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The strengths and capacities of Authentic Followership

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The strengths and capacities of Authentic Followership

Introduction:

Conventionally, the labels follower and followership have been viewed as pejorative terms, conveying images of passivity, deference, obedience and submission to leaders (Hoption et al., 2012, Carsten et al., 2010). However, there is a growing recognition that proactive, participatory, empowered followership styles are feasible and desirable. Indeed, several studies have posited that active followership plays an important role in assisting leaders and organisations to be effective (Carsten and Uhl-Bien, 2012, Baker, 2007, Kelley, 1988, Blanchard et al., 2009, Chaleff, 2009, Kellerman, 2013, e Cunha et al., 2013).

Recently there have been important advances in the development of followership theory. In 2014 Uhl-Bien and colleagues published a paper in The Leadership Quarterly that identifies two forms of followership theories: role-based views that investigate ‘how individuals enact leadership and followership in the context of hierarchical roles’, and constructionist views that investigate ‘the processes and relational interactions involved in the co-production of leadership and followership’ (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014 p.90 & p.94). Concurrently with Uhl-Bien et al.’s (2014) publication, de Zilwa published a new conceptual framework for Authentic Followership, AF (de Zilwa, 2014); throughout this paper this model is referred to as AF. AF aligns with Uhl-Bien et al.’s constructionist view of followership. AF explains the relational interactions involved in authentic followership, and how authentic followership impacts leadership processes (de Zilwa, 2014, Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). AF is a pro-active process whereby authentic followers decide whether they will follow a leader. Hence AF reverses the conventional view that leaders influence and direct followers’ behaviour (Avolio et al., 2004).

The aim of the present paper is to identify three potential positive outcomes of AF. These positive outcomes of authentic followership are presented as propositions – ‘statements for discussion or illustration to be affirmed or denied’ (Delbridge et al., 1981 p.1414).

1. Authentic followership enhances followers’ strengths and capacities.
2. Authentic followership strengthens dyadic relationships between followers and leaders.
3. Authentic followership deepens and strengthens positive organisational culture thereby improving organisational performance.
This paper has three sections. The first section of the paper provides an overview of the AF construct to assist readers’ understanding of how the propositions could work. Readers who seek more information about the AF model should refer to (de Zilwa, 2014). The second section of the paper presents three propositions of positive outcomes that could arise from AF. In conclusion, the third section of the paper discusses the practical implications of these propositions for followers, leaders and firms. It also identifies future research directions and notes some limitations of this work.

The foundations of AF construct:

To ensure that new theoretical constructs are rigorous and robust leading theoreticians have developed protocols to guide the work of developing theory (Suddaby, 2010, Sutton and Staw, 1995, Weick, 1995, Whetten, 1989). These protocols involve answering four key questions:

1. The relevance/significance question: why is the conceptual framework important?
2. The contextual question: how has the new theory emerged; how does the new theory relate to/differ from existing theories?
3. The definition question: what are the constituent components of the new theoretical framework, why were they chosen, and how do these components complement and/or interact with each other?
4. The boundaries question? What are the limitations of the conceptual framework; are there particular conditions where the conceptual framework may not work in practice?

This paper adopts the answers to these questions as its structural framework because they provide a clear, logical explanation of the new construct and situate this new work within the context of existing scholarship.

