



Authentic leadership and the narrative self

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Abstract

Contemporary leadership theory and practice describes authenticity in relation to self-awareness of one's fundamental values and purpose, and attributes the motivational effects of leadership to the consistency of leader's values and behaviors and the concordance of their values with those of followers. Drawing from hermeneutic philosophy, I offer a different perspective on authenticity in leadership that is based on the framework of the narrative self. This framework suggests that authenticity is not achieved by self-awareness of one's inner values or purpose, but instead is emergent from the narrative process in which others play a constitutive role in the self. Implications of this framework for research and for the practice of ethical leadership are discussed.

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Keywords: Authentic leadership; Narrative; Identity theories; Hermeneutic philosophy

“Who am I, so inconstant, that *notwithstanding* you count on me?” (Ricoeur, 1992: 168).

1. Introduction

Why does authenticity in leadership matter? Authenticity—or, more precisely the lack thereof—lies near the heart of the crisis of confidence in contemporary corporate leadership. When formulating their theory of authentic leadership development, Luthans & Avolio (2003, p. 241) begin with a discussion of

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how “leaders at all levels and types of organizations are facing the challenge of declining hope and confidence in themselves and their associates.” The kind of leadership that can restore confidence comes from individuals who are true to themselves, and whose transparency “positively transforms or develops associates into leaders themselves” (Luthans & Avolio, 2003, p. 243). From the transformational leadership perspective, authenticity serves as a moral compass by which the intentions of transformational leaders can be determined (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Thus, for these authors, when transformational leadership is “true to self and others, it is characterized by high moral and ethical standards” (p. 191).

Authenticity is also represented to be an antidote to the crisis in leadership in practitioner writings. In *Authentic Leadership* (2003, p. 11), Bill George argues that “being yourself; being the person you were created to be” rather than “developing the image or *persona* of a leader” is the way to restore confidence in business organizations after Enron and Arthur Andersen. In *The Leadership Challenge*, Kouzes & Posner (2002) discuss how finding one’s own true voice and aligning one’s actions with shared values as the commitments necessary to “model the way.” Speaking one’s own voice as a leader—rather than echoing the words of others—is necessary for credibility in the eyes of followers.

Central to these perspectives on authentic leadership is—as Polonius counseled Laertes—“to thine own self be true” (Shakespeare, 1901: Act I, Scene iii). Being true to self requires self-awareness if leaders are to determine what is distinctively their own; aligning behavior with the true self requires self-regulation (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). But what is the true self? Here, perspectives on authentic leadership are similar but not identical. For George (2003, p. 19), self-awareness discloses the leader’s unique purpose: “To find your purpose, you must first understand yourself, your passions, and your underlying motivations.” Bass & Steidlmeier (1999) distinguish between transformational (moral) and pseudo-transformational (amoral) leadership by describing the true self in terms of the values or ethics that shapes leaders’ idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Kouzes & Posner (2002) frame the journey to authenticity in terms of “finding one’s voice,” but this process begins in clarifying one’s own personal values. Luthans & Avolio (2003) use the concept of authenticity to integrate positive psychology and existing theories of transformational and full-range leadership, thus profiling authentic leaders as confident, hopeful, optimistic, and resilient.

My purpose in this essay is to offer a subtle, yet important, difference in the approach to studying authenticity in leadership. In the following Section, I evaluate four commonalities in how contemporary perspectives conceptualize the true self and its relationship to authentic leadership: (a) how awareness of self independent of others is necessary to be authentic, (b) the static or enduring nature of the values or purposes that constitute the “true self,” (c) the role of self-regulation in facilitating transparency and consistency, and (d) the relationship between authentic leadership and moral leadership. My evaluation will suggest that there are important limitations in each of these common features, thereby laying the foundation for introducing a different perspective on the nature of the self. In formulating this perspective, I draw primarily from the hermeneutic philosophy of Ricoeur (1992), who characterizes the self as a “narrative project” through which individuals interpretively weave a story uniting the disparate events, actions, and motivations of their life experiences—much as novelists enliven their characters through the plot. In presenting this alternative perspective, I discuss how it addresses the limitations in contemporary perspectives on authentic leadership. I conclude with implications for research and practice. With respect to research, I suggest

that the central ideas in Ricoeur's theory can be examined empirically in ways consistent with research on autobiographical memory. With respect to practice, I focus on the implications of the narrative self for leadership development.

2. Common elements in contemporary perspectives on authentic leadership

Although differences are evident in the ways that contemporary perspectives understand “to thine own self be true,” there are also important commonalities. In the following sub-sections, I identify and reflect critically on four common features: the primacy of self-awareness, the enduring nature of the true self, self-regulation and consistency, and authenticity and positive or moral leadership.

2.1. *The primacy of self awareness*

The importance of self awareness for authenticity is evident throughout the leadership literature regardless of whether the true self is understood in relation to values (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999), purpose (George, 2003) voice (Kouzes & Posner, 2002), or positive psychological states (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). My criticism is that the emphasis falls on the “self” in self awareness, implying that what is authentic about an individual leader lies inward. In this specific context other individuals, as well as groups or organizations, are viewed as potential sources of inauthenticity. So the first step in the journey from authenticity to inauthenticity is described in terms of finding one's own purpose instead of being buffeted by external pressures (George, 2003) or in speaking in one's own voice rather than echoing the voices of others (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). These perspectives hold that whether the elements of the authentic self are one's purpose, values, or voice, they cannot be one's own unless undisturbed by the influence of others.

Although authenticity necessarily involves “owning” who one truly is, the idea that individuals come to know their true selves only by withdrawing from others seems incomplete. The emphasis in contemporary leadership on awareness of an interior, “true” self has the unintended consequence of neglecting how the authentic self is constituted in relationships with others. The criticism I am offering here is not that contemporary perspectives on authentic leadership are indifferent to leaders' relationships with others. George (2003), for example, asserts that compassion (“heart”) and relationships with followers are elements in authenticity. Nevertheless, an emphasis on awareness of one's own true self over the contaminating influences of others makes understanding the essence of leadership problematic. If—to use the expression of Kouzes & Posner (2002)—leadership involves “modeling the way,” then followers are transformed not because leaders retreat into their inner selves, but because their leaders offer them alternative ways of being in the world. What else could “modeling the way” possibly mean?

One partial exception to the emphasis on turning inward to find the true self is found in the claim of Luthan & Avolio (2003, p. 248) that authentic leaders “remain cognizant of their own vulnerabilities and openly discuss them with associates,” thus inferring that self-awareness and self-regulation need on-going clarification that can only come from other persons. But this suggestion is not systematically pursued. Drawing from the hermeneutic philosophy of Ricoeur (1992), I argue in the following Section that the true self is not discovered absent of others, but is constituted in relation to others.

