

EMERALDHANDBOOKS

THE EMERALD HANDBOOK OF AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

EDITED BY

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The Emerald Handbook of Authentic Leadership

The Emerald Handbook of Authentic Leadership is a remarkable reader covering the complexities of leading across time, and into the future, with authenticity. The handbook offers a fresh leadership perspective across a vast field of research, from leadership insight revealed by classic literature, to the role of political and multinational institutions, to the growing influence of the internet of things, and well beyond. Great leadership literature compels the individual to think well beyond the chapters. As the handbook is about original research into the topic, the questions and unique insights about the leadership conditions lead the reader to consider their own role and aspirations in leadership. It is truly a mind-expanding exploration into all things authentic leadership.

Justin Ferbey, Deputy Minister of Economic Development,
Yukon, Canada

Like many helpful big ideas, the notion of authentic leadership can prove to be remarkably slippery when subjected to close academic scrutiny. With contributions from a wide diversity of expert contributors, the Emerald Handbook of Authentic Leadership maps out and explores the boundaries of the landscape of authentic leadership, its literature, theory and practice, with commendable clarity and insight. I am encouraged to hope that its contribution will broaden our knowledge and understanding of the notion of authentic leadership, making it less slippery and more profoundly useful for many readers.

Norman M. Fraser, PhD, IT entrepreneur, Adjunct Professor,
Aalborg University Business School, Denmark.

In a world where the old paradigms are breaking down, we need leaders to guide our politics, institutions and organisations through the turbulent waters of the 21st century and enable the world to break through to new sustainable models of growth. What is leadership? How do we define it and what does ‘good’ look like, in a world increasingly disrupted by existential threats such as pandemics and climate change? What do we mean by ‘authentic and how does it “fit” with different cultures, social norms and the increasing intrusion of technology into decision-making? Finally, as new types of organisations and businesses emerge, what types of leadership are needed? *The*

Emerald Handbook of Authentic Leadership gives us perspectives from multiple dimensions as to how we might answer these vital questions. It will provoke thinking and, hopefully, lead to different ways of being and seeing leaders in our modern world.

Steven Parker, Leadership Coach,
Chair of TAA Tech Ventures, UK

Scholars, practitioners, and the general public will enjoy this insightful handbook on authentic leadership lessons from AI, education, business, policy, NGO contexts, as well as COVID-19, which specifically benefits from considerable data and hindsight since the pandemic onset. This interdisciplinary author team blends in historical approaches with the latest in the field to provide analysis and advice for leaders in corporations, non-profits, and the public sector. The variety of methodological approaches (e.g., bibliometrics, inductive qualitative research, and autoethnography) and contexts in the *Emerald Handbook of Authentic Leadership* showcase state-of-the-art scholarship and practice in authentic leadership.

Siri Terjesen, Professor, Florida Atlantic University, US

In today's fast-paced and ever-changing world, leadership plays an indispensable role in shaping society. With the emergence of alternative facts, truth decay, siloed thinking, and the unstoppable rise of AI, it has become increasingly difficult to come together and tackle regional and global issues while adhering to shared values. The *Emerald Handbook of Authentic Leadership* is a must-read for anyone who wants to understand and participate in the dialogue around the role of authentic leadership in today's fluid world. It is a wide-ranging, interdisciplinary guide that serves as a catalyst for meaningful conversations about what it means to be an authentic leader and the important part it plays in our ability to navigate the challenges of the 21st century. I believe it spurs on multi stakeholder debate and further collaboration on the complex topic of authentic leadership.

Alex Tveit, Co-founder and CEO, Sustainable Impact
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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To our families, leaders who continue to inspire us.

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David Woollcombe founded Peace Child International in 1981. David's focus on peacebuilding began with the performance of the musical Peace Child at London's Royal Albert Hall. Set 50 years in the future in a world of peace and

sustainable prosperity, Peace Child flashes back to the present to tell the story of what today's teenagers do in their working lives to bring about that desired future. For each performance, the young cast members re-invent the characters and re-write the dialogue, imagining themselves to be the protagonists of the story. Peace Child brought the first Soviet youth and rockstars to the United States as part of a cultural exchange in 1986, paving the way for over 100 US-USSR cultural youth exchanges – each one a powerful addition to the citizen diplomacy effort to end the Cold War. Following the end of the Cold War, Peace Child began to focus on the promotion of sustainable development, human rights, youth job creation and community well-being.

