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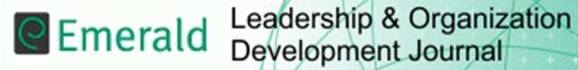
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The strengths and capacities of Authentic Followership

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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 (Hopton 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.

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3 This paper has three sections. The first section of the paper provides an overview of the AF
4 construct to assist readers' understanding of how the propositions could work. Readers who
5 seek more information about the AF model should refer to (de Zilwa, 2014). The second
6 section of the paper presents three propositions of positive outcomes that could arise from
7 AF. In conclusion, the third section of the paper discusses the practical implications of these
8 propositions for followers, leaders and firms. It also identifies future research directions and
9 notes some limitations of this work.
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14 **The foundations of AF construct:**

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17 To ensure that new theoretical constructs are rigorous and robust leading theoreticians have
18 developed protocols to guide the work of developing theory (Suddaby, 2010, Sutton and
19 Staw, 1995, Weick, 1995, Whetten, 1989). These protocols involve answering four key
20 questions:
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- 24 1. The relevance/significance question: why is the conceptual framework important?
- 25 2. The contextual question: how has the new theory emerged; how does the new theory relate
26 to/differ from existing theories?
- 27 3. The definition question: what are the constituent components of the new theoretical
28 framework, why were they chosen, and how do these components complement and/or interact
29 with each other?
- 30 4. The boundaries question? What are the limitations of the conceptual framework; are there
31 particular conditions where the conceptual framework may not work in practice?
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38 This paper adopts the answers to these questions as its structural framework because they
39 provide a clear, logical explanation of the new construct and situate this new work within the
40 context of existing scholarship.
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44 **1. Firms and leaders need authentic followership.**

45 Firms and public sector organisations with hierarchical organisational structures typically
46 have a high power distance between leaders, managers and workers (French and Raven, 1959,
47 Hinkin and Schriesheim, 1989 , Barbuto, 2000, Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). Executives,
48 leaders, managers and supervisors determine strategy, allocate resources, consult with
49 stakeholders, and direct, monitor and evaluate the productivity and performance of
50 subordinates. In many firms and organisations, this arrangement becomes entrenched over
51 time; the roles and identities of leaders and workers become normatively prescribed, and
52 rarely, if ever, questioned (Tajfel, 1982 , Hogg, 2001, Van Knippenberg, 2011). Under this
53 power dynamic, workers have minimal opportunities for input into strategic or operational
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3 decision-making processes. It has become axiomatic that this is the most efficient and
4 effective way for firms to operate. However there are two reasons why these normatively
5 prescribed identities of leader and worker should be challenged. First, when workers are
6 limited to passive roles in firms, the firm loses the opportunity of harnessing the full energy,
7 engagement and innovative potential of these workers. Second, whilst heroic leadership
8 paradigms, such as charismatic leadership and transformational leadership, portray leaders as
9 imbued with innate wisdom and ethical principles, leaders can and do fall short of these
10 ideals, making unethical or imprudent decisions (Mayer et al., 2012, Hoyt et al., 2013).
11 During the Global Financial Crisis there were numerous cases where ineffective leadership
12 contributed to the bankruptcy of firms such as at Citi-Bank, Fanny May, Freddie Mac and
13 Lehmann Brothers (de Zilwa, 2014 , MacKenzie et al., 2011, Benabou, 2013, Fried, 2012).
14 Also, the recent disclosure of corporate misconduct at Leighton Holdings (Mc Kenzie et al.,
15 2013) illustrates that there is still a pressing need for an antidote for ineffective leadership. AF
16 offers the potential of providing this antidote, acting as a countervailing force preventing the
17 occurrence, or at least diminishing the severity of unethical or imprudent leadership. How and
18 why? AF empowers followers, providing them with agency and voice. AF is grounded in the
19 principles and values of truth, integrity and ethics (de Zilwa, 2014 , Algera and Lips-
20 Wiersma, 2012, Park, 2007). When workers enact AF they prioritise the needs and interests
21 of the entire firm over their individual needs and aspirations, or those of the incumbent leader.
22 If a leader proposes a course of action that an authentic follower considers to be imprudent or
23 unethical, then they will raise their concerns about the situation with the firm's board,
24 external regulatory authorities or other agents with the power to intervene or circumvent the
25 situation.