2.2. *The enduring nature of the true self*

Whether framed in terms of values, purpose, or voice, the authentic self generally is seen in terms of *enduring* qualities of the character of leaders. This is not to suggest that authentic leaders are presumed to be born rather than made! Each perspective acknowledges that authenticity is a developmental process characterized by growing awareness of one's own true self. But the goal states of this growing self-awareness—the leader's distinctive values (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999), guiding purpose (George, 2003), or voice (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) that constitute his or her true self—are more static than dynamic. This constancy in the core self is necessary to anchor self-regulatory processes so that leaders are transparent; that is, to insure that their behaviors are consistent with their true selves. If the leader's true self is constantly changing, followers will be hard pressed to differentiate what is consistent with a changing true self from what is garden-variety flip-flopping. By emphasizing stability over change, theories of authenticity are able to make sense of followers' attributions of transparency.

I would not deny that followers evaluate their leaders' words and deeds against the values and principles they espouse; nor do I wish to undermine how stable values, purpose, and voice serve as anchors for one's character. Yet, the assumption of constancy is troubling because it represents a truncated view of the self. Leaders change, as do their followers. The one perspective that takes an explicitly dynamic perspective on authentic leadership is that of Luthans & Avolio (2003), whose model incorporates personal history and organizational context as the antecedents of the true self and positive psychological states. These antecedents can foster leadership development because the true self of the leader is not static, but malleable: "the working self concept of the leader can be changed and developed" to enhance positive psychological states. Thus exposure to different people, cultures, and contexts can require a leader to change, expand, or refine his or her core values.

Despite the emphasis on consistency in much of the authenticity literature, a dynamic view of the self is hardly an anomaly in the organizational literature. Lord & Brown (2004), for example, explicitly build their theory of how leaders shape the identities of followers on the foundation of conceptual framework of Markus & Nurius (1986) of "possible selves." Similarly, Ibarra (1999, 2003) describes socialization into new careers as a process of trying out provisional selves in the formation of professional identity. However, these perspectives on the self pose a problem as well. If the working self-concept is constituted in a dynamic of possible or provisional selves, how is it that these various selves are integrated into a single coherent identity? Ricoeur's (1992) theory of the self as a narrative project addresses this dialectic of constancy and change.

2.3. *Self-regulation and consistency*

Self-regulation is central to most formulations of authentic leadership. Luthans & Avolio (2003), for example, treat self-regulation as the process through which the behavior of authentic leaders becomes transparent (consonant) with their self-awareness. Similarly, Bass & Steidlmeier (1999) differentiate between pseudo-transformational and authentic transformational leaders by describing the former as deceptively appearing to be moral, whereas the latter genuinely have their followers' interests at heart. Although the practitioner approaches rarely speak explicitly of self-regulatory process, they are everywhere implicit in the idea that authentic leaders evaluate and shape their behavior in relation to purpose (George, 2003) or one's own voice (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Self-regulation seeks to insure that one's words are spoken from the inner voice and one's deeds reflect inner purpose and values.

Consistency is the result of self-awareness and self-regulation working in concert: authentic leaders are effective in leading others because followers look for consistency between their leaders' true selves—as expressed in values, purpose, or voice—and their behaviors. For example, Kouzes & Posner (2002) hold that finding one's voice and aligning behavior with one's values engenders credibility in the eyes of followers. Similarly, Luthans & Avolio (2003) see the positive psychological states projected by authentic leaders as initiating the development of authenticity in those around them.

Self-awareness, self-regulation, and consistency thus are central to contemporary perspectives on authentic leadership. However, they are not a sufficient explanation of how leaders influence, shape, or transform their followers. Modeling the way (Kouzes & Posner, 2002), for example, implies that "learning by example" is at work. But why should followers imitate their leaders—as opposed to any other individuals in their environments? Similarly, when Luthans & Avolio (2003, p. 243) say that the behavior exhibited by authentic leaders "positively transforms or develops associates into leaders themselves," the implication is that the positive psychological states of authentic leaders are contagious (also see Ilies, Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2005 and Shamir & Eilam, 2005 articles in this Special Issue).

I am not opposed to an epidemiological framework for understanding the diffusion of authenticity, but the mechanisms whereby the infection spreads require greater specification. Luthans & Avolio (2003) point the way when they suggest that it is the leaders'—and, by extension, followers'—working self concept where the transformation takes hold. Ricoeur's (1992) theory describes how the self is narrated in relation to possible selves displayed by others, thereby illuminating how authenticity might spread.

2.4. Authenticity and positive or moral leadership

When leadership scholars and practitioners find it necessary to be advocates for authenticity, the danger of inauthentic leadership must be clear and present. Some see the danger in distinctly moral terms. For Bass & Steidlmeier (1999, p. 186), the hallmark of inauthentic or pseudo-transformational leadership is unbridled self-interest that motivates leaders to treat followers as means to their own ends. Pol Pot and Saddam Hussein serve as their exemplars of inauthentic leaders. Similarly, George (2003, p. 75) links the loss of authentic values in leadership to the events at Enron and Arthur Andersen. Luthans & Avolio (2003, p. 255) link authentic leadership to positive psychological states and processes, yet their discussion of how these states enable leaders to make "a positive difference in his or her organization or community" lends their perspective a distinctively moral undertone.

Whether particular forms of leadership are posited to be necessary and sufficient causes for individual and organizational outcomes, such as performance, commitment, return on investment, or customer satisfaction, the research question is open to empirical falsification. Claiming that a particular form of leadership is intrinsically moral not only is difficult to falsify empirically, but also exceptionally difficult to argue logically. For example, the distinction between authentic (moral) transformational leaders and pseudo-transformational leaders by Bass & Steidlmeier (1999) is a convincing description of how a leader's values shape his or her idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. However, as an argument that authentic transformational leadership is intrinsically moral, the logic is circular. Further, Price (2003) has pointed out that values do not lead unambiguously to one and only one action, and positive values can be in conflict. Similarly, leading from one's purpose rather than narcissism (George, 2003) can only be moral if one's purposes are moral.

Is the authentic self as disclosed by self-awareness necessarily oriented towards positive values and principles? Even Shakespeare would question that assumption!