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Foreword

What is it that distinguishes ‘good’ leadership from ‘bad’ leadership? Some leaders are renowned for their strength, others for their wisdom, some for their cunning, and still others for their empathy. A weak leader may be dismissed as ineffectual while a strong leader may be detested as brutal and bullying. A cautious leader may be written off as timid while a decisive leader may be condemned for lack of care for details. The very qualities that are judged weaknesses in some are held up as virtues in others. How can a leader chart an optimal course through these and all the other dilemmas that shape their leadership journey?

In recent times, the importance of *authenticity* in leadership has come to be recognised. Effective leadership has more to do with *being* than *doing*. It emanates from an individual’s offering of the best version of who they really are, deployed for the common good, rather than an attempt to conform to some borrowed notion of what a leader ought to look like.

‘Fake it ’til you make it’ may sound like good advice, but once the fakery has been unmasked by those being led, the leader can all too readily be dismissed as an imposter. A better soundbite, surely, is ‘be yourself, you can’t be anybody else’. Play to your strengths, surround yourself with people who make up for your weaknesses, and don’t treat leadership as a role-play exercise.

What I’ve learnt on my own thirty-year journey as a business founder, chairman and CEO is that leadership by consent beats leadership by force every time. Carrots are dramatically better than sticks. The best leader is one who people want to follow. Unless a leader has the trust of their people, they cannot lead optimally. Trust cannot be presumed; it has to be earned. And in order to be trusted, leaders must be believable. What the leader says and does must be credible, but *they* must also be credible in themselves. Leaders who command the consent of followers need to display more than skill, understanding and drive; they need to be seen to be true to themselves and to others. In short, leadership must be authentic.

All this may be easy to express in anecdotes and personal observations, as I have done, but like many helpful big ideas, the notion of authentic leadership can prove to be remarkably slippery when subjected to close academic scrutiny. With contributions from a wide diversity of expert contributors, this Handbook maps out and explores the boundaries of the landscape of authentic leadership, its literature, theory and practice, with commendable clarity and insight. I am encouraged to hope that its contribution will broaden our knowledge and

understanding of the notion of authentic leadership, making it less slippery and more profoundly useful for many readers.

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Preface

From classical times, writers, scholars, philosophers, not to mention the woman and man in the street, have speculated and continue to do so on the nature of leadership and what makes a good and/or successful leader. Should *good* and *successful* be coupled in evaluating leadership and what do either word mean in practice and in time? Does discussion of leadership need always to be contextualised, can it only be understood and evaluated contextually? Is gender a material factor in leadership? Are populism, social media, surveillance capitalism, digital transformation, algorithms, generative artificial intelligence, climate imperatives, fluidity, uncertainty, ambiguity all on a global scale, fundamentally changing the nature and understanding of leadership? Because leadership is so central to human experience, it is a disputed, debated, questioned, mistrusted topic, but that does not diminish; on the contrary, it augments the need to continue to search for insights from practitioners and scholars.

This handbook was prompted by a European ERASMUS+ project for PhD and PhD supervisor training in authentic leadership (IETN, www.ietn.aau.dk) which stemmed from our recognition that understanding of leadership is a competence that doctoral candidates and their supervisors need to acquire and nurture.

Authentic leadership is a relatively *young* phenomenon. It emanates from the business school world. It draws on other theories, concepts and methods, to develop conceptual or theoretical understanding of leadership and promotes its definitions of *authentic*. Generic assertions disguise the diversity of views on the nature of leadership and whether leadership is fundamentally about values and value systems or other drivers such as success.

IETN project demonstrated for us the need for more extensive exploration of authentic leadership, the development of leadership capacity, a broader enquiry and understanding of the nature of authenticity, a review of leadership theory and practice, all viewed from diverse, contrasting perspectives. There is an extensive literature and a strong sense of ownership of the concept of *authentic leadership* primarily in a sector of the American academic community and it is a contested field.