2. Previous models of Authentic Followership:

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41 There are four previous constructs for authentic followership. Gardner and colleagues created
42 the first construct (Gardner et al., 2005). They proposed that the purpose of authentic
43 followership is to develop authentic leadership. The second construct for authentic
44 followership was developed by Goffee and Jones; this construct focused on the satisfaction of
45 a follower's needs (Goffee and Jones, 2006). Avolio and Reichard produced the third
46 construct; their model focused on a follower's possession of the psychological attributes for
47 authenticity (Avolio and Reichard, 2008) Leroy and colleagues developed the fourth model,
48 defining authentic followership as the satisfaction of a follower's needs, positing that a
49 follower's most important need is for autonomous motivation towards tasks (Leroy et al.,
50 2012). The new construct for AF differs from these previous constructs in two important
51 ways. First, it provides a comprehensive perspective on authentic followership encompassing
52 three necessary dimensions: individual, the follower's capacity to be authentic; relational, the
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3 follower's secure attachment to the leader; and organisational, the need for a positive
4 organisational culture to enable and sustain authentic followership. Second, the new
5 conceptual framework for authentic followership is grounded on the premise that it is a
6 valuable endeavour in and of itself, rather than viewing authentic followership as a conduit
7 for authentic leadership.
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10 11 12 3. The new construct for Authentic Followership.

13 The core premise of the new conceptual framework for AF is that it is a relational concept (de
14 Zilwa, 2014 , Roberts et al., 2009, Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). It is self-evident that the
15 foundation of authentic followership must be an individual's capacity for authenticity.
16 However, an individual follower may have the psychological capacity for authenticity, yet not
17 be able to enact authentic followership behaviours such as voicing suggestions for
18 innovations, or critiquing a leader's proposed decisions. Therefore, a comprehensive
19 construct of authentic followership should include two additional elements:
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21 (1) The nature of the follower's relationship with the leader, and (2) the nature of the context
22 or organisational culture of the firm in which the relationship between the follower and the
23 leader occurs. A robust construct for authentic followership should also explain the process of
24 interaction between the three components (individual, dyadic and organisational) of the AF
25 construct. The new conceptual framework for AF is a comprehensive and robust model
26 because it comprises these three essential components (individual, dyadic and organisational)
27 and it explains the interaction process between each of the components. Figure 1 illustrates
28 the new AF construct. A key feature of the new AF construct is that it is a circular model, a
29 non-linear feedback loop where each of the three constituent components which comprise AF
30 interact with each other continuously allowing AF to emerge and be sustained. Hence the new
31 AF construct is not a linear cause and effect model.
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43 Insert Figure 1:
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45 The first component of the AF model refers to individual followers; to the way the follower
46 thinks and behaves; to his/her psychological capacity or mindset for authenticity. The second
47 component refers to the nature of the dyadic relationship between the leader and follower; to
48 the follower's secure attachment to the leader. The third component refers to the nature of the
49 firm's context or setting; the institutional and organisational characteristics of the firm.
50 Positive organisational culture, norms and political conditions create and maintain the
51 conditions for authentic followership. The following discussion provides an overview of the
52 new conceptual framework for AF, for further details see (de Zilwa, 2014).
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3 The first component of AF is an individual's psychological capacity for authenticity (Kernis,
4 2003, Kernis and Goldman, 2005, Kernis and Goldman, 2005). Kernis's construct for
5 authenticity has been validated and found to be reliable by empirical testing (Kernis et al.,
6 2006). Kernis posits that in order for an individual to have the psychological capacity for
7 authenticity they require four attributes: (1) awareness, (2) unbiased processing, (3) action
8 and (4) relational orientation (Kernis, 2003). Awareness refers to self-knowledge, recognition
9 of one's motives, feelings, desires, strengths, weaknesses, trait characteristics and emotions
10 (Kernis, 2003). Unbiased processing means processing thoughts and experiences objectively,
11 cognisant of how our experiences and preferences affect our judgement and views (Kernis,
12 2003). Unbiased processing also involves seeking truth, integrity and ethical judgements.
13 The action attribute of authenticity means acting in accord with one's values, preferences and
14 needs, as opposed to acting in a way that will please others, or to attain rewards or avoid
15 punishment (Kernis, 2003). Relational orientation refers to self-disclosure, trust and
16 intimacy, allowing others to see the real you - the good and bad (Kernis, 2003).

