependent on the situation faced by the leader (Vroom & Jago 1995). Thomas (2001) posits the leaders' orientation must match the demands that go with the situation.

The underlying assumption of this contingency theory is that a leader's effects on subordinates are postulated to be contingent on particular situational moderator variables. The best known proponent of this theory was Fiedler (1964). He developed what he called a *contingency model of leadership effectiveness*. According to Steers et al. (1996) this model contains the relationship between leadership style and the favourableness of the situation. Situational favourableness was described by Fiedler in terms of three empirically derived dimensions: The *leader – member* relationship, the *degree of task structure*, and the *leader's position power*.

Favourable situation is described as one where there exist leader acceptance by followers, mutual respect and task completely laid out and formal authority is formally attributed to the leader by the followers. In contrast, the situation will be unfavourable for the leader if the opposite exist. Steers et al. (1996) explain that leader effectiveness, according to this theory is dependent on how favourable the situation.

One of the weaknesses of contingency theory is its assumption that everything about the leader is stable. However, it fails to prescribe variability of behaviour within this stable role the leader plays and its effects on subordinate motivation and satisfaction (Vroom & Jago 1995). Fiedler's theory according to Thomas (2001) has clearly made an important contribution toward understanding leader effectiveness and still needs further additional development in its application.

One strand of contingency theory is the Path-goal theory (House 1971; House & Mitchell 1974). This was developed in response to conflicting results from behavioural approaches. Path-Goal theory postulates that leaders must make sure that followers know what is expected of them by setting clear goals; providing the needed resources; removing all barriers to goal attainment and making followers know the link between achieving the desired goals and the extrinsic rewards associated. In essence the Path-Goal theory attempts to explain the impact that leader behaviour has on subordinate motivation, satisfaction, and performance depending on the situation. The contingency in this theory is that the leader defines the path to the follower and explains the rewards that go with it. (Bass 1990; Yukl 1989; Chea 2007; Dorfman 1996; Steers et al. 1996; Thomas 2001).

House (1971) supported the path-goal theory and identified four leader behaviours as: *directive leadership*, *supportive leadership*, *participative leadership* and *achievement oriented-leadership*. House's specifies a number of situational (task structure, formal

*Owusu-Bempah, Addison & Fairweather – Does follower subjectivity matter in defining authentic leadership? A call for qualitative research.*

authority system, work group) and follower (locus of control, experience, perceived ability) characteristics - moderators of the relationship between leader style and follower satisfaction and performance. Path-goal theory again presupposes that the leader's task is to analyse the situation and the subordinate characteristics and make it clear to subordinates that effective performance will result in desired goals. In doing this the leader may adopt a directive (which includes coaching), supportive, participative or achievement-orientation approach as required by the situations contingency factors. (Bass 1990; Yukl 1989; Chea 2007; Dorfman 1996; Steers et al. 1996; Thomas 2001).

Participative leaders according to House (1971), seek information from followers when making decisions, while directive leaders give specific directions and guidelines to followers regarding performance goals, scheduling, procedures and other relevant work variables. Supportive leaders show concern for followers and always try to create a rapport with them and achievement-oriented leaders emphasise setting challenging goals and objectives while expecting high performance levels from followers. The Path-Goal theory suggests that these various styles can actually be used by the same leader in different situations. Kort (2008) said that research has generally shown good support for the predictability of the theory, but some predictions have not been supported. Regardless, according to Yukl (1989) it has provided a good basis for considering a number of moderators in the study of leadership.

## **RECENT LEADERSHIP THEORIES**

### **Charismatic Leadership Theories**

The concept of charismatic leadership dates back to Max Weber in 1947, who asserted that this kind of leader is believed to have some extraordinary qualities, which they and their followers believe to have been inspired by some transcendental power. It is argued that such leaders emerge when people are suffering and looking for redemption. Steers et al.(1996) and Ensari & Murphy (2003) mention that such leaders appeal to the emotions of followers, earn their trust and enlist their enthusiasm because followers perceive them as radical change agents. Charismatic leaders are characterised by self-confidence, confidence in subordinates, high expectations for subordinates, ideological vision and the use of personal example (Steers et al. 1996).

Charismatic leaders are distinguished by a number of characteristics including risk-taking, goal articulation, high expectations, emphasis on collective identity and vision. It is proposed by the proponents of this theory that these elements motivate followers to go beyond self-interest. A noted characteristic of these leaders, is their personal challenge to the existing social order and the use of unconventional approaches in handling situations and issues (Steers et al. 1996, Ensari & Murphy 2003). Steers et al. (1996) add that in crisis situations, people seek dramatic change because they become dissatisfied with the status quo. Therefore, followers of the charismatic leaders identify with the leader and the mission of the leader, exhibit extreme loyalty to and confidence in the leader, emulate the leader's values and behaviour and derive self-esteem from their relationship. Ward (2006) mentioned that charismatic leadership can be considered as a leadership trait or style and an element of transformational leadership.

By virtue of the 'unique' characteristics that charismatic leaders possess (Thomas 2001), the proponents of the charismatic leadership style suggest that these leaders are more effective

*Owusu-Bempah, Addison & Fairweather – Does follower subjectivity matter in defining authentic leadership? A call for qualitative research.*

than non-charismatic leaders regardless of culture. However, doubt has been thrown on such claims by some recent studies that suggest that culture does influence the charismatic leadership process. For example, results from the Dominican Republic (Echavarria & Davis 1994), the Netherlands (Den-Hartog et al. 1999) and Singapore (Koh et al. 1995) suggest that while the concept of a charismatic leader might be universal, the way such a leader is described by followers can differ markedly across cultures.

## **Transformational and Transactional Leadership Theories**

Transformational leadership (TL) takes the notion of the charismatic leader but with some added elements (Bass 1990). Four elements; *charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration* (Bass 1990) were identified as being associated with transformational leadership style. Charisma becomes very important as organizations transform traditional ways of being to meet the challenges of dramatic change. Charisma provides vision and sense of mission, instils pride, and gains respect and trust (Bass 1990). Inspiration communicates high expectations, uses symbols to focus efforts, and expresses important purposes in simple ways. Intellectual stimulation on the other hand promotes intelligence, rationality and careful problem solving whereas individual consideration gives personal attention, treats each employee individually, coaches and advises. These factors add substantially to subordinates 'satisfaction and effectiveness (Bass 1990).

A transformational leader, in the view of Burns (1978), is the one who motivates the team to be effective and efficient by directing their communication and efforts toward goal achievement. This type of leader focus on the big picture and uses team work to produce results as they allow each member to operate in their area of expertise. The transformation leader is always looking for ways to get new ideas that will move the organization to reach the stated vision.

TL has consistently been claimed to be more effective than the other leadership styles (Dubinsky et al. 1995). For instance, transformational leaders have been argued to "lift ordinary people to extraordinary heights" (Boal & Bryson 1988) and also cause subordinates to do more than they are expected to do (Yukl 1989). They are also said to get people to perform beyond the level of expectation (Bass 1990) and are claimed to also motivate their subordinates to perform above and beyond the call of duty (House & Shamir 1993).

TL is also viewed as playing a key role in developing effective behaviours for mentors (McCull-Kennedy & Anderson 2002). Lewis (2000) was of the view that transformational leaders are recognized as using emotion to communicate a vision and to elicit the desired responses from their subordinates. Berson et al. (2001) added that indeed transformational leaders use "transformational influence to excite followers to work towards long-term ideals and strategic objectives. Transformational leaders according to Tsai et al. (2009) are able to arouse positive moods in their subordinates by using the emotional contagion.

