A VALUES-BASED AUTHENTICITY MODEL:

IMPLICATIONS AND INTERVENTIONS FOR LEADERS

Bjorn Thomas Atterstam

Kathryn Britton

Emma Westcott Judge

Miriam Ufberg Rosetti

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ABSTRACT

Authenticity is thinking and acting in alignment with one's deep-set personal values. This paper introduces an authenticity awareness model based on the difference between instinctive and rational behavior, a critical distinction for leaders. Acting out of alignment with one's values is done either unconsciously (self-betrayal) or consciously (disrespect for truth). Acting in alignment with one's values is done either unconsciously (instinctive authenticity) or consciously (intentional authenticity). The model suggests numerous positive interventions that can help people and organizations move from inauthenticity to authenticity through self-awareness, self-regulation, and habit formation. The paper briefly sketches a selection of interventions. The model is easy to understand and mnemonic. It can serve as a guide for leaders on how to recognize, achieve, and maintain authenticity. In organizations that have established shared values, the model can also be used for pragmatic analysis of the authenticity of teams, managers, leaders, and individuals in terms of how their behaviors affect the authenticity and thereby the performance of their organizations.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This paper introduces an authenticity awareness model appropriate for analyzing and improving individual behavior as well as the behavior of leaders in organizations. First, we define authenticity and relate it to theory in both positive psychology and leadership research. Then we introduce the model and show how it suggests positive interventions that help people develop the skills that can lead to greater authenticity in all facets of life.

General Definition of Authenticity

We define *authenticity* as thinking and acting in alignment with one's deep-set personal values. In this paper, the word *behaving* refers to both thinking and acting, Authenticity is "owning one's personal experiences and expressing oneself and acting in accordance with one's true self (Harter, 2005:382). Using self knowledge to guide behavior is venerable wisdom. It was carved on the sanctuary of Apollo's Delphic Oracle, "Know thyself." Socrates (Wikiquote, no date) said that the surest way to live with honor in the world is to be in reality what we would appear to be. Maslow described self-actualized people as being in tune with their basic natures, clearly seeing themselves and their lives (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). Statements about the importance of self knowledge come from all over the world and across history.

Authenticity Theoretical Traditions

Peterson and Seligman (2004b:250) describe authenticity as emotional genuineness and psychological depth. Sartre (1956) argued that it is found by embracing the inescapable reality of personal choice. C.R. Rogers (1961) equates psychological integrity with a person strongly valuing the discovery of inner experience and being willing to accept what he or she finds. In self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), authentic behavior comes from an internal locus

of control, thus needing social contexts that allow individual autonomy. For a more complete discussion of authenticity theory, see Peterson & Seligman (2004b:250-255).

Leadership and authenticity

Avolio, Luthans, and Walumbwa (2004:4) describe authentic leaders as people who are self-aware and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and other people's values and strengths. Shamir and Eliam (2005) outline the following four characteristics of authentic leaders: (1) rather than faking their leadership, authentic leaders are true to themselves; (2) authentic leaders are motivated by personal convictions rather than a desire to attain status, honors, or other personal benefits; (3) authentic leaders are originals, not copies; and (4) the actions of authentic leaders are based on their personal values and convictions.

ADVANCEMENT OF THEORY

Existing theory opens several questions in the minds of educated lay people. Is a person being authentic when acting according to any emotion, good or evil? What role does self-regulation play in the authentic life? Our authenticity model advances theory by clarifying the relationship between authenticity, behavior, and values. It incorporates Sartre's personal choice, but extends it with more recent knowledge about rational versus instinctive decision-making (Kahneman, 2003). It incorporates Rogers's awareness and acceptance of inner life, but moderates it with the understanding that not all emotions serve equally well as the basis for behavior. It includes Deci and Ryan's inner locus of control, but adds criteria for judging whether internal choices are sound. The model does not put self-regulation in opposition to authenticity. Instead it incorporates self-regulation as a capacity that can be both exhausted by overuse and developed through exercise like a muscle (Baumeister, Gailliot, DeWall, & Oaten, in press). Developing self-regulation is an important part of increasing personal authenticity.

