

Chapter 13

The Lived Experiences of Authentic Leaders: A Phenomenological Study Exploring the Defining Experiences that Informed Their Development

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ABSTRACT

Globalization presents an array of challenges and opportunities for today's leaders. Recurring corporate and government malfeasance on a global scale as well as the morally complex environments of organizations are imposing more significant demands on organizational actors. Authentic leadership is an emerging leadership category that is gaining much interest due to the demand for more authentic leaders. Authentic leaders attain greater performance from their followers and this is considered a leadership multiplier that produces a virtuous cycle of performance and learning for leaders, followers, and organizations. This chapter discusses a completed study that addresses the following research question: How do experiences inform authentic leadership development across the 4 dimensions of the authentic leadership multidimensional construct of self-awareness, balanced processing, relational transparency, and internalized moral/ethical perspectives?

INTRODUCTION

The demand and expansion of global leadership is dramatically changing the leadership development roadmap. Our understanding of how leadership develops is being eclipsed by the rush to implement global leadership competencies to meet the demand of globalization. According to Hannah, Avolio, and Walumbwa (2011), the morally complex environments of organizations are imposing significant demands and challenges on organizational actors. Recurring corporate and government malfeasance on a global scale has resulted in a demand for more authentic leaders. Authentic leadership is an emerging

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leadership category that is gaining much interest not only because of the demand for more authentic leaders but also given that authentic leaders attain greater performance from their followers. This latter point is considered a leadership multiplier that produces a virtuous cycle of performance and learning for leaders, followers, and organizations (Chan, Hannah, & Gardner, 2005).

Authentic leadership is also becoming part of a broader social change not only in the way leaders are thought about but also in what society is demanding in their leaders—leaders they can trust and who maintain an unshakeable ethical fabric when the going gets tough, leaders who are driven by the greater good and not just for their ego. *Outlook on the Global Agenda 2015*, published by the World Economic Forum (2014), reported that there is a lack of leadership across the globe along with a growing collective sense around the world that citizens have become fearful, distrustful, and impatient of leaders.

Authentic leadership will remain a growing field as society calls for ethical and inspirational leaders (Witt, 2011). The crisis in confidence in leaders continues to grow on a national and global scale. According to the National Leadership Index report (Rosenthal, 2012), Americans' confidence in their leaders was below average for the 5th year in a row. In 2014, the Global Leadership Index, published by the World Economic Forum, reported 42% of global respondents do not have confidence in leaders of international organizations to be independent and not influenced by some political, partisan or national interests. International organizations in North America have the least confidence in leaders whereas Latin America has the greatest confidence in leaders. Overall, Pakistan (3.57) and the United States (3.93) have the lowest Global Leadership Index respectively and Switzerland has the highest (5.21).

Leadership remains a skill sought by organizations to improve their bottom line (Boatman & Wellins, 2011; Northouse, 2010). Organizations with high-quality leaders out perform their competitors 13 times more in financial performance in which organizational leadership quality was rated as excellent (Boatman & Wellins, 2011). Boatman and Wellins's (2011) Development Dimensions International (DDI) leadership forecast report had an overarching theme indicating that it is time for a *leadership revolution* in this time when change is rapidly occurring. The economic crisis of 2008 catapulted the global economy into an economic crisis not seen since the great depression. The financial crisis caused businesses to go into damage-control mode, focusing on minimal strategies to keep their businesses viable, and budgets were cut across the board adversely affecting talent investment (Boatman & Wellins, 2011). From a commercial perspective, organizational survival in a globally competitive environment depends on organizations being "keenly aware of their leadership talent and how to best develop it across all levels" (Day, 2007, p. 13). From a military perspective, the focus is on "developing people and ideas, and building organizations" (O'Bryant, 2012, para. 5) to meet the new challenges that the military is faced with now and in the future.

The problems presented by the world of today are huge, complex, and not always predictable, and at times seem unimaginable. Globalization has led to drastic organizational changes that are occurring within a complex, uncertain and turbulent business environment (Akella, 2008, p. 219). Corporate scandals continue to occur that are having global impact. The U.S. housing market debacle crippled a global economy, today the global economy remains weak. The United States military is promoting the concept of ethical and adaptive leadership to improve global agility to operate in a complex and fiscally constrained environment. Arab Spring-type social revolutions continue to occur in which there is a demand to end oppressive leadership and seek a forward strategy of freedom eliminating authoritarian resilience. Political instability is on a global scale. Most recently, the 2015 Volkswagen emission scandal highlights unethical leadership behavior on a global scale. Volkswagen leaders knowingly put into

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