Transactional leadership on the other hand is reward based as leaders encourage specific performance and behaviours by rewarding such situations (in the broadest sense). With the transactional leader, rewards are contingent on delivery and they manage by intervening actively only when a delegated task or function is failing to conform to expectations (Higgs 2003). MacKenzie et al. (2001) were of the view that there is a thin line that differentiates transformational and transactional leadership as they all share common elements such as

*Owusu-Bempah, Addison & Fairweather – Does follower subjectivity matter in defining authentic leadership? A call for qualitative research.*

providing clarity of desired outcomes, recognizing accomplishments, and rewarding high leadership performance. But in the process and behaviours of these two forms of leadership lie substantive differences.

Whereas transformational leadership involves creating changes in values, goals and aspirations that are consistent with the values of the followers and implementing change by articulating stimulation while clarifying performance expectations, the transactional leaders do not follow such processes.

Research on the transformational and transactional leadership paradigm has proven to be promising (Podsakoff et al. 1990). For instance Bryman (1992) cites a variety of organizational studies demonstrating that transformational leader behaviours are positively related to employees' satisfaction, self-reported effort and job performance. Similar results have been reported in several studies (Avolio & Bass 1988, Bass et al. 1987, Conger & Kanungo 1987) from a variety of samples and organizational settings. Higgs (2003) mentioned that in more recent times, there have been several additions to the above through research which has generated more understanding into the leadership concept. However, regardless of the advantages and the contributions of the theories discussed above to the understanding of leadership, there have been several critiques leveled against all of them especially with the emergence of various leadership scandals at national and international levels. The critiques are discussed below.

## **CRITIQUE OF THE LEADERSHIP THEORIES AND THE EMERGENCE OF AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP**

The existing leadership theories tend to be focused on the leader as an individual with special features and portray the followers as non-participative members who only receive from this “special” hero known as a leader. That is why researchers (Harris 2004; Spillane 2005; Spillane et al. 2004; Bolden & Kirk 2009) have been very critical of leadership theories and commented that the existing theories present leadership as “something done by leaders to followers”, making these theories more leader-centric (Lord 1985; Bass 1990; Meindl 1995). Bolden (2007) suggests that existing leadership theories place the responsibility of leadership firmly in the hands of the ‘leader’ and represent the ‘follower’ as somewhat passive and subservient portraying leadership as a top-down approach, where followers only receive from the leader alone. But leadership is a process and therefore to ignore the part played by followers in the leader-follower dualism (Bolden 2007) is a serious oversight.

Spillane (2005) argues that most of the already known leadership e.g., trait, behavioural, contingency, transformational and transactional theories mostly dwell on the “what” of leadership rather than the “how” part of leadership. Further, Spillane explains that in any given organization, several people play different roles at different levels which collectively lead organizations to greatness. That is, leadership is distributed - where different people in different roles and position exhibits leadership in their area of operation and collectively spur organizations to greatness. Therefore, for the known leadership theories to paint leadership as something done by one ‘hero’ and discounting the individual roles played by subordinates is inaccurate (Spillane 2005). Focusing only on the “what” part of leadership alone in this challenging world today is not helping in finding solutions to leadership challenges and so we cannot rely on the existing leadership theories to develop leaders for the future (Avolio & Gardner 2005).

*Owusu-Bempah, Addison & Fairweather – Does follower subjectivity matter in defining authentic leadership? A call for qualitative research.*

Another criticism leveled against the known leadership theories is their silence over leaders' motives in the use of power. Howell (1988) indicates that the use of power by leaders has serious implications for followers, organizations and the society as a whole and cannot be ignored. The suspicion here is that some leaders can personalize the use of their power for their own benefit rather than for societal benefit. However, none of the existing leadership theories explicitly address this subject. Therefore, for the existing leadership theories to be silent over such important issues cannot be taken lightly (Howell 1988).

Can we therefore discount the insightful contributions made to the understanding of leadership by the known leadership theories? Can we ignore the successful applications of some of them in certain situations over the period? Contrary to the accusations leveled against the known leadership theories, it would be unfair to reject the contributions they have made to the understanding of the leadership concept. However, due to new challenges facing the world today the suitability and the applicability of the known leadership theories are questioned (Avolio & Gardner 2005). There is therefore the need to come up with a model of leadership that would be suitable to meet the challenges of today's organizations and still be relevant for the future as well. Researchers and practitioners (Avolio & Gardner 2005; Spillane 2005; Harris 2004; Walumbwa et al. 2008; Gardner et al. 2005; May et al. 2003; Bass & Steidlmeier 1999) are asking for the redirection of research efforts towards the understanding of leadership practice, which they believe is revealed in leader-follower interactions rather than concentrating on the leader alone.

Elaborating on leadership interaction, Harris (2003) suggests that the leadership focus should be on how leaders and followers generate ideas together, and how they seek to reflect upon situations at the work place and make sense of work in the light of their shared beliefs. Harris is simply drawing attention of researchers and practitioners to leader-follower interactions. Understanding leader-follower dynamics is vital because it is within this that we can know the expectations, anticipations and reactions of leaders and followers, which are very important ingredients of organizational development. Researchers (Avolio & Gardner 2005; Spillane 2005; Harris 2004) suggest that inherent in the leader-follower dynamism lies collaborative and collective learning and knowledge generation which, is a strong foundation for building trust and innovations in organizations. Also the issues of integrity become evident.

Gardener et al. (2005) echo that in times of rapid change like our world today, people (employees) need direction and meaning in their work. They are therefore in constant search for those who could genuinely and transparently help them with integrity coupled with high moral standards. Such helpers (leaders), in addition must have stable philosophies of themselves as well as the organization and must have the ability to help the employees to also develop their own philosophical bases (Novicevic et al. 2006). Leaders with such characteristics and abilities are said to be authentic (Endrissat et al. 2007; Novicevic et al. 2006; Avolio & Gardner 2005; Eagly 2005; Gardner et al. 2005; Shamir & Eilam 2005).

Authentic leaders are needed in today's organizations (Luthans & Avolio 2003; Avolio et al. 2004) to develop authentic followers ((Avolio et al. 2004; Gardner et al. 2005; Kernis 2003b; Kernis 2003a; Ilies et al. 2005) for positive organizational behaviours (Luthans & Youssef 2007; Luthans et al. 2004) which culminates in positive organizational outcomes such as citizenship and job satisfaction and more. Proponents of the authentic leadership (AL) construct (e.g., Luthans et al. 2004; Luthans & Youssef 2007; Avolio & Luthans 2004; Gardener et al. 2005; Kernis 2003; Ilies et al. 2005) have presented AL as having more

*Owusu-Bempah, Addison & Fairweather – Does follower subjectivity matter in defining authentic leadership? A call for qualitative research.*

practical advantages than the existing leadership models because it is more follower centric. The next section discusses the characteristics of authentic leadership and assesses the merits of the construct and concludes with its definition.

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP**

Authentic leaders are said to be true to themselves (Harter 2002) and are able to express themselves and act in ways that are consistent with their inner thoughts and feelings. One unique characteristic of authentic leaders, according to Luthans & Avolio (2003), is their consistent transparency in all their dealings over a period of time. Such transparency is also evident in the authentic leaders' dealings with their followers because followers can easily see the intention behind the actions.

Authentic leaders do not show pretence in their intentions and actions, because their actions are based on truth and what is right. Shamir & Eilam (2005) describe them as originals because they do not fake their actions and intentions, Cammock (2001), prefers to call such leaders great leaders because they lead with the heart, while other authors (Henderson & Hoy 1983; Luthans & Avolio 2003; Novicevic et al. 2006; Shamir & Eilam 2005) prefer to call them genuine. The genuineness is also seen in their open and transparent operations. For instance, in making decisions, authentic leaders do not necessarily go with what is most popular (May et al. 2003: 254). Rather, they systematically evaluate all alternatives and take those decisions that are just and fair without harming the parties involved or giving one an undue advantage over the other. Further, authentic leaders do not fake their interest in other people's welfare and wellbeing. According to Mitchie & Gooty (2005), authentic leaders genuinely show interest in the viewpoints and aspirations of others and this is a reflection of genuinely being concerned for other peoples' wellbeing. Kernis (2003a) claims that the genuineness expressed by authentic leaders is possible because they have genuine self esteem, which drives them to behave genuinely regardless of whether or not they are socially accepted. Authentic leaders also encourage their followers to behave and act openly and transparently, therefore creating an open organisational climate (Henderson & Hoy 1983) in which people are real to each other in interactions.