The problem in arguing that authenticity is intrinsically ethical is that “to thine own self be true” is resolute in its indifference to moral postures. Indeed, because “to thine own self be true” looks inward before recognizing others, its basic orientation is narcissism. The narrative perspective on the self that I develop in the following Section does not add a moral dimension to the dictum “to thine own self be true.” But because individuals treat themselves as an “other” in crafting a narrative self, and because other persons—real and imaginary—offer different plot lines, the emphasis shifts from one’s own self to how others are recognized, regarded, and esteemed. Through this shift from narcissism to the self being construed and constituted in relation to others, the possibility of reflecting coherently about how authenticity is reflected in the ways leaders and followers treat others becomes real.

3. The narrative self

3.1. Framing Ricoeur’s hermeneutic philosophy

Although the scope of Ricoeur’s philosophical work is quite broad, his work largely falls within the phenomenological and hermeneutic philosophical traditions that can be traced from [Dilthey \(1989\)](#) to [Husserl \(1964\)](#), [Heidegger \(1962\)](#), and [Gadamer \(1975\)](#). Consistent with these traditions, work has focused on the interpretation of symbols ([Ricoeur, 1967](#)), metaphor ([Ricoeur, 1977](#)), and narrative ([Ricoeur, 1984, 1985, 1988](#)) and how these forms of discourse serve to disclose the nature of and prospects for human existence. This tradition understands human experience to be organized in linguistic or textual forms (including symbol, metaphor, narrative), which “give rise to thought”—that is, to interpretation and reflection (1967, p. 348).

[Ricoeur’s \(1991\)](#) interest in ‘texts’ and his emphasis on the discursive or linguistic nature of experience places his work in apparent proximity to several contemporary perspectives in organizational studies, and it may be helpful to place his thought with respect to them. I relate Ricoeur’s work to the sociological paradigms identified by [Burrell & Morgan \(1979\)](#), the social constructionist perspective ([Gergen, 1985](#)), and [Weick’s \(1995\)](#) discussion of sensemaking in organizations.

Hermeneutics clearly is anchored in the interpretative paradigm of [Burrell & Morgan \(1979\)](#). However, one of the distinctive characteristics of Ricoeur’s work is to engage in precisely the kind of dialog across incommensurable paradigms that Burrell and Morgan saw as impossible because of their differing ontological assumptions. For example, Ricoeur has engaged in lively dialog with the radical humanist paradigm as represented by critical theory ([Ricoeur & Taylor, 1986](#)), as well as with the highly realist and objectivist functional perspective of contemporary neuroscience ([Changeux & Ricoeur, 2000](#)). Indeed, engaging in reflective dialog with conflicting interpretations or ‘paradigms’ is the distinguishing hallmark of [Ricoeur’s](#) work from his early study of Freud (1970) through his recent work on the memory and forgetting of history (2004).

Like the social constructionist tradition in the social sciences ([Berger & Luckmann, 1966](#); [Gergen, 1985](#)), [Ricoeur \(1967, 1974, 1984\)](#) focuses on discourse and texts, and recognizes that interpretation is always informed by the presuppositions of the interpreter. However, there are subtle but important differences between the two. Social constructivism, because of its opposition to logical positivism, emphasizes the subjective nature of experience over the possibility of objective knowledge. [Ricoeur](#)

(1976), too, objects to the presuppositions of the positivist program, and would agree that the objective ‘world’ is always mediated by the linguistic nature of conscious experience. But, in contrast to a strict constructivist approach that pits the subjective against the objective, Ricoeur (1985, 1988) seeks to give an account of how—and in what ways—we experience the world, tradition, and even ourselves as ‘objects’ even as we interpret them as subjects.

The third touchstone in organizational studies for locating Ricoeur’s work is Weick’s (1995) notion of sensemaking. In introducing sensemaking, Weick initially aligns it with the interpretative paradigm of Burrell & Morgan (1979). But, in the next moment, he distances sensemaking from the implication that it is “subjectivist” in orientation. Using the metaphor of a carpenter’s tool as example, Weick (p. 34–35) explains how sensemaking is both subjective and objective:

I have used the contour gauge, which was inspired by Heider’s (1959) discussion of thing and medium, to argue that it takes a complex sensing system to register and regulate a complex object. That is about as realist as one can get. And yet within earshot of that analysis is another analysis that asserts that self-fulfilling prophecies are the prototype for human sensemaking. People create and find what they expect to find. Does this mean, then, that the contour gauge presses against and registers the equivalent of fulfilled prophecies? Absolutely. That very mixing of ontologies is what drives Burrell and Morgan nuts.

But it shouldn’t. People who study sensemaking oscillate ontologically because that is what helps them understand the actions of people in everyday life who could care less about ontology.

Ricoeur would find a lot to like in this passage. First, it bridges the “constructivist” versus “naturalist” gulf because sensemaking occurs prior to the distinction between subject and object, or between the ideal and the real. The contour gauge and the self-fulfilling prophecy both are rendered by sensemaking. Ricoeur would concur. What is “real” and what is “ideal” are both rendered in the conscious imagination. Second, Weick uses a concrete object—a carpenter’s tool—in a way that is consistent with the understanding of metaphor of Ricoeur (1976, p. 52) as a form of “semantic dissonance” that combines a phrase with ordinary, literal signification (the ‘contour gauge’) and an unexpected predicate (‘fulfilled prophecies’). Third, sensemaking interprets action—“the actions of people in everyday life”—and this is consistent with Ricoeur’s (1992) interest in the interpretation of the actions of oneself and others in relation to narrative. Indeed, narrative interpretation is precisely what gives intelligibility to the actions of self and others.

3.2. *Narrative in Ricoeur’s thought*

Before turning to how narrative is related to identity, it is important to briefly introduce the broader context of how narrative functions in Ricoeur’s (1984, 1985, 1988) systematic analysis of the representation of lived experience occurring in time through history and fiction. The key concept is that of plot—or, more precisely, *emplotment*—because it is a dynamic rather than static term. Through emplotment, lived experience is mediated in narrative discourse in three closely related ways. First, emplotment “draws a meaningful story from a diversity of events or incidents” (1984, p. 65). That is, events whose relationships to one another are not immediately evident are drawn together so that their temporal and logical interdependencies can be grasped. Historical narrative, for example, replaces ‘one thing *after* another’ with ‘one thing *because* of another,’ thereby rendering intelligible those events.

Second, emplotment “brings together factors as heterogeneous as agents, goals, means, interactions, circumstances, and unexpected results” (1984, p. 65). Further, through emplotment, reversals and surprises are suspended in narrative, creating what Ricoeur (1984, p. 42–45) calls “discordant concordance.” Third, emplotment reveals a glimpse of the story as a whole so that it can be followed. It does this by narrating the way towards a conclusion: “To understand the story is to understand how and why the successive episodes led to this conclusion, which, far from being foreseeable, must finally be acceptable, as congruent with the episodes brought together by the story” (1984, p. 66–67).