Authors in this handbook do not belong to the orthodox authentic leadership community. They offer varied, provocative views and personal case studies of leadership. Some endorse aspects of the concept of authentic leadership while developing new understanding of authenticity, others suggest that it is flawed and others offer fresh, challenging, leadership insights. Because leadership is a

dynamic arena, each study, in offering insights, recognises that continual research is essential to respond to the intensity of change and uncertainty. *Innovative, creative, agile, sensing, pragmatic* are among the terms leadership development that studies in this book suggest. They may be considered indicators of authenticity, but perhaps they reveal more about the agenda imperatives for the future practice of leadership in all spheres than the four pillars of the authentic leadership paradigm?

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We express our gratitude to all the contributors who submitted interesting, thought-provoking chapters on aspects of authentic leadership, offering insight into the concepts at hand and providing a foundation for future valuable research.

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Part 1

Introduction

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Chapter 1

Leadership: The Conundrum of Authenticity

John E. Reilly and Romeo V. Turcan

Every theory becomes infinitely more difficult from the moment that it touches on the province of moral quantities. Architecture and painting know quite well what they are about as long as they have only to do with matter; there is no dispute about mechanical or optical construction. But as soon as the moral activities begin their work, as soon as moral impressions and feelings are produced, the whole set of rules dissolves into vague ideas.

(von Clausewitz, 1997, p. 86)

Abstract

This chapter introduces the aims, objectives and potential outreach of the handbook. The handbook is both a quest for insights from leadership theory and practice in the contemporary world and a manifesto for leadership training through a value-based approach to authenticity. Contributors in this handbook do not belong to the orthodox authentic leadership community. They offer varied, provocative views and personal case studies of leadership. Some endorse aspects of the concept of authentic leadership while developing new understanding of authenticity, others suggest that it is flawed; others offer fresh, challenging, leadership insights. The chapter concludes with a brief introduction to all chapters in the handbook.

Keywords: Authentic leadership; authenticity; management; paradox; conundrum; global; liquid; VUCA; Erasmus+; European Commission

Introduction

As we began writing this chapter in December 2021, it was still too early to judge the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic despite knowing that the significant global upheaval could produce lasting social, political and economic impacts. The COVID-19 pandemic certainly proved to be a leadership laboratory with profound impacts on our daily lives, social relationships, work, the economy and governance. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, social democratic and neoliberal ‘typologies are in play: freedom versus authoritarianism and social democracy versus neoliberalism. At stake is the interpretation of state intervention, as democratic or authoritarian’ (Walby, 2021, p. 25). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated social inequalities and offered a daily illustration of the fundamental role that leadership plays across all domains – public and private, political and business. It has manifested a range of leadership styles from the dictatorial to the democratic, including strategic, transformational, bureaucratic, transactional and coach styles, all of which have been and continue to be debated. Citizens, scholars and students have much to learn from the COVID-19 pandemic about the various ways in which leadership can be exercised.

The emergence of COVID-19 was such a shock to the body politic that people yearned for a charismatic, messiah-type leader who would solve the problem – who would make it go away – but the inexorable rise in infections and death rates constituted a reminder that leaders may not always have solutions to the challenges that we face. This fact does not only apply to the context of COVID-19. There is a temptation in contemporary Western society to believe that there are solutions to all problems and to blame an individual or organisation for their failure to provide an ‘oven ready’ solution (to quote former UK PM Boris Johnson; Bloom, 2022). It is worth closely assessing the search for solutions in which politicians and scientists often provide conflicting answers. In this chapter, we look for authenticity – what is genuine and true – in a world of doubt and unknowns. It is an open question whether we can find this authenticity in political leaders, scientists, the business world and the academy.

At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the persistent focus on the single overarching issue at the expense of all others appeared to turn the world upside-down. Right-wing politicians resorted to state intervention in ways that would have previously been unthinkable. Civil liberties were curtailed on a dramatic scale. Standard health issues were neglected in many countries to free hospitals and doctors to cope with the overwhelming numbers of COVID-19 cases. Schools and universities closed for extended periods. Blended learning or ‘hybrid’ learning, previously fringe activity, is likely to be a mainstream phenomenon. Remote work became the norm in many businesses, presenting new leadership challenges with expectations of *flexible work* being guaranteed to workers. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in public behaviour being regulated in ways that had long been unthinkable in Western countries.