1. Firms and leaders need authentic followership.

Firms and public sector organisations with hierarchical organisational structures typically have a high power distance between leaders, managers and workers (French and Raven, 1959, Hinkin and Schriesheim, 1989, Barbuto, 2000, Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). Executives, leaders, managers and supervisors determine strategy, allocate resources, consult with stakeholders, and direct, monitor and evaluate the productivity and performance of subordinates. In many firms and organisations, this arrangement becomes entrenched over time; the roles and identities of leaders and workers become normatively prescribed, and rarely, if ever, questioned (Tajfel, 1982, Hogg, 2001, Van Knippenberg, 2011). Under this power dynamic, workers have minimal opportunities for input into strategic or operational
decision-making processes. It has become axiomatic that this is the most efficient and effective way for firms to operate. **However** there are two reasons why these normatively prescribed identities of leader and worker should be challenged. First, when workers are limited to passive roles in firms, the firm loses the opportunity of harnessing the full energy, engagement and innovative potential of these workers. Second, whilst heroic leadership paradigms, such as charismatic leadership and transformational leadership, portray leaders as imbued with innate wisdom and ethical principles, leaders can and do fall short of these ideals, making unethical or imprudent decisions (Mayer et al., 2012, Hoyt et al., 2013). During the Global Financial Crisis there were numerous cases where ineffective leadership contributed to the bankruptcy of firms such as at Citi-Bank, Fanny May, Freddie Mac and Lehmann Brothers (de Zilwa, 2014, MacKenzie et al., 2011, Benabou, 2013, Fried, 2012). Also, the recent disclosure of corporate misconduct at Leighton Holdings (McKenzie et al., 2013) illustrates that there is still a pressing need for an antidote for ineffective leadership. **AF** offers the potential of providing this antidote, acting as a countervailing force preventing the occurrence, or at least diminishing the severity of unethical or imprudent leadership. How and why? **AF** empowers followers, providing them with agency and voice. **AF** is grounded in the principles and values of truth, integrity and ethics (de Zilwa, 2014, Algera and Lips-Wiersma, 2012, Park, 2007). When workers enact **AF** they prioritise the needs and interests of the entire firm over their individual needs and aspirations, or those of the incumbent leader. If a leader proposes a course of action that an authentic follower considers to be imprudent or unethical, then they will raise their concerns about the situation with the firm’s board, external regulatory authorities or other agents with the power to intervene or circumvent the situation.

2. Previous models of Authentic Followership:

There are four previous constructs for authentic followership. Gardner and colleagues created the first construct (Gardner et al., 2005). They proposed that the purpose of authentic followership is to develop authentic leadership. The second construct for authentic followership was developed by Gofee and Jones; this construct focused on the satisfaction of a follower’s needs (Goffee and Jones, 2006). Avolio and Reichar produced the third construct; their model focused on a follower’s possession of the psychological attributes for authenticity (Avolio and Reichar, 2008) Leroy and colleagues developed the fourth model, defining authentic followership as the satisfaction of a follower’s needs, positing that a follower’s most important need is for autonomous motivation towards tasks (Leroy et al., 2012). The new construct for **AF** differs from these previous constructs in two important ways. First, it provides a comprehensive perspective on authentic followership encompassing three necessary dimensions: individual, the follower’s capacity to be authentic; relational,
follower’s secure attachment to the leader; and organisational, the need for a positive organisational culture to enable and sustain authentic followership. Second, the new conceptual framework for authentic followership is grounded on the premise that it is a valuable endeavour in and of itself, rather than viewing authentic followership as a conduit for authentic leadership.

3. The new construct for Authentic Followership.

The core premise of the new conceptual framework for AF is that it is a relational concept (de Zilwa, 2014, Roberts et al., 2009, Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). It is self-evident that the foundation of authentic followership must be an individual’s capacity for authenticity. However, an individual follower may have the psychological capacity for authenticity, yet not be able to enact authentic followership behaviours such as voicing suggestions for innovations, or critiquing a leader’s proposed decisions. Therefore, a comprehensive construct of authentic followership should include two additional elements:

(1) The nature of the follower’s relationship with the leader, and (2) the nature of the context or organisational culture of the firm in which the relationship between the follower and the leader occurs. A robust construct for authentic followership should also explain the process of interaction between the three components (individual, dyadic and organisational) of the AF construct. The new conceptual framework for AF is a comprehensive and robust model because it comprises these three essential components (individual, dyadic and organisational) and it explains the interaction process between each of the components. Figure 1 illustrates the new AF construct. A key feature of the new AF construct is that it is a circular model, a non-linear feedback loop where each of the three constituent components which comprise AF interact with each other continuously allowing AF to emerge and be sustained. Hence the new AF construct is not a linear cause and effect model.