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26 The second component of AF is that there needs to be a strong dyadic relationship between a
27 follower and the leader. More explicitly, the follower needs to have a secure pattern of
28 attachment to the leader and by extension to the firm itself. This component draws on
29 attachment theory (Ainsworth et al., 1978, Bowlby, 1982). Following a Freudian perspective
30 whereby a leader is likened to a father (Davidovitz et al., 2007, Mayseless, 2010, Popper,
31 2011), it is argued that a secure attachment pattern develops between followers and leaders
32 when followers have developed a strong bond of trust with the leader. This bond of trust
33 enables followers to be confident that the leader will provide a secure base for them and is
34 available and responsive to their needs (Popper and Mayseless, 2003 , Popper, 2011,
35 Mayseless, 2010 , Hinojosa et al., 2014). This bond of trust between followers and leaders
36 enables followers to enact authentic followership, to take the risk of articulating their ideas
37 and offering critical feedback on a leader's proposed decisions. In contrast, when a follower is
38 uncertain about whether the leader will be available and responsive to their needs, they are
39 said to have an ambivalent or anxious attachment pattern to the leader (Mayseless, 2010). If a
40 follower seeks protection and support from a leader and the leader rejects the follower's pleas
41 for assistance, then the follower attempts to become emotionally self-sufficient, displaying an
42 avoidant attachment pattern to the leader (Mayseless, 2010). However, it is important to
43 clarify that when a follower develops a secure pattern of attachment to the leader, this does
44 not mean that the follower is dependent on the leader, as an infant is dependent on its mother
45 or father; quite the opposite in fact. When a follower has developed the capacity to be
46 authentic and developed the bonds of trust and respect, which enable them to develop a secure
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3 pattern of attachment to the leader they acquire agency. They are self-directed and self-
4 motivated (e Cunha et al., 2013).
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8 The third component of AF is that the firm needs positive organisational culture, norms and
9 political conditions for authentic followership to emerge and be sustained (Balthazard et al.,
10 2006, Luthans and Youssef, 2007, Jung et al., 2009). Positive organisational culture is
11 characterised by cohesion and cooperation and positive emotions such as optimism, hope,
12 strength, trust and respect (Cameron et al., 2011). A positive organisational culture enables
13 High Quality Connections (HQCs) (Stephens et al., 2012), strong dyadic relationships
14 between followers and leaders to develop as well as strong relationships between co-workers
15 in teams and groups. Participants in HQCs share subjective experiences (positive arousal,
16 energy, regard and mutuality, participation and engagement) (Stephens et al., 2012). In turn,
17 these shared experiences between participants in the HQCs enable deeper bonds of trust to
18 develop, as well as empathy and resilience, the capacity to withstand strain and stress, and
19 openness to new ideas and influences (Caza and Milton, 2012). In contrast, if a firm has a
20 negative organisational culture characterised by intense political rivalry and conflict between
21 individuals, this inhibits and can even thwart the development of authentic followership
22 (Kahn, 2012). When negativity permeates a firm there are low levels of trust between
23 followers and leaders, and people prioritise self-interested initiatives over devoting time,
24 energy and commitment to collective efforts (Balthazard et al., 2006). If a firm is
25 characterised by negative contagion, a negative affective state, this literally drains energy,
26 enthusiasm, hope and confidence from employees, leaders and managers alike, so the firm
27 can fall into a vortex of decline resulting in weaker levels of productivity, performance and
28 profit (Felps et al., 2006).
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41 4. Interaction between the components of Authentic Followership:

42 It is important to keep in mind that the AF construct does not propose a linear cause and
43 effect relationship between its three core components whereby one component is required as
44 an antecedent condition for another component to emerge. Each of the components of AF
45 (followers' capacity for authenticity, followers' secure attachment to the leader, and positive
46 organisational culture) coexist and interact with each other, reinforcing and strengthening the
47 other components; operating as a positive non-linear feedback loop. A feedback loop 'refers
48 to the process in which information about the outcomes of an action is fed back into the
49 decision-making, or regulation, process to affect the next action' (Stacey, 1996 p.287). For
50 further information about feedback loops in systems dynamics models, especially
51 mathematical models of flows (the rate of change over time) and stocks/state variables (the
52 state of the system over time) see (Neuwirth et al., 2015, Grösser and Schaffernicht, 2012). A
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3 non-linear feedback loop is ‘a system when actions [by an agent/component of the system]
4 can have more than one outcome and when actions generate non-proportional outcomes, in
5 other words, when the system is more than the sum of its parts’ (Stacey, 1996 p.288). There
6 are two types of feedback in complex non-linear systems - positive and negative. ‘Positive
7 feedback means that growth reinforces further growth... In contrast, negative feedback acts to
8 negate this growth ...’ (Neuwirth et al., 2015 pp.2-3). The core premise of the present paper is
9 that the AF model operates as a positive non-linear feedback loop, whereby growth reinforces
10 further growth.
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16 17 **5. The limitations of authentic followership:**