My brief description of the three ways through which emplotment creates a whole out of disparate elements could lead to the conclusion that Ricoeur sees narrative as an intriguing semantic form—but little more than that—much as does semiotics (e.g., Greimas, 1987). This would be an inaccurate characterization of his work because it severs narrative from the lived experience it mediates. For Ricoeur, narrative is a bridge between what is lived and what is told, between tradition and innovation, between what was, what is, and what might be, and between an author of a narrative and a reader (Laitinen, 2002). Or, in Ricoeur’s (1988, p. 249) words, “the practice of narrative lies in a thought experiment by means of which we try to inhabit worlds foreign to us.” But the path is indirect, traveling in a circle from lived experience to narrative to lived experience.

Near the conclusion of his philosophical treatment of narrative in fiction and history, Ricoeur (1988) pauses to reflect on the question of author or subject of the intentions and actions portrayed in narrative. The underlying issue in this question, however, pertains to identity. How is it that an individual or community can be said to have an identity in the midst of a diversity of lived experience? The dilemma is this: “Either we must posit a subject identical with itself throughout the diversity of its different states, or, following Hume and Nietzsche, we must hold that this identical subject is nothing more than a substantialist illusion, whose elimination merely brings to light a pure manifold of cognitions, emotions, and volitions” (1988, p. 246). In response to this dilemma, Ricoeur proposes the narrative self.

3.3. Emplotment and narrative identity: unity

In Ricoeur’s (1992) thought, narrative identity addresses the philosophical problems inherent in static conceptualizations of the self. Recall from the foregoing discussion how narrative is able to resolve the issue of identity in the midst of the “manifold of cognitions, emotions, and volitions” (1988, p. 246). It does this through emplotment. Rather than treating the self as identical through time and events, narrative portrays the self as the subject of a myriad of experiences in the form of a story-like account. The narrative self is not a constant self, identical through time, but the subject that experiences change, reversal, and surprise. Narrative discloses the self not as consistency or continuity, but—to use Ricoeur’s (1992, p. 141–142) logically awkward term—as “discordant concordance”.

How does this narrative project work? It may be helpful to begin at the level of events occurring in a person’s life. Without narrative, such events are merely contingent—one thing happening after another. However, to make sense of them, we use different kinds of ‘stories’ to account for these events and to relate them to one another. One way to do that is to recognize an event as the outcome of an intention—e.g. “this happened because I intended it to.” Another way is to construe the event as the effect of the intentions of some other individual, entity, or contextual factor. Put another way, when we think about ourselves in relation to our actions, we often do so in small plot segments.

To explain one's actions in relation to one's intentions, and to relate both to the interplay of contextual factors that affect action, are preliminary forms of narrative emplotment. These segments are then bound into larger story lines that are configured in relation to a beginning, middle, and end. Further, these short narrative accounts themselves can be the object of subsequent emplotment: "we can see how the story of a life comes to be constituted through a series of rectifications applied to previous narrative [...] subjects recognize themselves in the stories that they tell about themselves" (Ricoeur, 1988, p. 247).

Narrative identity thus is not simply the recounting of the temporal sequence of events in one's life, one thing after another. Rather, it is to portray of the 'whys' of one's life—if not by means of a 'causal' explanation, then through an accounting of how those events are related. That is, emplotment binds contingent events together into a comprehensible narrative ("discordant concordance") that leads from beginning to ending (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 142):

The paradox of emplotment is that it inverts the effect of contingency, in the sense of that which could have happened differently or which might not have happened at all, by incorporating it in some way into the effect of necessity or probability exerted by the configuring act. The inversion of the effect of contingency into an effect of necessity is produced at the very core of the event: as a mere occurrence, the latter is confined to thwarting the expectations created by the prior course of events; it is quite simply the unexpected, the surprising. It only becomes an integral part of the story when understood after the fact, once it is transfigured by the so to speak retrograde necessity which proceeds from the temporal totality carried to its term.

Ezzy (1998, p. 245) offers a somewhat more accessible account of how emplotment synthesizes events in Ricoeur's thought:

Events, which just happen, are transformed into episodes that take their place in a unified singular story. Episodes do not just happen, they carry the story along. Events can appear discordant until they are integrated and made sense of in the story. Hence Ricoeur refers to a concordant discordance. Plot is the organizing theme of a narrative. It weaves together a complex set of events into a single story.

The outcome of emplotment is to integrate, into a larger narrative, the discordant nature of events into "the unity of a life considered a temporal totality which is itself singular and distinguished from all others" (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 147). This "unity" points to character, or what is enduring about the self. By transmuting chance events into fate, "the narrative constructs the identity of the character" (1992). Emplotment intertwines the character and the plot thereby lending self-constancy to an individual's identity in relation to the temporal totality of an implied beginning, middle, and end. Character and self-constancy are therefore two poles of narrative identity. Character refers to a "set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized" (1992: 121), whereas self-constancy refers to how it is the same subject within the multiplicity of events in a narrated life. Character represents the "what," and self-constancy the "who" of narrative identity.

Ricoeur (1992, p. 160) certainly understands the obvious, namely, that the beginning and end represented in narrative is not equivalent to the historical beginning or end of a life:

Now there is nothing in real life that serves as a narrative beginning; memory is lost in the hazes of early childhood; my birth and, with greater reason, the act through which I was conceived belong

more to the history of others—in this case, my parents—than to me. As for my death, it will finally be recounted only in the stories of those who survive me. I am always moving towards my death, and this prevents me from ever grasping it as a narrative end.

Further, in the narrative structure of a novel, there is but one plot—whereas in life there are many possible plots and subplots. In literature, the sense of an ending is realized when the reading of the book is complete. In life, emplotment of the ending lies at the distant horizon of the future.

3.4. Emplotment and narrative identity: imaginative variation

In describing Ricoeur's (1992) theory of narrative identity I have focused on how emplotment *unifies* events into a coherent narrative of individual identity (character). I now need to reverse the emphasis and focus on the *variability* in events and narratives that emplotment unifies into a narrated identity. Recall how, in my basic example, we “make sense” of events by figuring them into brief plots—often with implied or actual actors, intentions, and outcomes. These brief plots are then retrospectively figured into larger narratives where there is an implied or actual beginning, middle, and ending. What is the source of these larger narratives? How is it that people know to narrate their lives as originating at some beginning point and continuing on a trajectory towards a horizon? Or, in my basic example, what is the source of the basic conjoining of events in relation to agents and their intended acts? For Ricoeur (p. 148), these narratives are found in culture—and are particularly visible in fictional texts: “literature proves to consist in a vast laboratory for thought experiments in which the resources of variation encompassed by narrative identity are put to the test of narration.”