Conflicting, inconsistent messages about public behaviour generated a breakdown in trust and political and social conflict in many countries. Complete lockdowns persisted in China, where ‘Xi Jinping’s zero-covid policy has turned a

health crisis into a political one' ([The Economist, 2022](#)), resulting in a significant impact on global supply chains. Opposition to China's COVID-19 measures led to staunch opposition and civil unrest, resulting in a volte face by the Chinese government (as of December 2022), which could have a long-term impact on the authority of President Xi and the Chinese Communist Party.

The search for authenticity remains; in today's liquid world ([Bauman, 2013](#); [Turcan, 2020](#)), authenticity is desperately needed. However, what authenticity actually means is a fraught, contested topic – which is why it will be critically explored in this handbook.

The Leadership Quest and Authenticity

The pursuit of 'ideal qualities' in a leader and leadership theories aimed at directing us towards those ideal qualities are not modern phenomena despite the prevalence of scholarly works and business schools framing them as such. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle explored the concept of authentic leadership and its underlying qualities. In their analyses of virtuous leaders, they focussed on authenticity. Since the start of the twenty-first century, 'authenticity' has been a vogue concept in leadership theory. Inevitably, this trend has given rise to an arena of academic dispute, which we review in this chapter.

In the academic and business world, leadership development and leadership theory have come to constitute a global business. The short review that we offer provides some indication of the work on this topic. There are now around 30 journals that are either solely devoted to leadership or contribute to discussions on leadership ([Table 1.1](#)). All business schools offer courses in leadership. Companies have training in leadership skills. Countries have leadership foundations and academies.

Beyond the shortcomings and limitations of leaders, the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that existing leadership models do not provide all the answers, meaning that new leadership paradigms need to be developed. This poses an acute question for all those who are committed to the search for authenticity and the promotion of values for tomorrow's leaders across all spheres of work. There is a considerable literature on and a strong sense of ownership of the concept of *authentic leadership* in a sector of the American academic community.¹ However, the concept of authentic leadership has been adopted and adapted by numerous other academics; it may now be viewed as a primary topic in leadership education. The concept is also the subject of substantial criticism. While we hope to provide fresh perspectives, we will also be critical of aspects of the theory as enunciated by [George \(2003\)](#) and [Avolio et al. \(2004\)](#).

The Leadership Glossary

The volume of publications on leadership is daunting. It is difficult, in an overview chapter, to know where to begin as well as what to include and exclude. As indicated in our bibliography ([Vignette 1.1](#)), there are copious studies and

Table 1.1. List of Prominent Leadership Journals.

Academy of Management Journal
Academy of Management Learning and Education
Academy of Management Perspectives
Administrative Science Quarterly
American Psychologist
Business Ethics Quarterly
Educational Administration Quarterly
Group & Organization Management
International Journal of Management Reviews
International Journal of Public Leadership
Journal of Applied Psychology
Journal of Business Ethics
Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership
Journal of Experimental Social Psychology
Journal of Healthcare Management
Journal of Leadership and Organisation
Journal of Management
Journal of Nursing Management
Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology
Journal of Organisational Behaviour
Journal of Social Issues
Leadership
The Leadership Quarterly
MIT Sloan Management Review
Organisation Development Journal
Organisation Studies
Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes
Psychological Bulletin
Psychological Review
Small Group Research

explanations of leadership, and this wide scope is part of the challenge. Understanding the vast glossary of terms applying to leadership alongside or as subdivisions of the main theories is like learning a new language. Even when words seem familiar, the definitions of the terms provided by authors require close scrutiny and interrogation. In fact, the very definition of the term ‘leadership’ is an

area of debate. 'Leadership is not a concrete entity, but is more appropriately regarded as a social construction that occurs in a historical and cultural context, and within the minds of the people involved' (Avery, 2004, p. 8). The concept has been challenged since the age of Plato, as '...one of the intriguing things about leadership is that the more closely you look at it as a concept, the more it seems to recede. What exactly is leadership? Is it the same in politics as it is in business? Can you be a leader without a leadership title? Can you have a leadership title and not be a leader? How do you come to recognise yourself as a leader – and (more importantly) persuade other people to accept you as one?' (Scott, 2018).