18 It is important to acknowledge that there could be certain conditions where authentic
19 followership may not be feasible:
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- 21 • In firms where leaders and managers use authoritarian command and control styles of
22 management.
- 23 • When leaders use narcissistic or abusive leadership.
- 24 • When firms are located in nations with cultural norms that reinforce high power
25 distance between leaders and subordinates.
- 26 • When workers experience job insecurity because their firms are under financial
27 duress or there is a possibility of organisational restructuring.
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33 Each of these scenarios is a situation where the power/distance between leaders and followers
34 is heightened and reinforced, under these conditions many workers would be unwilling to
35 take the risk of enacting authentic followership because they would be fearful and anxious
36 that if they did so leaders would target them, they could be sanctioned, or even lose their jobs.
37 Whilst it is important to acknowledge these conditions where authentic followership may be
38 unfeasible, when authentic followership can be enacted this could benefit followers, leaders
39 and firms. Next three propositions are presented which illustrate how AF could reinforce and
40 strengthen individual followers’ authenticity, dyadic relationships between followers and
41 leaders and reinforce and enhance a positive organisational culture.
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49 **Proposition One: Authentic followership enhances followers’ strengths and capacities.**

50 Support for this proposition is derived from work undertaken by Peterson and Seligman.
51 These researchers identified authenticity as a signature character strength, and they created
52 the VIA (Values in Action) inventory and undertook a large scale empirical study which
53 validated the instrument (Peterson and Seligman, 2004, Park et al., 2004). Subsequent studies
54 have found that when an individual develops the capacity to behave authentically at work,
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3 their job satisfaction, pleasure (hedonism), engagement (flow) and meaning (eudemonia)
4 improves (Peterson et al., 2005), in (Harzer and Ruch, 2012b). When followers can behave
5 authentically, this creates and sustains self-development strengths and capacities including
6 self-motivation, self-regulation, self-criticism and self-direction (Harzer and Ruch, 2012a,
7 Littman-Ovadia and Davidovitch, 2010). These strengths and capacities enable followers to
8 become more mature and confident workers thereby offering greater scope for improvements
9 in their work performance and productivity (Harzer and Ruch, 2012b , Page and Vella-
10 Brodrick, 2009 , Dutton et al., 2010 , Luthans et al., 2010). Each of these strengths and
11 capacities requires independent critical thinking (e Cunha et al., 2013). However, when an
12 authentic follower is exercising independent critical thinking, they are not being self-centred,
13 as a key aspect of authentic followership is its relational orientation: prioritising the interests
14 of the firm, the collective good, over individual needs and preferences. AF enables workers to
15 exercise their psychological capacity for authenticity. Put differently, workers may possess
16 the psychological capacity for authenticity, yet without interaction with the other two
17 components of AF (secure attachment between followers and leaders and a positive
18 organisational culture) then the workers capacity to enact authentic followership behaviours
19 (to offer feedback on leader's decisions, or offer suggestions for business improvements, or
20 innovations) will remain latent. When workers acquire the strengths and capacities that flow
21 from enacting authenticity, this reinforces, strengthens and deepens their relationships with
22 leaders and co-workers, which in turn strengthens positive organisational culture.
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35 **Proposition Two: Authentic followership strengthens dyadic relationships between**
36 **followers and leaders.**
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38 When followers develop and maintain a secure pattern of attachment to the leader, they have
39 confidence that the leader will support them and meet their needs (Mayseless, 2010 , Hinojosa
40 et al., 2014). When the dyadic relationship between a follower and leader is strong this builds
41 trust and respect between the two people. Trust and respect are foundation stones of open and
42 honest communication. Trust and respect between a leader and follower create secure
43 conditions, congruence and synergy between the leader and the follower. This enables
44 followers to take on a proactive role in their firm working as partners with leaders, in effect
45 engaging in the co-production of leadership (Carsten and Uhl-Bien, 2012). When workers
46 take on a proactive, authentic followership role, they are empowered, gaining agency and
47 voice. Authentic followers articulate their suggestions for innovation and voice concerns and
48 or criticisms if they view a leader's proposed course of action as inadvisable. Hence AF could
49 provide two benefits for firms. First, firms gain the opportunity to enhance their efficiency,
50 effectiveness and profit from new innovations proposed by authentic followers. AF enables
51 workers to stretch and develop their skills and capacities, they can attempt new tasks, or
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3 modify how existing tasks or projects are undertaken, confident that should these new
4 approaches fail they will still have the support of their leader. Second, AF has the potential
5 to enhance leadership effectiveness. Leaders can make better informed, more balanced
6 decisions, which consider and evaluate the viability of alternative strategies, perspectives and
7 priorities. In contrast, if there is a weak connection, or bond of trust and respect between a
8 leader and follower then the follower is unlikely to take the risk of voicing doubts, concerns
9 or criticisms if they consider a leader's planned course of action to be imprudent or unethical.
10 When this bond of trust and respect does not exist, followers are more inclined to remain
11 silent (Knoll and van Dick, 2013 , Carsten and Uhl-Bien, 2013). And as noted, followers'
12 silent acquiescence with imprudent or unethical decisions can lead to significant financial
13 losses for firms and significant reputational damage. A caveat is required. The advantages of
14 secure attachment patterns between followers and leaders are clear. However it is anticipated
15 that in some situations it could be difficult for followers to establish and maintain a secure
16 pattern of attachment to a leader if they adopt a narcissistic or abusive leadership style
17 'demanding unquestioning obedience' (Padilla et al., 2007 p.181, Pelletier, 2010) or when a
18 worker's employment is insecure.
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30 **Proposition Three: Authentic followership deepens and strengthens positive**
31 **organisational culture thereby improving organisational performance.**
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33 Authentic followership has the potential to improve a firm's organisational performance.