VALUES-BASED AUTHENTICITY MODEL

Model overview

The values-based authenticity model is the coming-together of two fundamental notions: 1) that authenticity means behaving according to one's personal values and 2) that humans are driven by both rational and instinctive decision-making. Some behaviors are thoughtful and conscious, while others are impulsive, unconscious and instinctive. Haidt (2006) and Kahneman (2003) suggest that reasoning is a relatively scarce resource. Figure 1 is Haidt's model of decision-making, showing that, in general, reasoning, if any, comes after a judgment has been reached (Haidt, 2006). Most judgments about behavior occur in the instinctive mind.

FIGURE 1:
Haidt's model of decision making

Passion/Sentiment → Judgment → Reasoning
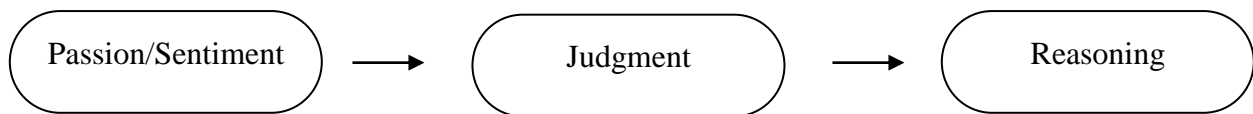
Figure 2 illustrates the values-based authenticity model as the cross product of behavior that is aligned versus not aligned with one's values and behavior that is instinctive, habitual, and unconscious versus thoughtful, rational and conscious.   Haidt (2006) calls instinctive behavior *the elephant* and rational behavior *the rider* in order to show the relative power of the two.

FIGURE 2:

Values-based authenticity model

	Unconscious (Instinctive – The Elephant)	Conscious (Rational – The Rider)
Aligned with values	**Q4 Instinctive Authenticity** Habits of right action or inaction Natural inclination to actualize character strengths Positive self-concept, acceptance of true nature Habitual avoidance of temptation	**Q3 Intentional Authenticity** Choice of right action/inaction Self-regulation Practice to form habits Recognition of misdeeds Efforts to make amends
Not aligned with values	**Q1 Self-Betrayal** Sins of omission Sins of commission Lack of internal guidance	**Q2 Bullshit** Rationalizing & Self-justification Intentionally misinterpreting others to justify self Attacking others to deflect blame

While it is difficult to change unconscious decision-making directly, consistent conscious thoughts and actions can become habitual, and thus instinctive, over time (James, 1892/2001; Pawelski, in press).   One could argue that the ultimate goal of leaders is to be instinctively authentic. That means having behavior 'feel' right both to themselves and their organizations without conscious effort.

For authenticity to be enhanced, explicit understanding of values is important. However, authenticity is not as straightforward as following a single value through to action. In leadership there are times when values compete. For example, a sense of responsibility for the welfare of the team may cause a conflict between the value of transparency and the value of minimizing unnecessary uncertainty and stress by releasing certain information. Leaders stay true to their values by taking a broader view of what is needed. Acts of balancing values frequently require leaders to move from instinctive judgments to thoughtful judgments, but in either of the top two quadrants of the model, leaders will feel and convey to others a sense of authenticity.

An instinctive judgment is authentic if it is in accordance with personal values (Q4). Otherwise it is self-betrayal (Q1). Sometimes it is easy to behave according to one's values because they align with desires. At other times, it is more difficult because one's values are in conflict with one's desires or because one is afraid or lacks energy or because the action is imprudent. How often one behaves authentically depends both on having behavioral habits that are aligned with one's values and on having the instinctive understanding of which judgments to turn over to reasoning. Haidt (2006) describes reason as the rider placed on the elephant's back to help the elephant make better choices.

To illustrate, if kindness to strangers is a personal value, smiling and greeting others can become a habit that requires no reasoning. Stopping to pick up papers that someone drops or holding a door can be habits. But deciding to miss a bus to help someone represents considerable inconvenience and discomfort, and deciding whether to stop at night to help someone change a flat tire should call in rational thought to weigh risks against benefit for the other.

Model quadrant descriptions

The four quadrants are described below to show how particular actions or thoughts fit into the authenticity model.

Self-betrayal (Q1) occurs when one acts or refrains from action in ways that are in conflict with personal values. A primary intervention for correcting self-betrayal is regular reflection or even confession. Self-betrayal comes in forms of commission and omission. For example, desire or intense anger can overcome habitual self-regulation, while passivity, wish to be comfortable, lack of interest, or fear of consequences can overcome habitual right action. Self-betrayal can also occur because one has no real understanding of personal values and therefore lacks internal guidance about what is authentic or not.