Some leading proponents of authentic leadership theory (Bass & Steidlmeier 1999, Luthans & Avolio 2003; May et al. 2003) largely believe that authentic leaders' actions are generally guided by a set of values that are geared towards doing what is right and fair for all stakeholders, as they align their values, actions and their behaviour. Reviewing Schwartz's (1994) value typology, Mitchie & Gooty (2005) suggest that doing what is right and fair for people does not necessarily mean that authentic leaders do not consider their own personal enhancement but they give more priority to the welfare of others, the organisation, the community and the entire society more than themselves (Bass & Steidlmeier 1999; Burns 1978; Howell & Avolio 1992; Luthans & Avolio 2003). It is this point that differentiates authentic leaders from other kinds of leaders. Howell and Avolio (1992) argue that leaders who are concerned with the welfare and common good of followers and the organisation qualify under the brand name authentic. Thus, to qualify as an authentic leader involves the combined application of self-transcendent values (Schwartz 1994) and a conscious effort to give more attention to other peoples' good and well being than one's own.

An important aspect of AL is the leaders' motivation to be authentic (Ferrara 1994). This aspect of AL has generated several dissenting ideas. Some authors (Bass & Steidlmeier 1999;

*Owusu-Bempah, Addison & Fairweather – Does follower subjectivity matter in defining authentic leadership? A call for qualitative research.*

Luthans & Avolio 2003) have recognised the combined effect of an individual's effort and desire in authentic behaviour and suggest that these two act to motivate authentic leaders to behave the way they do. Other researchers are of a different opinion. They believe that behaving authentically is a resolution a leader makes to take responsibility for their own individual freedom and their organizational and community obligations. However, taking this stance means these authors only consider the conscious effort being made to behave authentically by leaders and nothing else (Novicevic et al. 2006). But these arguments are expressing the same idea differently because they all agree that some efforts need to be exerted in an attempt to behave authentically. An intriguing issue that seems to be silently raised by these consenting views is the idea of choice on the part of leaders. That is, leaders can choose to put in the required effort to behave authentically or not.

In contrast to the above, authentic leaders are said to behave authentically because they are self-determined (Kernis 2003b) in their behaviour and relationships. That is, authenticity in this view has two parts namely: the mind (cognition) making it a psychological concept (Kernis 2003b). Kernis' assertion does not erase the earlier claims made that authenticity requires some effort on the part of leaders. This is because thinking or being self-determined requires some effort combined with choice making. Ferrara (1994), on the other hand, disagrees with the psychological stance of the authentic leader concept and argues that the authentic leader concept is more philosophical as it is more of ethical and moral behaviour than just a state of mind. Thus, authentic leaders use genuine moral judgments to rise above the average expectations of following other people's directions by reluctantly rejecting the commonly accepted ways of doing things. This philosophical stance (Novicevic et al. 2006) distinguishes the actions of authentic leaders from other forms of leaders.

The above dissenting ideas regarding the distinguishing characteristics of authentic leadership is summarised in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Different Aspects of Authentic Leadership**

<b>Opinion</b>	<b>Source</b>
Their actions are guided by set of values geared towards doing what is right and fair	Bass & Steidlmeier 1999; Luthans & Avolio 2003; May et al. 2003
They give more priority to the welfare of others and their organisation by applying self-transcendent values and conscious effort	Howell & Avolio 1992; Schwartz 1994
They make a resolution to take responsibility	Novicevic et al. 2006
They combine effort and desire to behave authentically	Bass & Steidlmeier 1999; Luthans & Avolio 2003
They are self-determined to be authentic in their behaviour and relationships	Kernis 2003b
Ethical and moral determination to do what is right and not a state of mind	Ferrara 1994

In summary, of the distinguishing attributes of AL from other forms of leadership, authentic leaders are argued as having received certain values and norms through their socialization process and life experiences which they have been able to personalise and formed convictions around them which drive their behaviour. They therefore "own" their personal experiences (Harter 2002, Luthans & Avolio 2003, Shamir & Eilam 2005) and do not live or act to please or to conform to the normal existing conventions, rather they act for the common good of everybody involved as motivated by their internal commitment to being fair and just in their actions.

*Owusu-Bempah, Addison & Fairweather – Does follower subjectivity matter in defining authentic leadership? A call for qualitative research.*

Essentially, AL is “...a pattern of leader behaviour that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development” (Walumbwa et al. 2008, pp. 94). This definition is accepted for this paper.

## **COMPARING AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP MODEL WITH KNOWN LEADERSHIP THEORIES**

The AL model shares some similarities with the already known leadership models. For example, AL has a close fit for behavioural theories than the trait theories. This is because most of the leading proponents (e.g., Harter 2002; Luthans & Avolio 2003; Kernis 2003b; Shamir & Eilam 2005; Novicevic et al. 2006) of the authentic leadership construct have argued that authentic leaders show a consistency between their espoused values and the actual behaviours they exhibit and that authenticity is not a trait. That is, these proponents emphasise behaviour.

The AL model compares favourably with Blake & Mouton’s (1964) behavioural theory in several ways. For instance, the consideration and initiation orientation (or the employee orientation and task orientation) proposed by Blake & Mouton could also be behaviours exhibited by authentic leaders. Consideration on the part of leaders is when a leader is said to show friendliness, support and to consult subordinates etc this compares directly with most of the authentic leader’s behaviours. Looking at the consideration part of authentic leaders, Mitchie & Gooty (2005) comment that authentic leaders genuinely show interest in the affairs of their subordinates’ viewpoint and aspirations. A similar picture is painted with the initiating structures of Blake & Mouton’s model where leaders clearly define the task to be performed for each subordinate and emphasize goal achievement. Authentic leaders also clearly identify the strengths and weaknesses of subordinates and support them to achieve goals. However, the difference between the behavioural model and the authentic leader is the emphasis placed on genuineness by the authentic leader which is not mentioned in the behavioural theories. It must be noted that a leader may fake friendliness and support followers but authentic leaders do these genuinely.

AL compares favourably with Fiedler’s contingency theory in comparing situational factors for each follower and then building relationships while spelling out what each follower can do and helping them to achieve this. Both the contingency and the authentic leadership models claim to enhance respect for the leader by the followers. However, authentic leaders go beyond just creating a favourable situation by building a genuine relationship with followers as they openly discuss their own weaknesses and strengths and encourage their followers to do the same (Henderson & Hoy 1983; Kernis 2003b). They also treat each follower with respect and do what is right and fair for them (Bass & Steidlmeier 1999; Howell & Avolio 1992). Therefore, follower respect evolves as a consequence.

Comparing House’s (1971) path-goal theory with the AL model, the four characteristics suggested (directive, supportive, participative and achievement-oriented leadership styles) are also part of the authentic leader’s behaviours. As discussed above, the authentic leader is supportive of followers and takes a keen interest in each follower’s well being and welfare genuinely (May et al. 2003). By so doing, the authentic leader exhibits all the four styles suggested by House. But the difference between House’s claims and AL is the followers’

*Owusu-Bempah, Addison & Fairweather – Does follower subjectivity matter in defining authentic leadership? A call for qualitative research.*

welfare and wellbeing. House's path-goal theory is silent over these two things but that is the main concern and distinguishing feature of authentic leaders. It is possible to find a leader who is supportive of a follower but not necessarily on the welfare or wellbeing of that follower or an achievement oriented leader who only care about achieving the goals set regardless of the impact it is going to have on the followers' welfare or wellbeing.