Insert Figure 1:

The first component of the AF model refers to individual followers; to the way the follower thinks and behaves; to his/her psychological capacity or mindset for authenticity. The second component refers to the nature of the dyadic relationship between the leader and follower; to the follower’s secure attachment to the leader. The third component refers to the nature of the firm’s context or setting; the institutional and organisational characteristics of the firm. Positive organisational culture, norms and political conditions create and maintain the conditions for authentic followership. The following discussion provides an overview of the new conceptual framework for AF, for further details see (de Zilwa, 2014).
The first component of AF is an individual’s psychological capacity for authenticity (Kernis, 2003, Kernis and Goldman, 2005, Kernis and Goldman, 2005). Kernis’s construct for authenticity has been validated and found to be reliable by empirical testing (Kernis et al., 2006). Kernis posits that in order for an individual to have the psychological capacity for authenticity they require four attributes: (1) awareness, (2) unbiased processing, (3) action and (4) relational orientation (Kernis, 2003). Awareness refers to self-knowledge, recognition of one’s motives, feelings, desires, strengths, weaknesses, trait characteristics and emotions (Kernis, 2003). Unbiased processing means processing thoughts and experiences objectively, cognisant of how our experiences and preferences affect our judgement and views (Kernis, 2003). Unbiased processing also involves seeking truth, integrity and ethical judgements. The action attribute of authenticity means acting in accord with one’s values, preferences and needs, as opposed to acting in a way that will please others, or to attain rewards or avoid punishment (Kernis, 2003). Relational orientation refers to self-disclosure, trust and intimacy, allowing others to see the real you - the good and bad (Kernis, 2003).

The second component of AF is that there needs to be a strong dyadic relationship between a follower and the leader. More explicitly, the follower needs to have a secure pattern of attachment to the leader and by extension to the firm itself. This component draws on attachment theory (Ainsworth et al., 1978, Bowlby, 1982). Following a Freudian perspective whereby a leader is likened to a father (Davidovitz et al., 2007, Mayseless, 2010, Popper, 2011), it is argued that a secure attachment pattern develops between followers and leaders when followers have developed a strong bond of trust with the leader. This bond of trust enables followers to be confident that the leader will provide a secure base for them and is available and responsive to their needs (Popper and Mayseless, 2003, Popper, 2011, Mayseless, 2010, Hinojosa et al., 2014). This bond of trust between followers and leaders enables followers to enact authentic followership, to take the risk of articulating their ideas and offering critical feedback on a leader’s proposed decisions. In contrast, when a follower is uncertain about whether the leader will be available and responsive to their needs, they are said to have an ambivalent or anxious attachment pattern to the leader (Mayseless, 2010). If a follower seeks protection and support from a leader and the leader rejects the follower’s pleas for assistance, then the follower attempts to become emotionally self-sufficient, displaying an avoidant attachment pattern to the leader (Mayseless, 2010). However, it is important to clarify that when a follower develops a secure pattern of attachment to the leader, this does not mean that the follower is dependent on the leader, as an infant is dependent on its mother or father; quite the opposite in fact. When a follower has developed the capacity to be authentic and developed the bonds of trust and respect, which enable them to develop a secure
pattern of attachment to the leader they acquire agency. They are self-directed and self-motivated (e Cunha et al., 2013).