A common denominator and defining element of contemporary thinking is the leader–follower relationship, but even this relationship is under question, as roles oscillate and questions arise regarding whether followers exert more influence over leaders than leaders over their followers, making the nominal leaders, in effect, *followers*. In this chapter, we examine some of the most prominent theories of leadership: the great man theory, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, servant leadership, participative leadership, situational leadership, contingency leadership and the trait theory. In addition to these classic areas, we discuss the following concepts: emergent leadership, messiah discourse, political leadership, business leadership and two classic terms associated with the concept of leadership, those being *power* and *authority*.

There is also the way in which leadership is conferred through an office and the status that it implies. This topic entails questions about appointment processes and the basis on which offices are achieved. Government ministers are generally appointed by the head of government on the basis of political loyalty or as part of an effort to balance party factions or interest groups – not demonstrated competence. In other spheres, such appointment processes may be ostensibly objective and merit-based, but they are frequently politically determined, even in cases of formal open selection with articulated and achieved criteria.

The role of media presentation prompts questions about the extent to which current leaders in both the public and private sectors are *manufactured*. Their public persona and image are moulded by their organisations and media manipulation, which, in principle, undermines the notion of authenticity. We should perhaps consider whether individuals may increasingly have the status of leader but with the source, direction and operation of their leadership being a complex composite, making it increasingly difficult to identify the source of true power and authority. This dynamic is particularly evident in leadership teams, collective leadership and oscillating leadership roles. Importantly, however, the more sinister concerns stem from the lack of visibility and the shadowy forces behind the image of the leader.

Anarchic Manifestations of Leadership

The modern world features increasingly anarchic manifestations of leadership. The *Gilets Jaunes* in France, for example, were not only able to disrupt everyday life and business in France, but they were also able to achieve substantial reversals

in government policy across multiple sectors. There is nothing new about demonstrations and political movements producing change, but the speed and scale at which this can now happen do suggest that the question of where leadership lies in the modern world is an open one. Extinction Rebellion, Black Lives Matter and the Me Too movement, among countless other powerful social movements, have challenged and continue to challenge leaders and society in fundamental ways. While change may be more incremental than suggested by the movements' radical proclamations, they are nevertheless *leading* social, political and business understanding, policy and practice. This is a form of collective, often incoherent, leadership that formal leadership structures in business and politics must confront and that may – and perhaps should – be examined as potential examples of the new *authenticity*. In these contexts, leaders become followers. Terrorist groups constitute another example of dispersed leadership, with leadership being exercised through propaganda, media, social dynamics and other indirect means. They are driven by values and beliefs that challenge traditional ideas and prompt questions for research on interpretations of authenticity. This *anarchic*, disruptive form of leadership that often generates radical change may reinforce the *authentic* school or be a powerful reason to abandon the concept.

Hunting for Perspective

As established, finding a suitable starting place for this analysis represents a significant challenge. Perhaps we would glean a deeper understanding through a *perspective lens*, looking from the past, to the present and to the future. Classical ideas about leadership (e.g. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle) have permeated Western thought and practice to the degree that their origins are often forgotten. Thus, it may be appropriate for us to revisit the original works. We often seem to fail to learn lessons from the past, but if we ignore history, we will inevitably fail to learn the lessons it offers. 'Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness. [...] Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it' (Santayana, 2011, p. 172).

Some writers suggest that biographies and autobiographies of political and business leaders offer lessons and insights into the concept of leadership; however, as always, selection inevitably distorts perception. Do we focus simply on success, begging the definitional question of how we define success and/or moral qualities? Should we only study leaders whom we judge to have been successful on the basis of morals, values and qualities? Would such an approach require the exclusion of Napoleon-type characters and a focus on those like St Benedict, St Francis and Gandhi? Psychology is another dimension that may be worth considering – the exploration of the unconscious aspects of leaders' psychology. An analysis of psychological factors would provide an explanation of failure (incompetence) and success (Dixon, 1976). Does this thesis mean, however, that psychology holds the