Authentic leaders are argued to also possess positive psychological capacities (Luthans & Avolio 2003) such as charisma, self-confidence, integrity, flexibility, dynamism etc, which Bass (1990) and other researchers have mentioned as being key features found in charismatic and transformational leaders. By openly discussing their strengths and weaknesses with followers, authentic leaders display self-confidence about what they can or cannot do and complement this with walking their talk while stimulating followers' minds in problem-solving (Bass & Steidlmeier 1999; Howell & Avolio 1992; Luthans & Avolio 2003; Shamir & Eilam 2005). By making reference to their own past experiences, authentic leaders compare directly with charismatic and transformational leaders. But what distinguishes the authentic leader is their ability to personalise their past experiences and use them to direct their actions which is not a characteristic found in charismatic and transformational leaders (Harter 2002; Luthans & Avolio 2003; Shamir & Eilam 2005). Secondly, the motives behind such actions taken by charismatic and transformational leaders may not necessarily be ethical but for their own selfish gains, whereas actions taken by an authentic leader are purely ethical and based on high standards of moral judgements (Ferrara 1994).

Generally, the essential difference between most of the existing leadership theories and the AL theory is their view of the uni-directional flow of leadership. The existing leadership theories tend to view leadership as something that flows from leaders to followers (Bolden & Kirk 2009) or something done to followers by leaders, presenting followers as inactive recipients. In contrast, AL looks at the interrelationships between leaders and followers, presenting the two as active participants of the entire leadership process.

Again, whereas the previous theories are silent over the motives, thoughts, emotions, and beliefs behind the leaders' actions and the exercise of power, authentic leaders are said to match their actions and exercise of leader power with ethical motives, emotions, beliefs and thoughts (Avolio et al. 2004; Bass & Steidlmeier 1999; Ferrara 1994; Harter 2002; Luthans & Avolio 2003). The next section critically discusses the theoretical foundations of the AL theory.

## **CONCEPTUALISING AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP**

Up to this point, the review has focused on the emergence of AL, distinguishing characteristics of AL and assessed merits of AL. This section gives a detail discussion of Kernis' conceptualisation of AL. Of the several theories and models proposed for AL, Kernis' (2003b) model of AL can be seen as the foundation of modern AL theory as all those suggested models and theories heavily rely on it.

### **Kernis' Conceptual Description of Authentic Leadership**

Kernis' theorizes that AL has four components; self awareness, unbiased processing, authentic behaviours/action and relational authenticity shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Kernis' Model of Authentic Leadership Summarised**

<b>Self awareness</b>	Knowing strengths and weaknesses and having the ability to openly discuss them with others
<b>Unbiased processing</b>	Objectively processing self relevant information without allowing distortions due to personal emotions
<b>Authentic behaviour/action</b>	Acting freely and naturally by expressing one's core feelings, motives and inclinations without fear of the outcomes
<b>Relational authenticity</b>	Displaying high levels of openness, self disclosure and trust in relevant relationships

Self awareness is defined by Kernis (2003b: 13) as having awareness of and trust in one's motives, feelings, desire and self-relevant cognitions. By implication, self-awareness includes an individual's awareness of his/her strengths and weaknesses; how he/she feels at a given time and the potential effects those emotions have on current beliefs and actions. Luthans & Avolio (2003) claim that authentic leaders "remain cognizant" of their own vulnerabilities, but one distinguishing characteristic is that they openly discuss them with associates. These open discussions of strengths and weaknesses makes leaders know who they are and understand what they believe and they act upon such beliefs (Avolio et al. 2004). This awareness, Gardner et al (2005) explain, is gained because the authentic leaders work hard to derive a meaning of the world around them based on introspection that is self-reflective.

The self awareness of authentic leaders does not just happen, but is developed over time. Explaining how self awareness is developed, Avolio & Gardner (2005) suggest that the awareness comes from one's understanding of his or her unique talents, strengths, sense of purpose, core values, beliefs and desires. Such understanding, according to Kernis (2003b), provides one with a sense of freedom and responsibility which forms the foundations of authenticity. Such personal awareness gained is then utilized in interactions with others (Gardner et al. 2005; Kernis 2003b). It is from this point that authentic leaders and their associates relate in a transparent manner best described as authentic (Gardner et al. 2005) because such interaction is characterized by openness and trust. As leaders disclose themselves to their followers and encourage them to act similarly transparency is deepened in their relationships. This forms the basis of follower trust in the leader (Avolio & Gardner 2005; Gardner et al. 2005; Kernis 2003b; Luthans & Avolio 2003).

Kernis (2003b) explains that the second element of authenticity, unbiased processing, is the manner in which a person processes self-relevant information made available to him/her. As the name implies, Kernis suggests that authentic leaders are able to process self-relevant information in an objective manner. This is the point of divergence between Kernis (2003b) and Gardner et al. (2005). Gardner and his colleagues suggest that humans, by nature, are biased processors of information especially self-relevant information and therefore regardless of how authentic individuals are, there will be some element of bias, while Kernis thinks otherwise. However they all have a basic agreement that authentic leaders collect and interpret self-relevant information, whether positive or negative, without distorting or exaggerating the contents. Avolio & Gardner (2005) explain further the concept of balanced processing by positing that it becomes evident as a leader is able to recognize his or her relevant biases and still act objectively in a given situation. Avolio and Gardner emphatically assert that authentic leaders and their followers know their biases, but are able to consider various sides of a given issue and take in different perspectives before decisions are made. This attribute of authentic leaders corresponds with Peterson's (2000) description of an optimist. Peterson asserts that an optimist is an individual who objectively and realistically

*Owusu-Bempah, Addison & Fairweather – Does follower subjectivity matter in defining authentic leadership? A call for qualitative research.*

assesses situations without fear or favour before making a decision. This brings with it several positive organizational outcomes such as trust in leader, organizational citizenship behaviour and commitment.

The third critical component according to Kernis (2003b) is authentic behaviour/action. This means acting in accord with one's values, preferences, and needs as opposed to acting merely to please others or to attain rewards or avoid punishment through acting 'falsely'. That is, acting freely and naturally by expressing your core feelings, motives and inclinations without compulsion (Kernis 2003b, p. 14). This is what Harter's (2002) explained as 'owning and acting' one's true self. This is the match between one's actions and one's true self as against acting to please or gain approval of others. When a situation calls for the leader's attention, the way he/she handles it will determine his/her degree of authenticity (Harter 2002; Gardner et al. 2005; Avolio & Gardner 2003). The true authentic leader will match his/her actions and true beliefs regardless of the rewards or punishment involved. As the authentic leader acts in accord with his or her values and encourages others in the organization to do same, (Gardner et al. 2005; Avolio & Gardner 2003) they become a model of transparency for others throughout the organization. This is especially important as followers' perceptions of and trust in the leader is largely based on the leader's behaviours and actions (Cantor & Mischel 1977; Nye & Forsyth 1991; Cronshaw & Lord 1987). Therefore, the leaders' actions must be aligned with their espoused values and their behaviour must be consistent to be seen as genuine or authentic (Avolio & Gardner 2005; Gardner et al. 2005; Kernis 2003b). This act is argued as key input for authentic follower development (Gardner et al. 2005). It could therefore be inferred from the above discussion that leaders who are more open and who self-disclose more would be expected to in-still higher levels of trust in their followers.

The fourth component of authenticity as suggested by Kernis (2003b) is relational authenticity. Relational authenticity involves valuing and achieving openness and transparency (truthfulness) in one's relationships. Relational authenticity involves showing one's true self, good or bad to people encountered. Gardner et al. (2005) suggest that relational authenticity involves the display of high levels of openness, self-disclosure and trust in relationships. Thus, relational authenticity involves the presentation of an individual's genuineness and encouraging others to do same. This ensures the creation of intimate bonding and trust between them (Gardner et al. 2005). This kind of relationship (Gardner et al. 2005; Avolio & Gardner 2005) is characterized as authentic because there are no hidden motives and intentions. Kernis (2003b) was of the view that as leaders accept others' view points and act based on appropriate feedback and suggestions, the leader sets the standard for others in the organization to welcome feedback and inputs as well. This forms the basis of transparent relationships. Thus, transparency is a critical component of authentic relationships that is proposed to strengthen trust levels (Gardner et al. 2005).