The third component of AF is that the firm needs positive organisational culture, norms and political conditions for authentic followership to emerge and be sustained (Balthazard et al., 2006, Luthans and Youssef, 2007, Jung et al., 2009). Positive organisational culture is characterised by cohesion and cooperation and positive emotions such as optimism, hope, strength, trust and respect (Cameron et al., 2011). A positive organisational culture enables High Quality Connections (HQCs) (Stephens et al., 2012), strong dyadic relationships between followers and leaders to develop as well as strong relationships between co-workers in teams and groups. Participants in HQCs share subjective experiences (positive arousal, energy, regard and mutuality, participation and engagement) (Stephens et al., 2012). In turn, these shared experiences between participants in the HQCs enable deeper bonds of trust to develop, as well as empathy and resilience, the capacity to withstand strain and stress, and openness to new ideas and influences (Caza and Milton, 2012). In contrast, if a firm has a negative organisational culture characterised by intense political rivalry and conflict between individuals, this inhibits and can even thwart the development of authentic followership (Kahn, 2012). When negativity permeates a firm there are low levels of trust between followers and leaders, and people prioritise self-interested initiatives over devoting time, energy and commitment to collective efforts (Balthazard et al., 2006). If a firm is characterised by negative contagion, a negative affective state, this literally drains energy, enthusiasm, hope and confidence from employees, leaders and managers alike, so the firm can fall into a vortex of decline resulting in weaker levels of productivity, performance and profit (Felps et al., 2006).

4. Interaction between the components of Authentic FollowerShip:
It is important to keep in mind that the AF construct does not propose a linear cause and effect relationship between its three core components whereby one component is required as an antecedent condition for another component to emerge. Each of the components of AF (followers’ capacity for authenticity, followers’ secure attachment to the leader, and positive organisational culture) coexist and interact with each other, reinforcing and strengthening the other components; operating as a positive non-linear feedback loop. A feedback loop ‘refers to the process in which information about the outcomes of an action is fed back into the decision-making, or regulation, process to affect the next action’ (Stacey, 1996 p.287). For further information about feedback loops in systems dynamics models, especially mathematical models of flows (the rate of change over time) and stocks/state variables (the state of the system over time) see (Neuwirth et al., 2015, Grösser and Schaffernicht, 2012). A
non-linear feedback loop is ‘a system when actions [by an agent/component of the system] can have more than one outcome and when actions generate non-proportional outcomes, in other words, when the system is more than the sum of its parts’ (Stacey, 1996 p.288). There are two types of feedback in complex non-linear systems - positive and negative. ‘Positive feedback means that growth reinforces further growth... In contrast, negative feedback acts to negate this growth …’ (Neuwirth et al., 2015 pp.2-3). The core premise of the present paper is that the AF model operates as a positive non-linear feedback loop, whereby growth reinforces further growth.

5. The limitations of authentic followership:
It is important to acknowledge that there could be certain conditions where authentic followership may not be feasible:

- In firms where leaders and managers use authoritarian command and control styles of management.
- When leaders use narcissistic or abusive leadership.
- When firms are located in nations with cultural norms that reinforce high power distance between leaders and subordinates.
- When workers experience job insecurity because their firms are under financial duress or there is a possibility of organisational restructuring.

Each of these scenarios is a situation where the power/distance between leaders and followers is heightened and reinforced, under these conditions many workers would be unwilling to take the risk of enacting authentic followership because they would be fearful and anxious that if they did so leaders would target them, they could be sanctioned, or even lose their jobs. Whilst it is important to acknowledge these conditions where authentic followership may be unfeasible, when authentic followership can be enacted this could benefit followers, leaders and firms. Next three propositions are presented which illustrate how AF could reinforce and strengthen individual followers’ authenticity, dyadic relationships between followers and leaders and reinforce and enhance a positive organisational culture.