Ricoeur's (1992) emphasis on literature as a source of narrative variation is consistent with how the novelist, in particular, is faced with the project of interweaving plot and character through time. Novels thus are paradigmatic of how narrative resolves events into a coherent character. The first implication of claim of Ricoeur (p. 148) that literature—and, by extension, culture—represents a “vast laboratory for thought experiments” is that individuals actively engage in thinking through alternative pasts, presents, and futures. What motivates this experimentation? For Ricoeur (p. 160) it is the desire for narrative unity within a life that remains open to the future: “If my life cannot be grasped as a singular totality, I could never hope it to be successful, complete.” But narrating a beginning, middle, and ending for a life in its unity is hardly a straightforward task. Just as historians describe what might have been had things happened differently, and novelists entertain alternative plot lines to develop their characters, individuals ponder what would have happened under different circumstances (“counterfactuals”), and brood over alternative futures (“hypotheticals”). There are many such alternative pasts and futures. We experience them as such—as alternative pasts and futures—because we think about our lives in relation to the basic structure of narrative.

But our lives cannot have narrative identity unless some are appropriated as our own, and not others. As Yogi Berra said, “when you come to a fork in the road, take it.” Fiction, the vast laboratory for thought experiments, helps this happen (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 162):

As for the narrative unity of a life, it must be seen as an unstable mixture of fabulation and actual experience. It is precisely because of the elusive character of real life that we need the help of fiction to organize life retrospectively, after the fact, prepared to take as provisional and open to revision any figure of emplotment borrowed from fiction or history.

Ricoeur is not suggesting that only novelists and their readers have access to narrative models through which to imaginatively represent their identities. Instead, he is reflecting how individuals organize events in narratives because doing so is familiar to them through their cultural experiences.

The implication of this extension is that individuals draw from the narratives of those around them in formulating their own stories. There are many other potential sources of narrative variation, including film, conversations with friends and acquaintances, or “stories” told about organizational founders (Ezzy, 1998). The stories of others potentially inform my story, albeit in an ‘experimental’ or provisional way. Others thus enable individuals to generate counterfactual (retrospective) and hypothetical (prospective) alternative plot lines and character developments in sustaining a narrative identity. To bring this idea into the domain of contemporary psychology, others offer possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), or provisional selves (Ibarra, 1999) that individuals adopt in their own narrative identities.

3.5. *The narrative self and the other*

Ricoeur does recognize the most important difference between fictional narratives and the narratives of lives lived by individuals. In novels, the development of the characters and the plot is encapsulated in the world of the text. Although readers can be engaged by the narrative, the reverse is not true. A novel might disclose an alternative plot line for my life, but my story cannot offer an alternative plot line for the characters in the novel. Contrast this with actual life, in which the life of an individual is bound up in the life of others: “Whole sections of my life are part of the life history of others—of my parents, my friends, my companions in work and in leisure” (1992, p. 161).

Others, then, are related to the self in two ways: first, as a source of imaginative variation in refiguring one’s narrative identity and, second, as persons with whom our own histories are intertwined. Both imply a relationship in which others are “constitutive of selfhood as such” (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 3). Here, Ricoeur’s hermeneutic philosophy begins to sound remarkably like the perspectives of Mead & Morris (1967) and, in particular, Cooley’s (1902) “looking glass self” in which individuals see themselves in the responses of others. The important difference between Ricoeur’s approach and that of social interactionism lies in the role of narrative as the organizing framework for identity.

There is yet a third way in which the self and otherness are intrinsically related, and that is in how the self is both the subject and the object of narrative emplotment—how, “the subject both appears as a reader and the writer of his own life” (Ricoeur, 1988, p. 246). The basis of narrating one’s self is to take oneself as an object of reflection for the self. Put simply, to tell our stories we have to see our selves as others see us. Narrating our selves is therefore “seeing oneself as an other.” This is a key insight because, in order to examine whether one leads the “good life” (in Aristotle’s sense) or an “authentic life” in the domain of contemporary leadership theory and research, it is necessary to construe oneself as an object and, at the same time, recognize that it is one’s own self that is the object of reflection. In this way, the other calls us to account—and without the other to call us to give an account of ourselves, there is no self.

The possibility of a virtuous self emerges from this dialectic between self and other through which “oneself is an other” in the narrative process. For Ricoeur, the central features of this process are the

esteem individuals hold for themselves, the regard they hold for others (solicitude), and the reciprocity (similitude) that links esteem and regard. Ricoeur (1992, p. 193) explains as follows:

It is in experiencing the irreparable loss of the loved other that we learn, through the transfer of the other onto ourselves, the irreplaceable character of our own life. It is first for the other that I am irreplaceable. In this sense, solicitude replies to the other's esteem for me [. . .] Similitude is the fruit of the exchange between esteem for oneself and esteem for others.

Ricoeur (1992, p.193) offers this alternative formulation of the same idea: “I cannot myself have self-esteem unless I esteem others as myself.” This is so not because of a moral imperative linking the two, but because, in the narration of the self, “esteem of the *other as a oneself* and the esteem of *oneself as an other*” are fundamentally equivalent (1992, p. 194; emphasis in the original).

4. Authentic leadership and the narrative self

Ricoeur does not deal explicitly with authenticity. However, the relationship between character and self-consistency offer interesting possibilities for linking authenticity to the narrative self. Recall that character represents the distinctive and enduring traits whereby a person can be identified. Self-constancy, in contrast, points to how it is the same subject throughout the events, changes, surprises, and reversals of a narrated life. Insofar as contemporary formulations of authenticity focus on what is consistent or enduring about a leader, they are directed toward character. But, for Ricoeur (1992, p. 165), self-constancy is as important as well:

Self-constancy is for each person that manner of conducting himself or herself so that others can *count on* that person. Because someone is counting on me, I am *accountable for* my actions before another. The term “responsibility” unites both meanings: “counting on” and being “accountable for.” It unites them, adding to them the idea of a *response* to the question “Where are you?” asked by another who needs me. This response is the following: “Here I am!” a response that is a statement of self-constancy.

Character thus is a response to the question, asked by the subject about himself or herself: “what am I?” But self-constancy is a response to the question asked by others, “where are you?” (1992, p. 165). Authenticity cannot be meaningful if the self is empty of character, but it cannot be real if it ignores the dynamics of lived experience. It is the narrative self that unites character and self-constancy: “Narrative identity makes the two ends of the chain link up with one another: the permanence in time of character and that of self-constancy” (1992, p. 166).