It must be emphasised that while Kernis' model produces an in-depth analysis of the AL construct, it is not fully adequate as it does not explicitly cover in detail the leader-follower dynamism especially the role of follower subjectivity in AL. This is a deficiency in the Kernis' model.

Avolio et al. (2004) and Sparrowe (2005) offer models with a slightly different twist to the AL construct. They introduce the self regulation component in their model and explained it as the exercising of discretion in the way authentic leaders disclose information. Luthans & Avolio (2003) believe that self regulation is a process through which the authentic leader is self awareness of his strengths and weaknesses and can even discuss them openly with

*Owusu-Bempah, Addison & Fairweather – Does follower subjectivity matter in defining authentic leadership? A call for qualitative research.*

followers. That is, as authentic leaders self regulate their actions in their relationships with followers and encourage reciprocal behaviour, a deeper level of trust develops in the ensuing relationship. This would lead to the display of each person's true self (Gardner et al. 2005; Avolio et al. 2004; Sparrowe 2005). With regards to information processing, Gardener et al. (2005) maintain that authentic leaders are able to set aside their own biases when processing information as they consider various perspectives of such information and objectively make conclusions without distorting or denying any part of the information. This is referred to as balanced processing of information.

All these other explanations to AL are either directly related to Kernis' (2003b) model or are suggestions on various ways to extend and improve on Kernis' model. These additional AL models also do not address the role of follower subjectivity. This paper now moves towards the theoretical explanation of variations in follower subjectivity due to differences in perceptions and expectations.

## **FOLLOWER PERCEPTION AND EXPECTATION**

Follower perceptions and expectations play a vital role in their relationships with their leaders. Followers come into work situations with already built expectations, with which they measure and rate their leaders, either as effective or non effective. Studies (Nye & Forsyth 1991; Hains et al. 1997) have found that followers prefer leaders whose behavioural attributes match their expectations and tend to rate such leaders as being good leaders. Several explanations have been given to account for this phenomenon. Proponents of implicit leadership theory (Cronshaw & Lord 1987; Cantor & Mischel 1977; Lord & Maher 1991; Phillip & Lord 1981; Awamleh & Gardner 1999; Meindl et al. 1985; Wanasika et al. 2010) suggest that employees compare leaders' behaviours to their leadership prototypes when making leadership assessment and when a leader has attributes that are consistent with the follower's leader prototype, it influences the extent to which they accept such leaders and also how they appraise them as effective or good. The more the congruence of leader attributes to follower leader prototype, the stronger the leader is perceived/rated as effective or good leader.

### **Models of Perceptions and Expectations**

Several models and theories have been propounded to explain follower perceptions of leader behaviours in the leader-follower dynamic. One such model is by Lord and Maher (1991). Two models: 'recognition model' and 'inferential model' were used to explain how people form perceptions of leadership. The recognition model suggests that individuals have prior knowledge of leadership qualities in their memories that is, organized into cognitive schemas as leader prototypes which they rely on when categorizing people into leaders and non-leaders. Therefore when they encounter a leadership situation later they compare the observed attributes and behaviour to the pre-existing notion held in memory and when the two match, then the person being observed is categorized as an effective leader. The inferential model suggests that the knowledge of organizational events and outcomes held by the individual is used to judge leader effectiveness and good leadership rather than the actual leader behaviour. That is, as individuals observe and are part of the organizational outcomes, they engage in cause and effect analyses before making attributions about the quality of the leadership. When the leader's actions and decisions are seen as being responsible for the

*Owusu-Bempah, Addison & Fairweather – Does follower subjectivity matter in defining authentic leadership? A call for qualitative research.*

successful outcome of events in the organisation, effective leadership is inferred; conversely when the leader is judged to be responsible for negative outcomes, inadequate or ineffective leadership is inferred (Lord & Maher 1991; Phillip & Lord 1981).

The attribution theory (Fedor & Rowland 1989; Ensari & Murphy 2003) is based on the premise that individuals have their own perceptions of reality on which they determine or find explanations of the causes of events in their social environment and draw conclusions. Dobbins & Russel (1986) suggest that, based on the individual's understanding of reality, they compare and contrast successes and failures, good and bad, etc. When such information is tested for some period of time and it continues to provide justifiable outcomes which then form the basis of individual perceptions about that particular situation in question. It is such information that followers store and brings to the organisational setting and use in making attributions of another leader's qualities and achievements (Fedor & Rowland 1989; Ensari & Murphy 2003).

Attribution theory fits neatly with the inferential theory of perceptions as they both agree on gathering specific leader characteristics in a given situation that has produced positive or negative organisational outcomes for followers. This is stored in their memory and use later to make judgments of other leaders. However, these two theories are time bound and give just a one sided look at perceptions without taking into account followers' socialisation processes and those ideas and characteristics that might have been picked up which might have contributed or impacted significantly on their selecting process. This oversight seems to be covered by the recognition model but it does not give details regarding how the earlier knowledge it speaks about was acquired. However, these models have produced insightful information on how follower perceptions are formed.

The above discussion explains the differences in follower subjectivities. In the light of the above theoretical explanations for the differences in perceptions this review now move towards building an interactive model which incorporates follower subjectivity in the AL construct.

## **INTERACTIVE MODEL OF AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP**

In the following model-building stage of the paper the intention is to develop an interactional model of AL. This section first presents the key features of interactive model in Figure 1 and proceeds to discuss the basis on which the model is grounded.

### **Key Features of the Interactive Model of AL**

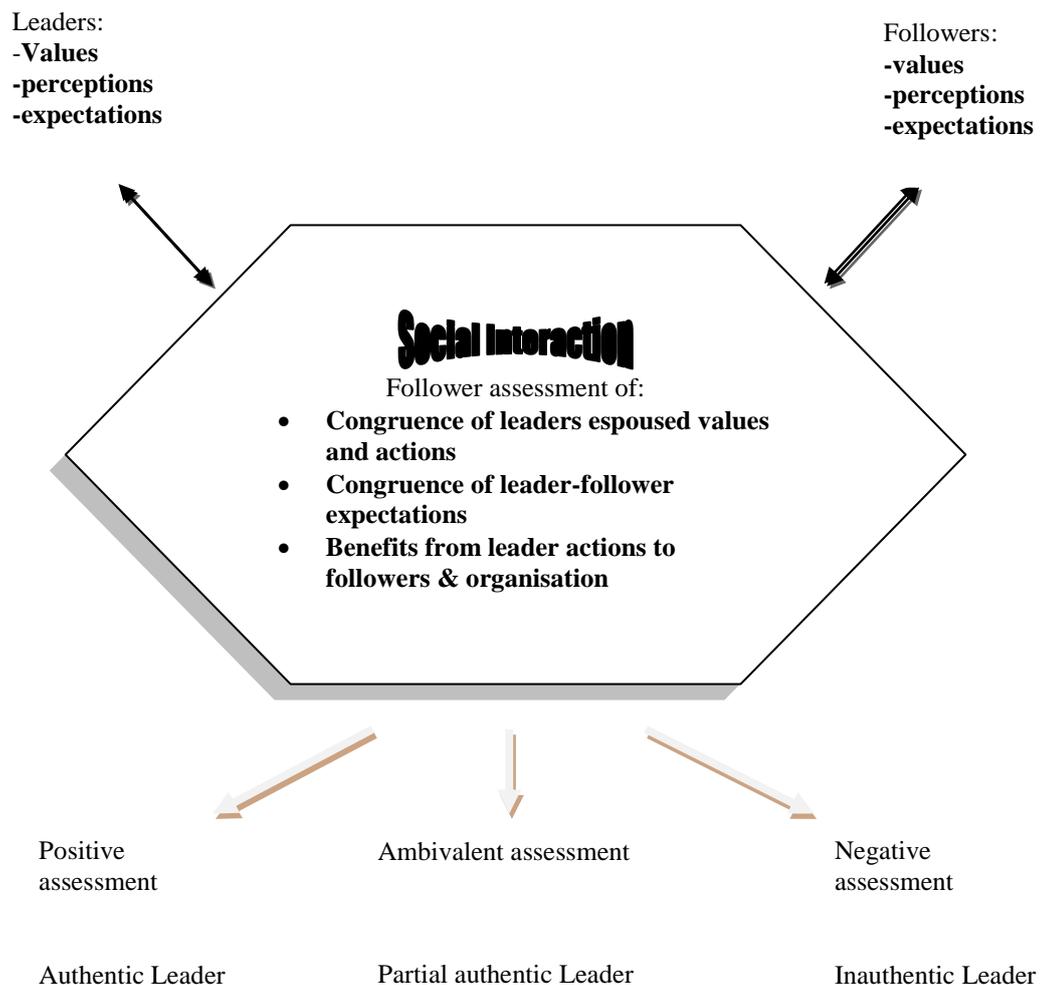
The interactive model presented in Figure 1 is built based on the synthesis of AL theories and the implicit based theories discussed. The interactive model pulls together the various theoretical perspectives that explain how authenticity in leaders is bestowed and provides more comprehensive theoretical explanations of the role follower subjectivity plays in bestowing the honorary title authenticity on leaders.