How does one feel following self-betrayal? Often people experience almost intolerable guilt or discomfort that leads to some attempt to move out of the self-betrayal quadrant. In the words of Shakti Gawain (no date), "Every time you don't follow your inner guidance, you feel a loss of energy, loss of power, a sense of spiritual deadness."

Figure 3 shows that one can move either into Q3 (intentional authenticity) by making amends or into Q2 (bullshit) by making excuses. Haidt (2006) describes an inner lawyer that observes judgments as they occur and works to legitimize them, one way or the other.

FIGURE 3:
Two exits from the self-betrayal quadrant
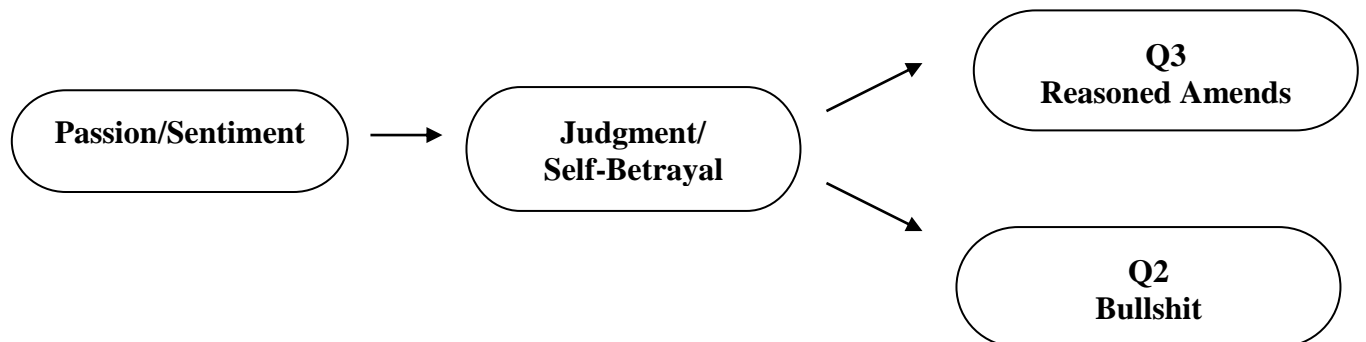
Bullshit (Q2) is a common escape from the discomfort of self-betrayal. Frankfurt (2005) used this term for utterances or behaviors selected without reference to the truth, contrasting bullshit to both truth-telling and lying. Rationalizing, making excuses, and shifting blame are all attempts to manufacture a new self-justifying simulation of truth rather act either in accordance with or in opposition to the actual truth.

Everyone has made the move from self-betrayal to bullshit at some point. People explain away reasons for inaction, "Well it really wouldn't have worked anyway." Making excuses can exaggerate a minor subjective state into a controlling one, "I didn't feel well enough yesterday." Shifting blame sometimes takes the form of abdicating leadership of oneself to others, "Well, so-and-so did it first," or "So-and-so made me do it." When justifying lack of action, people may shift the responsibility, "Well someone else probably took care of it," or "What so-and-so did is enough." People can exaggerate another's faults in order to prove the other did not deserve help. They can also look for evidence that others failed to act rightly toward them, "Well, person A didn't do X for me, and so I can't be blamed for not doing it for person C." Forms of self-justification are legion and are familiar to all of us.

Arbinger (2000) shows the results of bullshit: we begin to see the world in ways that justify our behavior. This distorts our sense of reality in ways that invite mutual mistreatment of each other. The worst of it is that frequent use of bullshit dulls a person's ability to perceive the difference between truth and falsehood. Given that both our actions and our abstentions from action contribute to the shape of the world around us, frequently being in the Bullshit quadrant causes us to create distorted futures, limiting both relationships and self-development.