34 Richard and colleagues defined organisational performance as:

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

41 It is useful to provide an explanation of how the proposition that AF could improve a firm's
42 organisational performance was derived. Human resource management scholars have
43 undertaken a substantial body of work investigating links between employees motivation, job
44 satisfaction, engagement, creating high performance work systems, the absence of
45 dysfunctional organisational culture and improved organisational performance of firms (Singh
46 et al., 2012 , MacKenzie et al., 2011, Hancock et al., 2013, Guest, 2011 , Buller and McEvoy,
47 2012). And as noted, organisational psychologists have studied how employees can build
48 their strengths and capacities through the VIA (Values in Action) Inventory (Peterson and
49 Park, 2006, Harzer and Ruch, 2012b, Dutton et al., 2010, Luthans et al., 2010, Peterson and
50 Seligman, 2004). The proposition that AF could facilitate improved organisational
51 performance is influenced by the human resource management stream of scholarship on
52 employees motivation, engagement and improved organisational performance and the
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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

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3 foster and sustain a positive organisational culture during challenging times – recession,
4 aggressive competition from a rival firm? Future studies could address these questions using
5 two research methods. The first involves systems dynamics scholars developing mathematical
6 models to simulate the AF model and the propositions presented in this paper on a computer,
7 perhaps using a Visual Modelling Language (VML) (Neuwirth et al., 2015). The second
8 involves empirical testing of the AF model and the propositions in different types of firms
9 (SMEs and multinationals) representing different industries (finance, manufacturing, retail,
10 transport, health) in different countries and under different market conditions (recession and
11 strong growth), with followers and leaders of different gender, age, education level, and
12 tenure of employment. Indeed the two forms of research need not be mutually exclusive. Both
13 research methods could yield valuable knowledge about the strengths and capacities of
14 authentic followership and identify its limitations.
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23 **Limitations of the present study:**