Proposition One: Authentic followership enhances followers’ strengths and capacities.
Support for this proposition is derived from work undertaken by Peterson and Seligman. These researchers identified authenticity as a signature character strength, and they created the VIA (Values in Action) inventory and undertook a large scale empirical study which validated the instrument (Peterson and Seligman, 2004, Park et al., 2004). Subsequent studies have found that when an individual develops the capacity to behave authentically at work,
their job satisfaction, pleasure (hedonism), engagement (flow) and meaning (eudemonia) improves (Peterson et al., 2005), in (Harzer and Ruch, 2012b). When followers can behave authentically, this creates and sustains self-development strengths and capacities including self-motivation, self-regulation, self-criticism and self-direction (Harzer and Ruch, 2012a, Littman-Ovadia and Davidovitch, 2010). These strengths and capacities enable followers to become more mature and confident workers thereby offering greater scope for improvements in their work performance and productivity (Harzer and Ruch, 2012b, Page and Vella-Brodick, 2009, Dutton et al., 2010, Luthans et al., 2010). Each of these strengths and capacities requires independent critical thinking (e Cunha et al., 2013). However, when an authentic follower is exercising independent critical thinking, they are not being self-centred, as a key aspect of authentic followership is its relational orientation: prioritising the interests of the firm, the collective good, over individual needs and preferences. AF enables workers to exercise their psychological capacity for authenticity. Put differently, workers may possess the psychological capacity for authenticity, yet without interaction with the other two components of AF (secure attachment between followers and leaders and a positive organisational culture) then the workers capacity to enact authentic followership behaviours (to offer feedback on leader’s decisions, or offer suggestions for business improvements, or innovations) will remain latent. When workers acquire the strengths and capacities that flow from enacting authenticity, this reinforces, strengthens and deepens their relationships with leaders and co-workers, which in turn strengthens positive organisational culture.

**Proposition Two: Authentic followership strengthens dyadic relationships between followers and leaders.**

When followers develop and maintain a secure pattern of attachment to the leader, they have confidence that the leader will support them and meet their needs (Mayeless, 2010, Hinojosa et al., 2014). When the dyadic relationship between a follower and leader is strong this builds trust and respect between the two people. Trust and respect are foundation stones of open and honest communication. Trust and respect between a leader and follower create secure conditions, congruence and synergy between the leader and the follower. This enables followers to take on a proactive role in their firm working as partners with leaders, in effect engaging in the co-production of leadership (Carsten and Uhl-Bien, 2012). When workers take on a proactive, authentic followership role, they are empowered, gaining agency and voice. Authentic followers articulate their suggestions for innovation and voice concerns and criticisms if they view a leader’s proposed course of action as inadvisable. Hence AF could provide two benefits for firms. First, firms gain the opportunity to enhance their efficiency, effectiveness and profit from new innovations proposed by authentic followers. AF enables workers to stretch and develop their skills and capacities, they can attempt new tasks, or
modify how existing tasks or projects are undertaken, confident that should these new
approaches fail they will still have the support of their leader. Second, AF has the potential to
enhance leadership effectiveness. Leaders can make better informed, more balanced
decisions, which consider and evaluate the viability of alternative strategies, perspectives and
priorities. In contrast, if there is a weak connection, or bond of trust and respect between a
leader and follower then the follower is unlikely to take the risk of voicing doubts, concerns
or criticisms if they consider a leader’s planned course of action to be imprudent or unethical.
When this bond of trust and respect does not exist, followers are more inclined to remain
silent (Knoll and van Dick, 2013, Carsten and Uhl-Bien, 2013). And as noted, followers’
silent acquiescence with imprudent or unethical decisions can lead to significant financial
losses for firms and significant reputational damage. A caveat is required. The advantages of
secure attachment patterns between followers and leaders are clear. However it is anticipated
that in some situations it could be difficult for followers to establish and maintain a secure
pattern of attachment to a leader if they adopt a narcissistic or abusive leadership style
‘demanding unquestioning obedience’ (Padilla et al., 2007 p.181, Pelletier, 2010) or when a
worker’s employment is insecure.

Proposition Three: Authentic followership deepens and strengthens positive
organisational culture thereby improving organisational performance.

Authentic followership has the potential to improve a firm’s organisational performance.
Richard and colleagues defined organisational performance as:

Organizational performance encompasses three specific areas of firm outcomes: (a)
financial performance (profits, return on assets, return on investment, etc.); (b) product
market performance (sales, market share, etc.); and (c) shareholder return (total shareholder
return, economic value added, etc.) (Richard et al., 2009 p.723).