Intentional Authenticity (Q3) occurs primarily in two cases: when we recognize we have betrayed ourselves (see Figure 3) and when our instinctive reasoning (Q4) recognizes that

finding a balance of competing values is beyond its capability. In the former case, we move from Q1 (self-betrayal) or Q2 (bullshit) to this quadrant by remaking the decision in a values-based way and making up for any damage caused by the betrayal. In the latter, we move from Q4 (instinctive) to this quadrant by surfacing a decision to the rational mind. One of the attributes of good leaders is to have good instincts for decisions where instinctive behavior needs to be qualified by careful consideration.   Harter (2005) describes the need for us to have many authentic selves to go with the different roles we play in life. Maintaining and moving among these different authentic selves is a constant challenge requiring self-awareness, environment awareness, and self-regulation.

Instinctive Authenticity (Q4) is the quadrant most used by truly authentic people. Kahneman (2003) explains that people make many more decisions with the instinctive mind than with the rational mind because the instinctive mind can handle many decisions simultaneously and can often sift through large quantities of information to reach a judgment swiftly. Dijksterhuis (2004) tested the hypothesis that conscious thought is maladaptive for making complex decisions involving lots of data, while unconscious thought is highly effective. He found throughout his experiments requiring assimilation of large amounts of data that unconscious thinkers made the best choices. The instinctive mind can handle many decisions with authenticity if the person has formed habits of making decisions according to his or her values. Many of these habits are learned at young ages, for example, to share, to return things borrowed, and not to lash out in anger in ways that hurt other people. These habits make right action easier because the passion behind decisions incorporates both one's values and the heat of the moment; they contribute to instinctive self-regulation.

Instinctive authenticity leads to many, many small acts and interactions that add up. For example, one makes many different decisions during the day about where to invest time. These decisions reflect values, even though they may not directly involve thought about values. Thus, leaders whose doors are open to younger people seeking help may convey the value they put on nurturing the next generation of leaders simply by the number of interruptions they welcome.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The authenticity model visually suggests multiple possible interventions to increase both personal and organizational authenticity. Several are sketched below. These interventions could be the basis of a research agenda to elaborate and *manualize* them, that is, to document the steps of the intervention so that it can be applied consistently, and to validate empirically that they do, in fact, have the anticipated impact.

Increasing Individual Authenticity

Q2 Bullshit to Q3 Intentional Authenticity: The easiest place to start is the bullshit quadrant, where we can choose to move from rationalizing to rational thought. Keeping a log of personal statements that have the earmarks of self-justification is one possible intervention. In such statements, we inflate other people's faults, inflate our own virtue, or deflect blame to others (Arbinger, 2000). We can join Benjamin Franklin (1793/2005:65-69), who kept track of his faults. He found that he had more of them than he imagined, but he also had the satisfaction of seeing them diminish.

Q1 Self-betrayal to Q3 Intentional Authenticity (instead of Q2 Bullshit): We can observe ourselves closely to recognize self-betrayal before it turns into bullshit. How does it feel in the moment? What somatic responses accompany it? Does one feel physically restless or sweaty or have a rapid heartbeat? This intervention focuses on learning how to recognize self-betrayal as it

occurs in order to correct course early.   There are various other pathways to increased self-awareness of inauthenticity, including meditation and keeping a log of significant decisions and responses to compare later to one's personal values. If one has no explicit understanding of one's personal values, there are various ways to discover them, such as working through values checklists (Posner, 2006; Seneca College, no date).

Q1 Self-betrayal or Q2 Bullshit to Q3 Intentional Authenticity: Recognizing that we are betraying or excusing ourselves is not always enough to change course, particularly when behaving according to our values is difficult or we are intimidated by others. We can develop personal techniques, such as mental taglines, that support better actions. One fruitful approach is to remember to apply our specific Values-in-Action character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004a; Values-in-Action Strengths Inventory, no date) in situations that commonly lead to self-betrayal. Consider a person who tends to experience self-betrayal by failing to speak up for fear of conflict. If this person has curiosity as a strength, he or she could prepare a tag line to remember during heated discussions, "I want to understand why the other person disagrees with me." With the kindness strength, the tag line might be, "I need to work towards a solution that the other person can also accept."   These taglines could be posted by the phone or wherever we find ourselves prone to self-betrayal.

Enter via Q3 Intentional Authenticity: When we recognize patterns that tempt us to betray our values, we can apply conscious attention to change our intention before we act. We can avoid temptations entirely or decide ahead of time how to respond to them. In the process, it is helpful to increase our capacity for self-regulation, the mental muscle that enables us to follow our values even when doing so is difficult. Baumeister et al. (in press) describe simple exercises such as standing up straight to increase capacity for self-regulation.