Is the authentic self the self that is constant (sameness) or is it the self that is faithful to its promises though fluid and changeable (selfhood)? I suggest that it is neither one alone; it is instead the narrative that unites them. When narrative recounts how an individual acts out of character yet, in time and through a succession of events, he or she comes to their senses, it portrays inauthenticity and then authenticity in the story of a life. What matters is neither one nor the other but the story of how one replaces the other through character and plot. Narrative recounts how the values and purposes of a person change through time and events, yet they remain the values and purposes of the same individual. Equating authenticity with a particular configuration of values, or a single distinctive purpose, or even a

selection of positive psychological states, fails to capture what is distinctive about an individual simply because his or her identity is a narrative.

Having outlined the central features the narrative self in Ricoeur's (1992) thought, I now return to the issues posed by my critique of contemporary perspectives on authenticity in leadership. My purpose is to inform the contemporary discussion of authentic leadership from the vantage point of the narrative self. I discuss the narrative self in relation to themes drawn from my critical analysis of contemporary perspectives on authentic leadership: the primacy of self-awareness, self-regulation and consistency, the effects of leaders on followers, and narrative identity and ethics.

4.1. The primacy of self-awareness

In my initial critique, I characterized contemporary work on authentic leadership as focusing on how self-awareness is necessary to identify one's enduring values (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999) and purposes (George, 2003). The "self" in self-awareness is emphasized because other individuals are viewed as potential sources of inauthenticity. Self-awareness is thus an inward journey. These contemporary perspectives differ from that of the narrative self in two ways.

First, the focus on enduring values and purposes emphasizes character rather than self-constancy. This is an unfortunate emphasis to the extent that it undercuts the changing nature of the self through the events of a lifetime. Ricoeur's (1992) understanding of narrative identity by no means excludes character in favor of self-constancy. Rather, it holds the two through the narrative process. Character—what is enduring about a person, and through which we can identify him or her amongst others—is attested through the narrative process, and not independently of it. A leader's values and purposes are disclosed in relation to the changing events of a narrative life, rather than by what he or she says at a given moment in time.

Even though contemporary perspectives emphasize character at the possible expense of self-constancy, there is an important sense in which narrative identity and self-constancy are implied—and often explicit—in these understandings of authenticity. Being "true to oneself" is only problematic when seen in the context of a life filled with events, challenges, reversals, and surprises. Further, it is worth noting that these perspectives explicitly involve the narrated world of action. The emphasis on modeling the way in Kouzes & Posner (2002) is one example, as is George's (2003) narration of his leadership at Medtronic.

This observation leads me to suggest that the "inward" path of self-awareness that leads towards authenticity is a narrative journey in autobiographical memory. To be sure, what autobiographical memory discloses is an "unstable mixture of fabulation and actual experience" (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 162). But because self-consciousness organizes autobiographical memory in narrative form (Rubin, 1995; Rubin & Greenberg, 2003), emphasizing the narrative nature of self-awareness will hold together the unity of character and the dynamism of self-constancy.

Second, to the extent that contemporary perspectives on authenticity set the self over others, they risk undercutting the important ways in which the self is constituted in relation to others. Here the edge between the narrative framework and contemporary leadership perspectives that define authenticity as being "oneself" against others (George, 2003) draws to its sharpest point. The emplotment of the self is not a process of winnowing what is distinctively one's own from all that surrounds one; instead, it is a process of crafting a distinctive plot through which one's own character takes shape. It involves experimentation with provisional story lines, counterfactual pasts, and hypothetical futures. That these

alternatives often are derived from the “plots” of others—even fictional others—is not necessarily a mark of inauthenticity. Rather, it is a hallmark of narrative authenticity.

At the same time, the importance of others for narrative identity does not mean individuals can easily become authentic by imitating the stories of others—as if new selves can be tried on as readily as a new pair of shoes. Trying on a provisional self is not a magical process whereby autobiographical memories move from one person to another, such that the conscious experience of one becomes the conscious experience of the other. To say that the self is constituted in relation to others does not dissolve the self into the other; my experience remains resolutely my own. Nevertheless, the suspicion with which George (2003) or Bass & Steidlmeier (1999) view leaders who espouse the purposes or values of others rather than their own is well founded. Narratives of the self—just like values and purposes—can be authentic or inauthentic. Self-delusion is not avoided by narrative identity. What is different, however, is Ricoeur’s (1992, p. 165) assertion that self-constancy means being both responsive and accountable in relationship to others—even as the other might be one’s own self. This leads to the question of self-regulation, and how it might be understood from the perspective of the narrative self.

4.2. Self-regulation and consistency

In contemporary perspectives on authentic leadership, self regulation is the process through which leaders align their behavior with their true selves (implicitly, George, 2003; explicitly, Luthans & Avolio, 2003). That alignment makes leaders’ true selves (values, purpose) transparent to followers. Since the true self is seen in most of these perspectives as enduring, this also means that followers evaluate leaders in terms of the consistency with which leaders behave in ways that are consonant with their core values or guiding purposes. The underlying model here is one of being true to oneself by means of prototype matching: observed behavior is assessed in terms of its consistency with identifiable qualities.

Viewing the self as a narrative project does not eliminate or even reduce the importance of transparency and consistency. But it necessitates a re-conceptualization. As I suggested in the previous Section, leaders can be disingenuous just as easily when narrating their identities as they can in masking their true intentions to followers. Transparency involves being explicit in either case. Second, in the narrative view of the identity, consistency is not evident in the repetition of particular behaviors, or the commitment to a particular course of action. Instead, consistency is the outcome of successfully narrating how the self is the same self through the disparate events of one’s life so that the unity of character becomes evident. Narrative can integrate how a person is the same person through changing and even conflicting decisions. If character thereby undergoes change, what constitutes the basis for self-regulation?

I propose that there is a potential for self-regulation within the process of narrating one’s life. But it is not, strictly speaking, regulation in the form of prototype matching. Because narrative is so well suited for representing the relationships between intentions, choices, and outcomes, it offers an especially effective means for self-regulation. In fact, narrative is a more complete representation of self-regulative possibilities than prototype matching because it operates in the realm of action rather than static categories. By representing the future in the present, narrative can portray what is a contingent choice today in the form of a consequence one must live with tomorrow. In so doing, narrative offers a much sharper form of self regulation than assessing whether a choice made today is consistent with one’s values or purpose. I should also note, however, that the same narrative process represents a powerful interpretative tool for impression management and self-delusion.