24 Work on authentic followership is at a nascent stage; this means that the limitations of this
25 work must be acknowledged. The present paper extends and develops initial work that
26 presented the AF model by providing three conceptual propositions of positive outcomes,
27 which could arise from the AF model (de Zilwa, 2014). However, as yet, no measure for the
28 AF model or the propositions has been developed. A second limitation is that at this stage we
29 are uncertain about the boundaries of the AF model. It is predicted that under specific
30 organisational scenarios/conditions AF may be unfeasible or could be constrained; we need to
31 identify these boundaries. A third limitation of the propositions is that at this stage the
32 significance of the temporal dimension remains unclear: do followers and leaders have to work
33 with each other for a certain amount of time before a follower has the confidence and trust in
34 their leader to display authenticity, and to develop a secure attachment to the leader. Whilst
35 these limitations are important, they are not insurmountable obstacles. Each is an issue which
36 can and should be addressed in the future – measures for the AF model and the propositions
37 can be developed, the boundaries of AF identified and the significance of the temporal
38 dimension clarified, so that followers, leaders and their firms can reap the positive benefits
39 that could flow from authentic followership. AF is not the panacea for all that ails
40 contemporary firms - low staff morale, engagement and productivity, high turnover,
41 dysfunctional organisational cultures, resource constraints and regulatory requirements.
42 However the generative benefits of AF are clear. AF is a theory with relevant and useful
43 practical implications, it has the potential to enable individual employees, leaders and
44 organisations to thrive and flourish.
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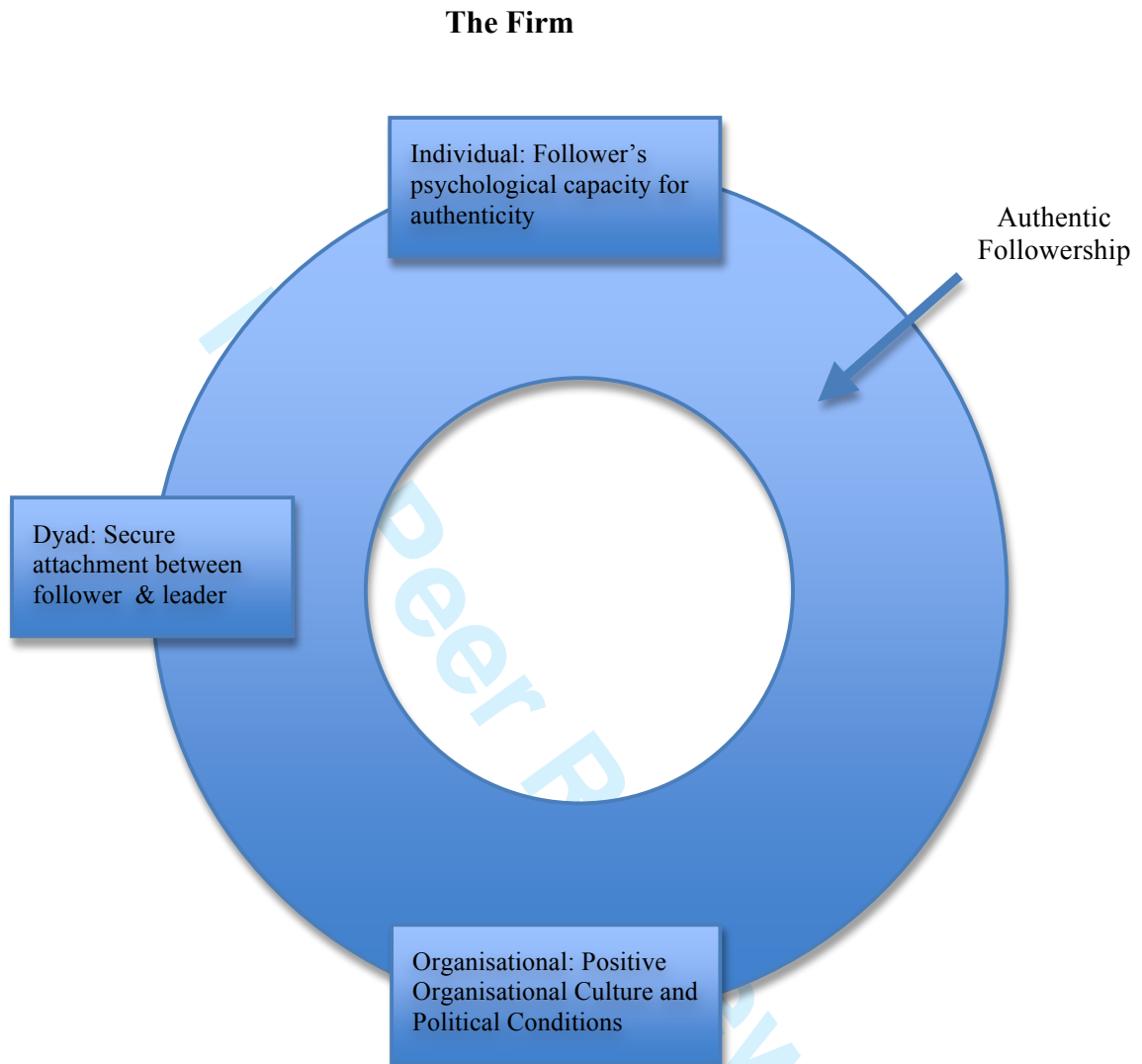
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Figure 1: Authentic Followership



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