Q4 Instinctive Authenticity to Q3 Intentional Authenticity: We can learn to recognize trends of instinctive decisions that make us feel right with ourselves, thus bringing our values more into conscious thought. Contemplating instinctive authenticity can lead to new thoughtful behaviors to put our values in action more intentionally.   For example, we could learn to recognize which stimuli in the environment are associated with authentic behavior and which put authenticity at risk. Then we can make changes to our environment to make the former more available and the latter less salient (Haidt, 2006:18). For example, a leader who finds that a particular person stimulates authentic behavior in him or her might rehearse the response to a challenging situation with that person before going public. For reducing negative stimuli, avoidance works best, if it is feasible. If not feasible, intentionally filling the mind with thoughts of other matters can reduce the salience of the stimulus.

Q3 Intentional Authenticity to Q4 Instinctive Authenticity: By practicing intentional authenticity consistently, we can increase our habits of making authentic decisions so that they occur with greater and greater probability. There are numerous sources of guidance for creating virtuous habits from intentional practice (James, 1892/2001; Pawelski, 2004; Franklin, 1793/2005:66, Prochaska, Norcross & DiClemente, 1994). Pawelski (in press) remarks that being able to form habits intentionally generally requires considerable self-regulation until the chosen habits are second nature. In terms of Haidt's metaphor, the competent rider learns how to teach the elephant to move in authentic directions as a matter of course.

Authenticity grows through increased self-awareness, self-regulation, application and practice.   The goal is to make instinctive authenticity the dominant quadrant, as illustrated in Figure 4.

FIGURE 4

Desired state according to authenticity model

	UNCONSCIOUS INSTINCTIVE- THE ELEPHANT	CONSCIOUS RATIONAL- THE RIDER
ALIGNED WITH VALUES	Q4 INSTINCTIVE AUTHENTICITY	Q3 INTENTIONAL AUTHENTICITY
NOT ALIGNED WITH VALUES	Q1 SELF BETRAYAL	Q2 BULLSHIT

Increasing Organizational Authenticity

By extension, organizational authenticity is the behavior of many individuals acting in accordance with the values of the organization. Just as awareness of personal values contributes to individual authenticity, so also does awareness of organizational values. One of the key roles of leaders is to make the organizational values clear, memorable, and relevant to people playing all roles in the organization. People sometimes learn to act with instinctive authenticity (Q4) by emulating the behavior of authentic leaders or by trying to please them.

When leaders make decisions that are not in accordance with claimed values, the organization enters the self-betrayal quadrant. One example is an organization that claims to value teamwork and yet tends to reward people based only on individual accomplishments. When explaining these decisions, leaders have the same opportunity to move the organization

into the bullshit quadrant (Q2) through self-justification or the thoughtful authenticity quadrant (Q3) through corrective action.   Moving into the bullshit quadrant as an organization can cause people to lose faith in having shared vision and move toward zero-sum manipulation.

Today's environment contains unique stressors for both leaders and members of organizations (Avolio, Gardner, 2005). Organizations address immense challenges, such as avoiding ethical meltdowns, dealing with terrorism, ethically off-shoring labor, and serving shareholders in an increasingly inter-connected global economy. Successful organizations develop organizational values and then follow them. The values-based authenticity model can help individuals understand, share, and behave in alignment with organizational values. It can help leaders effectively guide others to follow organizational values. It can help managers model and motivate behavior according to organizational values. Managers can use it to find the conviction to move people who cannot share organizational values out of the organization. Organizational authenticity encourages high-quality connections between people (Dutton, 2003), with documented benefits to morale and productivity. These organizations have an inner clarity that gives them expansionary range (Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1996:61) to deal with uncertainty and new opportunities.

CONCLUSION

To put our values into action, we need to understand them. We also need to know how we can use our particular strengths to apply the values practically. Because the values-based authenticity model is easy to understand and remember, we can use it to judge, reinforce, and correct our own behavior and that of our organizations on a daily basis. This model will also stimulate conversation about values and authenticity, thus deepening shared understanding. Over time, the model enables leaders to increase their capacity for acting instinctively in alignment with values, enabling them to build the trust and shared vision that organizations need to succeed in today's complex and changing world.

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