4.3. *The effects of leaders on followers*

In my critique of contemporary perspectives on authentic leadership, I indicated that transparency and consistency in leaders do not automatically result in the transformation of followers. It is a simple extension of Ricoeur (1992) to suggest that this happens as followers incorporate alternative plots, offered by their leaders, into their own self-narratives. The mechanism I am proposing is similar in some ways to the identity-based approach to leadership offered by Lord & Brown (2004). They view leadership as the process whereby leaders make explicit alternative possible selves for followers, and followers incorporate those alternatives into their working self-concepts. Once incorporated, these alternative selves serve to guide self-regulation.

Although Lord & Brown's (2004) theory accounts for change in the working self-concept, their explanation is at best marginally dynamic. Possible selves are static prototypes. Self-regulation is a prototype matching process whereby alternative selves are compared to goal states. What Ricoeur's (1992) theory brings to this process is the emphasis on narrative as a means of weaving together character and plot, intentionality and actions. Others offer not alternative prototypes so much as different plot lines along which intentions, choices, actions, and consequences are represented.

An interesting example of the narrative approach is found in Shamir & Eilam (2005) who propose that leaders influence followers through self concepts as made evident in the stories they tell about themselves. Although this autobiographical approach is not explicitly informed by an understanding of how the past informs the present in narrative, the authors clearly understand how to move around the hermeneutical circle: "we do not view the autobiographies as windows to the leaders' actual lives or history but as texts that operate at the time of their telling" (Shamir & Eilam, 2005). Ricoeur would describe this same possibility in terms of how narrative can open up the world of the author and invite the reader or listener to understand his or her own opportunities under the horizons of that world.

4.4. *Narrative identity and ethics*

A primary impetus in contemporary discussions of leadership is the desire to address ethical concerns by equating authenticity with ethics. Bass & Steidlmeier (1999) take this approach, arguing that pseudo-transformational leaders value self-interest at the expense of others. Similarly, George (2003) advocates authentic leadership in response to the events at Enron and Arthur Andersen. Does the narrative theory of the self suggest an ethical stance?

In focusing on the reciprocity between esteem and regard, Ricoeur's (1992) narrative theory of the self draws close to the ethical positions held by Bass & Steidlmeier (1999), George (2003), and Kouzes & Posner (2002)—all of whom focus on the regard authentic leaders hold for others. The narrative theory of the self reaches this point not through an inner journey of self-awareness to discover one's fundamental values and purpose, but in engagement with others, both real and fictional. Esteem of self is not the product of an inner struggle but the recognition of oneself in the regard of an other, just as regard for others is discovered in the esteem they hold for oneself.

Shaping one's character chameleon-like to manipulate others is disingenuous and Machiavellian. But being "true to self" is no more likely to result in value-centered or principle-centered leadership. What then matters in relation to positive principles and values are the regard leaders demonstrate for their followers and the esteem they hold for themselves. The two are inextricably related. As Ricoeur (1992,

p. 193) observed, “I cannot myself have self-esteem unless I esteem others as myself.” Self-esteem follows from the recognition of oneself in the regard of another, just as regard for others is discovered in the esteem they hold for one’s own self. Authentic leadership, then, is reflected not only by being “true to self” but also in the positive regard leaders hold for their followers and the positive regard of followers for their leader. This is, of course, a variation on the familiar theme of the Golden Rule.

5. Implications of the narrative framework for research and leadership development

The overall purpose of this critique has been to propose that the narrative self (Ricoeur, 1992) offers a richer conceptual framework for understanding identity in relation to authenticity and leadership. I now turn to the implications of this framework for leadership research, and to the closely related practical issues of leadership development.

5.1. *Implications for research*

In drawing out the implications of the narrative self for empirical research on authenticity and leadership, I begin at what is the most basic question, namely, the contention that identity be construed principally as a narrative process. Ricoeur (1992) derived his framework within the interpretative paradigm of hermeneutic philosophy, in which existence is taken to be ‘textual’ and the narrative form has a rich tradition. Thus, it is not at all surprising to find that his philosophy has informed interpretative work in organizational research (e.g., Brown, 1998; Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001), including the “narrative” organizational research program advocated by Cunliffe, Luhman, & Boje (2004). Ricoeur’s work also has informed theory and research in the psychology of narrative identity (Crossley, 2003) and the role of emplotment in psychotherapeutic practice (Mattingly, 1994).

However—at the risk of imposing the functional paradigm on what is essentially an interpretative tradition—I wish to draw attention to relevant parallels to the narrative self in contemporary theory of Ricoeur (1992) and research in cognitive science. To begin, Roser & Gazzaniga (2004) have argued that cognitive processes of integration are constructive and interpretative. Further, Turner (1996) holds that these higher-order interpretative functions (“cognitive blending”) take “literary” forms, such as metaphor and narrative. Then, note how Dennett (1991, 1992) has suggested that this narrative structure is also characteristic of the self. Finally, although Ricoeur (Changeux & Ricoeur, 2000, p. 14) has characterized cognitive neuroscience and hermeneutic philosophy as representing “heterogeneous perspectives [...] that cannot be reduced to each other or derived from each other,” Gallagher (2000) nonetheless has pointed out how his (Ricoeur’s) understanding of the narrative self enhances Dennett’s. These examples from cognitive science point to an interesting convergence between interpretative and functionalist paradigms in relation to understanding self and identity. In so doing, they imply that research on narrative identity need not—indeed, should not—be constrained by the limits of either paradigm.

Drawing connections between hermeneutics and cognitive science might at first blush seem quite distant from the issues of authenticity and leadership. I would argue, however, that understanding authentic leadership cannot proceed effectively without a clear understanding of what it means to be an “authentic” self. Further, to grasp what is distinctive about authenticity requires a conceptually rigorous and empirically robust model of the self in both its authentic and inauthentic dimensions.

An example will help clarify my claim. For Ricoeur (1992), emplotment is the primary process of narrative self construction and self reflection. Emplotment makes use of one's own remembered experiences, as well as the experiences of others in literature and in everyday life. Ricoeur would, I believe, acknowledge that this narrative interpretation and construction of experience is subject to bias—principally because it is within the nature of narrative to be selective in telling one's story. Further, the narrative self is rarely undertaken as a chronology. Instead, narrating one's self is often occasioned by the desire to understand constraints and opportunities for action in the present. Recent research in autobiographical memory lends empirical specificity to how the past is constructed in relation to the present. For example, positive events appear to lend themselves to autobiographical narrative constructions more readily than negative events. Interestingly, this 'bump' in the narration of positive events appears to be related not to a bias within individuals, but instead to the preponderance of positively oriented "culturally shared life scripts" (Rubin & Berntsen, 2003) from which individuals narrate their identities. This line of research clearly is exploring empirically something very close to Ricoeur's philosophical idea of emplotment, and thus is a relevant example of how research on autobiographical memory from a functionalist paradigm can illuminate how individuals, including leaders, misrepresent themselves to themselves.