The interactive model suggests that leaders and followers come into an organisational setting with an already built understanding and interpretation of leader-follower processes. During the social exchanges that go on between leaders and followers, followers assess three key

*Owusu-Bempah, Addison & Fairweather – Does follower subjectivity matter in defining authentic leadership? A call for qualitative research.*

things. First, they assess leaders' espoused values in terms of their exhibited behaviours, second, they match their expectations with those of the leaders, and then third they assess the benefits that the leaders' exhibited behaviour produces for them (followers) and the organisation. If each of these assessments is a positive i.e., if there all the three conditions are met then leaders are rewarded with the title authenticity by followers. if all the three conditions are however not met then authenticity will not be bestowed. If only two conditions are met, such leaders will be classified as partially authentic.

**Figure 1: Interactional Model of AL Identifying Three Key Elements Assessed by Followers Before they Bestow AL on Leaders**



Thus, the model grounds the assessment of AL solely on follower subjective beliefs and interpretation. Two important implications can be derived from this, first, the model implies contingency, that is, because follower values and expectations differ, their interpretations and assessments of AL may differ even in the same example of AL behaviour. Second, since leader-follower interactions occur in given cultural contexts and culture influences thinking, it is likely that the cultural context influences follower assessment. Finally, it is possible that same attributes of AL are universal while others are context specific. Following from the above, several implications can be drawn for AL.

*Owusu-Bempah, Addison & Fairweather – Does follower subjectivity matter in defining authentic leadership? A call for qualitative research.*

First, the AL literature discussed holds that authenticity is not a trait that an individual possesses. Secondly, on observing leaders alone would not produce enough justification to conclude they are authentic or not. Authenticity only becomes evident after some period of interaction, observation and assessment by a second party. This directly leads to the third point that authenticity cannot be claimed by any individual but bestowed or conferred by others based on their understanding of what constitutes authenticity. This highlights the importance of follower subjective understanding if AL is to be achieved.

In summary, it is now evident that the authentic leadership model discussed above is a behavioural attribute that emerges through social interactions. Researchers (e.g. Lord & Maher 1991; Philip & Lord 1981; Awamleh & Gardner 1999; Meindl et al. 1988; Cronshaw & Lord 1987) have argued that employees come into work situations with implicit theories built in their minds and as they observe their leaders behave, they match the leaders exhibited behaviors against these implicit theories and classify them either as good or bad leaders, authentic or inauthentic based on the level of congruence and/or incongruence. Gardner et al. (2005) posit that authentic leaders encourage followers to reciprocate, by helping followers to also become true to themselves and positively influence others. Through this interaction, there is a close relationship that develops to the extent that leaders are able to empathize with their followers and see things through the followers 'eyes'. Through this, leaders are able to influence the subordinates' existing ideas and concepts of leadership (Fedor & Rowland 1989).

It can therefore be suggested that both leaders and followers together play a vital role in constructing authenticity. First, there should be congruence between leaders' espoused values and actions, second, the first condition as stated should match with follower perceptions and expectations of "what is desirable" and finally, the leaders' actions must produce direct benefits to the organisation and the followers. When these purposes are satisfied, then leaders receive the title authentic from followers. This therefore implies that followers are an inseparable part (Cammock 2001) in the construction of leadership authenticity and not a passive recipient of leadership as portrayed by most extant leadership theories.

However, conferring the honorary title of authenticity on leaders by followers is dependent upon followers' subjective understanding and interpretation of what they believe constitutes authenticity. This therefore makes the authenticity concept subjective as it depends on followers' perceptions and expectations of the constituents of authenticity in leadership.

## **DISCUSSION**

The theories reviewed in general offer a framework for understanding AL by analysing different aspects of the AL models and exposing the role follower perception plays in constructing leader authenticity. The paper then discussed the implicit theories held by followers, which was also revealed to be directly related to culture. Various segments of theories explaining these related concepts were discussed. This section discusses some obvious issues that emerged from the literature review and formulate the research questions for future study and suggests appropriate method suitable to answer the questions.

From the AL literature one common theme emerged, that is authenticity is not a trait but behavioural and seen through leader-follower interactions. When the leader matches the espoused values with actions to the benefit of the followers and the organisation, in such a

*Owusu-Bempah, Addison & Fairweather – Does follower subjectivity matter in defining authentic leadership? A call for qualitative research.*

way that is acceptable to the followers, then they confer authenticity on leaders. By playing such a key role in the creation of authenticity in leaders, followers' understandings and meanings of authenticity become very important issues that need to be understood. However, follower understandings and meanings are subjective as they depend on their own perceptions and expectations built over time.

It came to light that followers explain situations, issues and concepts based on the implicit theories they have on those issues, concepts and situations which they have tested over a period of time and have built their own reality about them and upon which they draw inferences when explaining events encountered. It could therefore be implied from the above discussions that to understand an individuals' subjective meanings and interpretations given to specific situations is to understand them from their own point of view. This is so, because, people give different interpretations and evaluations to situations encountered.

Similarly, differences in expectations and interpretations will influence assessment of acceptable leadership and organisational practices in different situational or cultural contexts. It is against this background that this paper is arguing that if authentic leadership is not a trait but an attribute conferred on leaders based on the congruence between: follower assessment of leaders' espoused values and behaviours, assessment of leader-follower expectations and then assessment of leader actions and the direct benefits it produces to the organisation and the followers. There is greater likelihood to have different meanings given to AL in different situational and/or cultural contexts due to differences in follower subjective understand and interpretations of situations. However, there could also be some preferred AL attributes that may be universal as portrayed by the existing AL theory. This therefore leads directly to the following research questions:

1. *How and to what extent are the constructs of authentic leadership in one culture, e.g., a developing country the same as or different from that of another, e.g., a developed country?*
2. *Is it likely that the cultural contexts influence assessment of AL?*
3. *Is it possible that some attributes of AL are universal while others are context specific?*

To be able to deal with such research questions, it would be worth identifying and comparing the subjective meanings of AL from the view point of individuals in different cultural and organisational contexts. Human subjectivity cannot easily be measured using quantitative research approaches as it demands in-depth interviews where follow up and engaging questions can be asked for clarifications. It must also be noted that such information gathered must be reported from the subjects own perspective without imposing any external ideas to the meanings given by subjects.