It is useful to provide an explanation of how the proposition that AF could improve a firm’s
organisational performance was derived. Human resource management scholars have
undertaken a substantial body of work investigating links between employees motivation, job
satisfaction, engagement, creating high performance work systems, the absence of
dysfunctional organisational culture and improved organisational performance of firms (Singh
et al., 2012, MacKenzie et al., 2011, Hancock et al., 2013, Guest, 2011, Buller and McEvoy,
2012). And as noted, organisational psychologists have studied how employees can build
their strengths and capacities through the VIA (Values in Action) Inventory (Peterson and
Park, 2006, Harzer and Ruch, 2012b, Dutton et al., 2010, Luthans et al., 2010, Peterson and
Seligman, 2004). The proposition that AF could facilitate improved organisational
performance is influenced by the human resource management stream of scholarship on
employees motivation, engagement and improved organisational performance and the
organisational psychologists work on building individuals’ strengths and capacities. Unpacking the reasoning involved in the proposition that AF could improve a firm’s organisational performance involves the following steps. First, it has been argued that AF strengthens the skills and capacities of workers, enhancing their motivation, engagement and self-direction. Second, the case has been made that AF strengthens the relationship between leaders and followers, building trust, respect and honest communication, serving to reinforce individual workers alignment with the firm’s strategic goals. Together, these two patterns of behaviour associated with AF serve to strengthen and reinforce a positive organisational culture. What is proposed here is that as AF continues to deepen and flourish in a firm over time, continually strengthening and reinforcing the positive nature of the firm’s organisational culture, then the flow on effect could be improvements in the firm’s organisational performance, especially its financial performance – profit, return on investment, market share, and return to shareholders.

Discussion:
The core idea presented in these propositions is that when the three components of AF are enacted (followers’ authenticity, secure attachment between followers, and leaders and positive organisational culture) each component is strengthened and reinforced. Some readers may find these propositions confusing, they may refer to their training in the principles of logic and dismiss these propositions as a Cartesian circle whereby the premise assumes what is to be proved in the conclusion (Baggini and Fosl, 2003 ). Such a view assumes that the concept under consideration is linear, that agent/component A causes a particular effect in agent/component B. However the AF model is not linear, it is a non-linear feedback loop where each of the components co-exist and interact, feeding back to the other components.

This paper extends the original work on the AF model by proposing that the feedback between the components of AF is positive, that it strengthens and reinforces each component of AF (de Zilwa, 2014 ). More formally, systems dynamics scholars refer to positive feedback as ‘positive polarity’ where each agent or component in the complex non-linear system changes in the same direction (Neuwirth et al., 2015 p.2, Grösser and Schaffernicht, 2012). These scholars argue that negative feedback or ‘negative polarity’ occurs when a change in one agent/component of the system causes another agent/component of the system to change in the opposite direction (Neuwirth et al., 2015 p.2 ). Why is the direction of the feedback important? If the feedback between the AF components is positive rather than negative, this theoretical insight offers significant practical benefits for firms. How and why? Firms are constantly striving to improve their performance. The AF model and these propositions about strengthening and reinforcing the components of AF through positive feedback serve as useful
insights that firms could deploy to enhance workers’ performance and productivity, improve the effectiveness of leadership, sustain a robust positive organisational culture which fosters creativity and innovation, and strengthen the firm’s resilience to adverse events.