Exploring these processes would seem to be essential in understanding the prospects for authentic emplotment. If the alternative plot lines available in our culture are disproportionately positive, as the work of Rubin & Berntsen (2003) clearly implies, how do leaders authentically portray their responses to challenging, traumatic, or exceptionally difficult events? By the same token, how do their followers emplot their own narrative identities? To the extent that cultural understandings of charismatic leadership are preponderantly bound up in heroic narratives (Smith, 2000), authentic alternatives for "imaginative variation" (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 148) for narrating identity will be scarce.

Research in autobiographical memory also holds potential for clarifying empirically this implication that cultures differ in the nature and variety of alternative plot lines from which individuals can glimpse and provisionally adopt different selves. Although the capability to represent oneself in a narrative appears to be a human capability from about age four (Levine, 2004), there is evidence that individuals from different cultures construe themselves differently (Ross, Xun, & Wilson, 2002). The field of possible selves one has available—what stories one has grown up with, read, seen, or heard in conversation around the water cooler—thus becomes critical (Hauerwas, 1994). Drawing out the implications of group, organizational, and cultural contexts for narrative identity is an important step in understanding individual differences in authenticity. Also important in understanding individual differences in authenticity are those factors that lead one individual to narrate a self in which others are held in regard, whereas another individual, in a similar context, narrates a self in which others are the targets of deception and manipulation. Research from the perspective of moral development (e.g. Kegan, 1982) might clarify the processes in the evolution of the self that lead individuals to hold themselves in esteem and others in regard.

The importance of others as sources of narrative possibilities in Ricoeur (1992)—both as a source of alternative plot lines and in relation to esteem and regard—also deserves careful empirical examination. To the extent that the narrative identity of a leader is derived from the provisional selves he or her has available from friends, colleagues, and acquaintances, understanding those other individuals and their own stories may prove important. The same principle holds for relations between leaders and followers. Again, an example may prove helpful. In the model of authenticity of Luthans & Avolio (2003), leaders share positive psychological states such as hope and resilience.

Assume, for the purpose of illustration, that resiliency is best perceived in the context of a traumatic, challenging, or difficult event, and so is represented particularly effectively by a narrative. Given this assumption—which seems quite plausible—then the potential story-line of being a resilient individual would pass from the leader to the follower in the narration of the events.

This emphasis underscores the importance of research on the social networks of leaders (e.g., Brass, 2001), and directs attention to the self-disclosing stories that are told within those networks and how they affect attitudes and behaviors (Brass, Butterfield, & Skaggs, 1998). Social network analysis may provide a particularly helpful analytical tool for investigating the ‘diffusion’ of authenticity—in the model of Luthans & Avolio (2003) this would mean the expansion of positive psychological states—through social networks in which the ties represent relationships in which stories of one and to one another. An instructive example, albeit based not on Ricoeur (1992), but on Cooley (1902), is Yeung & Martin’s (2003) empirical test of whether self-conceptions grow in correspondence to looking-glass conceptions through time. And a potentially fruitful measurement approach for representing and comparing narrative models is AutoMap (Diesner & Carley, 2004), which is designed to extract and model relationships in the form of networks.

Ricoeur’s (1992) framework comes out of hermeneutic philosophy and, as such, is interested in discourse and texts. But stories are not the only domain in which plot and character are evident. Drama also invokes character and plot. Gardner & Avolio (1998) discuss how charismatic leadership involves a dramaturgical portrayal of the self. Linking narrative emplotment to dramaturgical self-portrayal, both theoretically and empirically, offers the potential for explaining how the charismatic leader’s narrative self is “dramatized” and thereby accessible to followers.

5.2. Implications for leadership development

The implications of the framework of Ricoeur (1992) for authentic leadership development follow directly from his emphasis on narrative. I outline several alternatives below.

First, programs and interventions designed to increase self-awareness would be enhanced by autobiographical work, such as writing one’s story, keeping journals, or even writing one’s obituary (see also Shamir & Eilam, 2005 in this Special Issue). Another option would be to engage leaders in the narration of what Luthans & Avolio (2003) refer to as “trigger events.” Such events are particularly relevant because they represent transitions in the plot of narrative identity. The purpose of such autobiographical work is to shift the emphasis from traits and dispositions (often assessed by personality inventories) or preferred values (again often assessed by inventories) in the direction of narrating events, thereby making evident self-constancy in the transitions of life.

Second, enriching the variety of alternative but positive plot lines enables developing leaders to find in others new ways of being. Although the biographies of corporate leaders on the bookstore shelves at airports are the bane of academic leadership researchers, they are narratives nonetheless. Reading these biographies is important to managers who need a variety of alternative plots and characterizations through which they can imaginatively represent their future and narrate their own development as leaders. Following Smith (2000), I pointed out that these biographies often are formulaic renditions of leaders as great warriors or conquering heroes, and so questionable in terms of the esteem for self and regard for others that they promote. However, not all books narrate leaders as heroes. A positive example illustrating this point is Quinn’s (2004) work on leadership and change. Quinn organizes his book around

the stories people have told about life-changing events. Many of these stories relate how the individual has confronted an aspect of his or her self that was previously denied or buried, or faced events of unexpected difficulty and challenge. In the telling of these stories, the power of narrative to integrate what was denied through plot is remarkably evident.

Third, there are tools for engaging the involvement of others in the process of narrating oneself, particularly as one recognizes oneself in the esteem of others. An example is an exercise developed by the Positive Organizational Scholarship Research Group (Quinn, Dutton, & Spreitzer, 2003) in which participants solicit feedback on their unique strengths as individuals from significant others. Participants ask others not just to list those strengths, but to relate “three stories of when I was at my best.” The implications for the narrative construction of an esteemed self through the exercise of “seeing oneself as an other” are striking. Further, most individuals have well-developed mechanisms to blunt the impact of negative feedback. Few, however, have such strong defenses against positive views of the self. Here the gift of the other to hold one accountable to one’s best self, conveyed through stories expressing positive regard, is most evident.

This essay began with a critique of contemporary perspectives on authentic leadership. In response to that critique, I introduced the perspective of Ricoeur (1992) on “Oneself as Another” in order to stimulate reflection on identity as a narrative construction, thereby capturing the constancy of the self in the dynamic nature of lived events as well as the unity of the self in terms of enduring character. Completing the circle, I returned to the issues of authenticity in leadership, sketching implications for research and leadership development. Now, at the end of this narrative, I point to its unifying character: my hope that emphasis on authenticity as “to thine own self be true” will be complemented by authenticity disclosed *in the regard one holds for others*.

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