One rigorous method that has been identified as being very robust in studying human subjectivity is the Q method (Brown 1980).

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper started by critiquing the some of the known leadership theories and presented authentic leadership as the kind of leadership that has been proposed by practitioners and researchers as being suitable for our world today and the future. The review moved to discuss characteristics of authentic leadership and assessed the merits associated with it and then

**Owusu-Bempah, Addison & Fairweather** – *Does follower subjectivity matter in defining authentic leadership? A call for qualitative research.*

preceded to the theoretical perspectives on the AL concept in a more detail. Kernis' model which has been relied heavily on when discussing AL was the main focus of the discussion.

As discussed, authenticity is a kind of honorary title followers bestow on leaders. This dimension introduces follower subjectivity into the process of conferring authenticity on leaders. The paper proceeds to examining theoretical explanations offered for follower perceptions and expectations. The discussions revealed that perceptions and expectations are context bound and dependent on the information stored about the world and how specific things should or must operate for individuals. It is from this basis that they rate, judge or assesses situations making it very subjective.

However, it is evident that the existing AL models do not sufficiently address the importance of follower subjectivity in the whole process of authenticity. The review moved towards suggesting ways to help eliminate or reduce the weaknesses so identified by proposing the interactive model of AL. The interactive model synthesized the AL and follower perceptions and expectation models to address follower subjectivity. The paper further addressed methodological issues and called for qualitative study especially cross cultural studies in AL. At this point, the paper introduces Q methods as a rigorous and more appropriate method for empirically studying human subjectivities because it does not give room for researchers to impose their own meanings on the subjects studied as it presents results from the perspective of respondents.

## REFERENCES

- Alima-Metcalf, B 1995, 'An investigation of female and male constructs of leadership and empowerment', *Women in Management Review*, vol. 10, no. 3-8.
- Avolio, B & Bass, MM 1988, 'Transformational leadership, charisma and beyond', in JG Hunt, BR Baliga, HP Dachler & CA Schriesheim (eds.), *Emerging leadership studies*, Lexington Books, Lexington.
- Avolio, B & Gardner, W 2005, 'Authentic leadership development: Getting to the root of positive forms of leadership', *Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 16, pp. 315-338.
- Avolio, B Gardner, W Walumbwa, F Luthans, F & May, D 2004, 'Unlocking the mask: A look at the process by which authentic leaders impact follower attitudes and behaviors', *Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 15, pp. 801-823.
- Awamleh, R & Gardner, WL 1999, 'Perceptions of leader charisma and vision effectiveness: the effects of vision, content, delivery and organisational performance', *Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 10, pp. 345-373.
- Ayman, R, Martin, MM & Fieldler, F 1995, 'The contingency model of leadership effectiveness: Its level of analysis', *The Leadership Quarterly*, no. 6, pp. 147-167.
- Bass, BM 1990, *Bass and Stogdill's handbook of leadership*, The Free Press, New York.
- Bass, BM Avolio, BJ & Goodheim, L 1987, 'Biography and the assessment of transformational leadership at the world class level', *Journal of Management*, vol. 13, pp. 7-19.
- Bass, BM & Steidlmeier, P 1999, 'Ethics, character and authentic transformational leadership', *Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 10, pp. 181-217.
- Berson, Y Shamair, B Avolio, BJ & Popper, M 2001, 'The relationship between vision strength, leadership style and context', *The Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 12, pp. 53-73.

**Owusu-Bempah, Addison & Fairweather** – *Does follower subjectivity matter in defining authentic leadership? A call for qualitative research.*

- Boal, KB & Bryson, JM 1988, 'Charismatic leadership: A phenomenological and structural approach', in JG Hunt, BR Baliga, HP Dachler & CA Schriesheim (eds.), *Emerging leadership vistas*, Lexington Books, Lexington.
- Bolden, R 2007, Distributed leadership, in A Marturano, A Arturano & J Gosling (eds), *Leadership, the key concepts*, Routledge, Abingdon.
- Bolden, R & Kirk, P 2009, 'African leadership: surfacing new understandings through leadership development', *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, vo. 9, pp. 69-86.
- Brown, SR 1980, *Political subjectivity: Applications of Q method in political science*, Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Bryman, A 1992, *Charismatic and leadership in organisations*, Sage, London.
- Cammock, P 2001, *The dance of leadership*, Pearson Education Ltd., Auckland.
- Cantor, N & Mischel, W 1977, 'Prototypes in person perception', in L Berkowitz (ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology*, Academy Press, New York.
- Chea, AC 2007, 'Leading in today's competitive environment: how exemplary leaders motivate, lead and achieve goals and create value', *International Journal of Business and Management*, no. 2, pp. 112-211.
- Chemers, MM 2000, 'Leadership research and theory: a functional integration', *Group Dynamics*, vol. 4, pp. 27-43.
- Clemens, K & Mayer, DF 1999, *The classic touch: lessons in leadership from Homer to Hemingway*, Illinois, NTC/Contemporary Books, Lincolnwood.
- Conger, JA & Kanungo, RN 1987, 'Toward a behavioural theory of charismatic leadership in organisational settings', *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 12, pp. 637-647.
- Cronshaw, SF & Lord, RG 1987, 'Effects of categorisation, attribution and encoding process on leadership perceptions', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol. 72, pp. 97-106.
- Den-Hartog, DN, House, RJ, Hanges, PJ & Ruiz-Quintanilla 1999, 'Culture specific and cross-cultural generalizable implicit leadership theories: are attributes of charismatic/transformational leadership universally endorsed?' *Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 10, pp. 219-256.
- Dobbins, GH & Russel, JM 1986, 'Self-serving biases in leadership: A laboratory experiment', *Journal of Management*, vol. 12, pp. 475-483.
- Dorfman, PW 1996, 'International and cross-cultural leadership', in BJ Punnet & O Shekar (eds.), *Handbook for international management research*, Blackwell, Oxford.
- Dubinsky AJ, Yammarino, FJ, Jolson, MA & Spangler, WD 1995, 'Transformational leadership: an initial investigation in sales management', *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, vol. 15, pp. 17-29.
- Eagly, AH 2005, 'Achieving relational authenticity in leadership: does gender matter?' *The Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 16, pp. 459-474.
- Endrissat, N, Muller, WR & Kaudela-Baum, S 2007, 'En route to an empirically-based understanding of authentic leadership', *European Management Journal*, vol. 25, pp. 207-220.
- Ensari, N & Murphy, SE 2003, 'Cross-cultural variations in leadership perceptions and attribution of charisma to the leader', *Organisational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes*, vol. 92, pp. 52-66.
- Fedor, DB & Rowland, KM 1989, 'Supervisor attributions for subordinate performance', *Journal of Management*, vol. 15, pp. 37-48.
- Ferrara, A 1994, 'Authenticity and the project of modernity', *European Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 2, pp. 252-274.

**Owusu-Bempah, Addison & Fairweather** – Does follower subjectivity matter in defining authentic leadership? A call for qualitative research.