Conclusion:
Lewin stated ‘nothing is as practical as a good theory’ (Lewin, 1945 p.129). At first glance Lewin’s statement appears to be paradoxical. Yet on deeper reflection its profound nature is revealed. ‘Good theory is practical precisely because it advances knowledge in a scientific discipline, guides research toward crucial questions and enlightens the profession of management’ (Van de Ven, 1989 p.486). Does this paper meet the criteria of good theory? Yes. The paper makes three important contributions to advancing our knowledge of followership and leadership processes. 1. It proposes that followers can have agency and voice; proposing ideas for business improvements or innovations and actively collaborating with leaders in decision-making processes. 2. The propositions presented in this paper extend the initial work undertaken in developing the AF model by explaining that the processes of interaction between the three components of AF operate as a positive non-linear feedback loop. Hence the present paper contributes to Uhl-Bien and colleagues call for followership researchers to undertake research that explores the constructionist approach to followership – whereby leadership and followership are conceived as relational processes (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014 p.100). 3. The propositions’ contention that the interaction process is positive has significant practical implications – beneficial outcomes for followers, leaders and firms. Proposition 1 explains how AF can enable followers to gain confidence, maturity, and create solid foundations from which to thrive and flourish. Proposition 2 explains how dyadic relationships between followers and leaders could be strengthened, creating deeper bonds of trust and respect between each party. This has a flow on effect of improving leadership effectiveness through the active involvement of authentic followers in decision-making processes. Proposition 3 explains how the dynamic processes of AF can strengthen and deepen positive organisational culture and enhance organisational performance.

Future Research Directions:
The paper provides a guide for future research. In order to harness the potential practical benefits from this theoretical work some key questions need to be answered: 1. Are the propositions presented in this paper correct – is the feedback between the components positive, or is it negative? 2. How can firms enable and sustain authentic followership? 3. Are there specific strategies, structures, operational practices and resources, which could assist and support workers to enact authentic followership? 4. Do leaders need to be authentic leaders to enable workers to enact authentic followership? 5. How can leaders and followers
foster and sustain a positive organisational culture during challenging times – recession, aggressive competition from a rival firm? Future studies could address these questions using two research methods. The first involves systems dynamics scholars developing mathematical models to simulate the AF model and the propositions presented in this paper on a computer, perhaps using a Visual Modelling Language (VML) (Neuwirth et al., 2015). The second involves empirical testing of the AF model and the propositions in different types of firms (SMEs and multinationals) representing different industries (finance, manufacturing, retail, transport, health) in different countries and under different market conditions (recession and strong growth), with followers and leaders of different gender, age, education level, and tenure of employment. Indeed the two forms of research need not be mutually exclusive. Both research methods could yield valuable knowledge about the strengths and capacities of authentic followership and identify its limitations.

Limitations of the present study:
Work on authentic followership is at a nascent stage; this means that the limitations of this work must be acknowledged. The present paper extends and develops initial work that presented the AF model by providing three conceptual propositions of positive outcomes, which could arise from the AF model (de Zilwa, 2014). However, as yet, no measure for the AF model or the propositions has been developed. A second limitation is that at this stage we are uncertain about the boundaries of the AF model. It is predicted that under specific organisational scenarios/conditions AF may be unfeasible or could be constrained; we need to identify these boundaries. A third limitation of the propositions is that at this stage the significance of the temporal dimension remains unclear: do followers and leaders have to work with each other for a certain amount of time before a follower has the confidence and trust in their leader to display authenticity, and to develop a secure attachment to the leader. Whilst these limitations are important, they are not insurmountable obstacles. Each is an issue which can and should be addressed in the future – measures for the AF model and the propositions can be developed, the boundaries of AF identified and the significance of the temporal dimension clarified, so that followers, leaders and their firms can reap the positive benefits that could flow from authentic followership. AF is not the panacea for all that ails contemporary firms - low staff morale, engagement and productivity, high turnover, dysfunctional organisational cultures, resource constraints and regulatory requirements. However the generative benefits of AF are clear. AF is a theory with relevant and useful practical implications, it has the potential to enable individual employees, leaders and organisations to thrive and flourish.
References:


Figure 1: Authentic Followership

The Firm

Individual: Follower’s psychological capacity for authenticity

Dyad: Secure attachment between follower & leader

Organisational: Positive Organisational Culture and Political Conditions

Authentic Followership