- Gardner, WL, Avolio, BJ, Luthans, F, May, DR & Walumbwa, F 2005, 'Can you see the real me?' A self-based model of authentic leader and follower development', *The Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 16, pp. 343-372.
- Hains, SC, Hogg, MA & Duck, JM 1997, 'Self-categorisation and leadership: effects of group prototypicality and leader stereotypicality', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 23, pp. 1087-1100.
- Harris, A 2004, 'Distributed leadership and school improvement: leading or misleading?' *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, vol. 32, pp. 11-24.
- Harter, S 2002, 'Authenticity', in CR Snyder, & SJ Lopez (eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Henderson, JE & Hoy, WK 1983, 'The development and test of an operational measure', *Educational and Psychological Research*, vol. 3, pp. 63-75.
- Higgs, M 2003, 'How can we make sense of leadership in the 21st century?', *Leadership and Organisational Development Journal*, vol. 24, pp. 273-284.
- House, RJ 1971, 'A path-goal theory of leadership effectiveness', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, pp. 321-339.
- House, RJ & Mitchell, TR 1974, 'Path-goal theory of leadership', *Journal of Contemporary Business*, vol. 3, pp. 81-97.
- House, RJ & Shamir, B 1993, 'Towards the integration of transformational, charismatic and visionary theories', in MM Chemers, & R Ayman (eds.), *Leadership theory and research: perspectives and directions*.
- Howell, JA 1988, 'Two faces of charisma: socialised and personalised leadership in organisations', in JA Conger & RN Kanungo (eds.), *Charismatic leadership, the elusive factor in organisational effectiveness*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco.
- Illies, R, Morgeson, FP & Nahrgang, JD 2005, 'Authentic leadership and the eudemonic well-being: understanding leader-follower outcomes', *The Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 16, pp. 373-394.
- Ivancevich, JM & Matteson, MT 1999, *Organisational behaviour and management*, McGraw-Hill, Singapore.
- Kernis, M 2003a, 'Optimal self-esteem and authenticity: separating fantasy from reality', *Psychological Inquiry*, vol. 14, pp. 83-89.
- Kernis, M 2003b, 'Towards a conceptualization of optimal self-esteem', *Psychological Inquiry*, vol. 14, pp. 1-26.
- Koh, WL Steers, RM & Terborg, JR 1995, 'The effects of transformational leadership on teacher attitudes and student performance in Singapore', *Journal of Organisational Behaviour*, vol. 16, pp. 319-333.
- Kort, ED 2008, 'What after all is leadership? 'leadership' and plural action', *The Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 19, pp. 409-425.
- Lewis, KM 2000, 'When leaders display emotion: how followers respond to negative emotional expression of male and female leaders', *Journal of Organisational Behaviour*, vol. 21, pp. 221-234.
- Lord, RG 1985, 'An information processing approach to social perceptions, leadership and behavioural measurement in organisations', *Research in Organisational Behaviour*, vol. 7, pp. 87-128.
- Lord, RG, Foti, RJ & Phillips, JS 1982, 'A theory of leadership categorisation', in HG Hunt, U. Sekaran & CA Schriesheim CHRIESHEIM, C. A. (eds.), *Leadership: beyond establishment views*, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, Illinois.
- Lord, RG, Foti, RJ & Vader, C 1984, 'A test of leadership categorisation theory: internal structure, information processing and leadership perceptions', *Organisational Behaviour and Human Performance*, vol. 34, pp. 343-378.

**Owusu-Bempah, Addison & Fairweather** – Does follower subjectivity matter in defining authentic leadership? A call for qualitative research.

- Lord, RG & Maher, KJ 1991, *Leadership and information processing: linking perceptions and performance*, Routledge, New York.
- Luthans, F & Avolio, BJ 2003, 'Authentic leadership development', in KS Cameron, JE Dutton & RE Quinn (eds.), *Positive organisational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline*, Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco.
- Luthans, F, Luthans, KW & Luthans, BC 2004, 'Positive psychological capital: beyond human and social capital', *Business Horizons*, vol. 47, pp. 45-50.
- Luthans, F & Youssef, CM 2004, 'Human social and now positive psychological capital management: investing in people for competitive advantage', *Organisational Dynamics*, vol. 33, pp. 143-160.
- Luthans, F & Youssef, CM 2007, 'Emerging positive organisational behaviour', *Journal of Management*, vol. 33, pp. 321-349.
- Mackenzie, S, Podsakoff, P & Rich, G 2001, 'Transformational and transactional leadership and salesperson performance', *Academy of Marketing Science. Journal*, vol. 29, pp. 115-134.
- May, DR, Hodges, TD Chan, AYI & Avolio, BJ 2003, 'Developing the moral component of authentic leadership', *Organisational Dynamics*, vol. 32, pp. 247-260.
- McColl-Kennedy, JR & Anderson, RD 2002, 'Impact of leadership style and emotions on subordinate performance', *The Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 13, pp. 545-559.
- Meindl, JR 1995, 'The romance of leadership as a follower-centric theory: a social constructionist approach', *Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 6, pp. 329-341.
- Meindl, JR, Ehrlich, SB & Dukerich, JM 1985, 'The romance of leadership', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, vol. 30, pp. 78-102.
- Mitchie, S & Gooty, J 2005, 'Values, emotions and authenticity: will the real leader please stand up?' *The Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 16, pp. 441-457.
- Nahavandi, A 2000, *The art and science of leadership*, Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ.
- Novicevic, MM, Harvey, MG, Buckley, MR Brown, JA & Evans, R 2006, 'Authentic leadership: a historical perspective', *Journal of Leadership and Organisational Studies*, vol. 13, pp. 64-76.
- Nye, JL & Forsyth, DR 1991, 'The effects of prototype-based biases on leadership appraisals: a test of leadership categorization theory', *Small Group Research*, vol. 22, pp. 360-379.
- Petersib, C 2000, 'The future of optimism', *American Psychologist*, vol. 55, pp. 44-55.
- Phillip, JS & Lord, RG 1981, 'Causal attributions and perceptions of leadership', *Organisational Behaviour and Human Performance*, vol. 28, pp. 58-83.
- Podsakoff, P, MacKenzie, S, Moorman, R & Fetter, R 1990, 'Transformational leader behaviours and their effects on followers trust in leader, satisfaction and organisational citizenship behaviours', *Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 1, pp. 107-142.
- Schwartz, SH 1994, 'Are there universal aspects of in the structure and contents of human values?' *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 50, pp. 19-45.
- Shamir, B & Eilam, G 2005, "What's your story?" life-stories approach to authentic leadership development', *The Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 16, pp. 395-417.
- Sparrowe, RT 2005, 'Authentic leadership and the narrative self', *The Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 16, pp. 626-645.
- Spillane, JP 2005, 'Distributed leadership', *The Educational Forum*, vol. 69, pp. 143-150.
- Spillane, JP, Halverson, R & Diamond, JB 2004, 'Towards a theory of leadership practice: a distributed perspective', *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, vol. 36, pp. 3-34.
- Steers, RM, Porter, LW & Bigley, GA 1996, 'Models of leadership', in RM Steers, LW Porter & GA Bigley (eds.), *Motivation and leadership at work*, McGraw-Hill, New York.

**Owusu-Bempah, Addison & Fairweather** – *Does follower subjectivity matter in defining authentic leadership? A call for qualitative research.*

- Thomas, DC 2001, 'Leadership across cultures: A New Zealand perspective', in K Parry. (ed.), *Leadership in the Antipodes: Findings, implications and a leader profile*. Wellington, Institute of Policy Studies and Centre for the Study of Leadership.
- Tsai, WC, Chen, HW & Cheng, JW 2009, 'Employee positive mood as a mediator linking transformational leadership and employee work outcomes', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, vol. 20, pp. 206-219.
- Vroom, VH & Jago, AG 1995, 'Situation effects and levels of analysis in the study of leader participation', *The Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 6, pp. 169-181.
- Walumbwa, F, Avolio, BJ, Gardner, WL, Wersing, TS & Peterson, SJ 2008, 'Authentic leadership: development and validation of a theory-based measure', *Journal of Management*, vol. 34, no. 89-126.
- Wanasika, I, Howell, JP, Littrell, R & Dorfman, P 2010, 'Managerial leadership and culture in sub-saharan Africa. Leadership and Management Studies in Sub Sahara Africa', 3<sup>rd</sup> bi annual conference, Cape Town 22-24 November 2010.
- Yukl, GA 1981, *Leadership in organisations*, Prentice-Hall, Cliffs, New Jersey.
- Yukl, GA 1989, *Leadership in organisations*, Prentice-Hall, Cliffs, New Jersey.
- Yukl, GA 1994, *Leadership in organisations*, Prentice-Hall, Cliffs, New Jersey.