

## **The Authentic-Machiavellian leadership grid: A typology of leadership styles<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> This work was supported by Portuguese national funds through FCT - Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, under project «PEst-OE/CJP/UI0713/2013»

**Abstract**

In a world increasingly critical of leadership, we propose a grid representing five primary leadership styles derived from Machiavellian and Authentic Leadership archetypes. We argue that Authenticity and Machiavelianism are independent constructs and not two sides of the same coin as implied in the literature. We conclude suggesting some implications of our grid for leadership accountability and decision-making.

**Keywords:** Leadership; Authentic Leadership; Machiavellianism; Machiavelically Authentic Leaders.

Scandals such as the collapses of Enron and Lehman Brothers, precipitating the Global Financial Crisis in 2008 have turned the spotlight on the ethical conduct of leaders and the consequences of their actions. Mounting criticism questions leadership behaviors of acting primarily for self-interest, ready to use any means to achieve personal ends, demonstrating a Machiavellian mode of behavior (Sendjaya, Pekerti, Hartel, Hirst & Butarbutar, 2016). The term Machiavellianism is derived from Nicholas Machiavelli's (1469 - 1527) work *The Prince*, wherein he analyzes the rises and falls of historical leaders from Greek, Roman and Christian literature concluding, "He who neglects what is done for what ought to be done, sooner effects his ruin than his preservation" (Machiavelli 1944, p. 117). Machiavellianism is defined in psychology as "The use of guile, deceit, and opportunism in interpersonal relationships" (Christie, 1970, p. 1). Wilson, Near and Miller (1996), refer to machiavellian social behavior as a strategy which involves the manipulation of the other, acting intentionally in order to obtain personal advantage.

Calls for leadership practices consistent with ethical principles, values and actions, has seen the recent rise of "authentic leadership", a moral construct based on leadership behaviors characterized by transparency, integrity, virtue, accountability and genuine relationships (e.g. Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrganget, 2005; Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Authentic leaders, according to Brown and Trevino (2006), make decisions consistent with their personal moral values, taking into account the ethical consequences of their decisions on others. These are leaders who practice what they preach and maintain consistency between their words and actions (Simon 2002).

Along with the stereotypical categories of Mechevallian and authentic leadership styles that are firmly established in the literature, in this paper, we develop the observation that authenticity and Machiavellianism can coexist in the same individual

(Sendjaya et al. 2016) – giving rise to other leadership classifications. Even authentic values-driven leaders sometimes incorporate deviant and immoral or Machiavellian behavior, in the interests of achieving a higher moral purpose or end. These are the Robbin Hood leadership types who perpetuate morally questionable behavior on behalf of weaker or vulnerable followers. The complexity of this observation becomes salient when considering the following question: When otherwise authentic leaders incorporate Machiavellian values, do they cease to be authentic and become Machiavellian (Hartog & Belschak, 2012; Brown & Trevino, 2006)? We suggest not!

### **The Authentic-Machiavellian Leadership Grid**

Having discussed various leadership approaches, we are now ready to present a grid (Figure 1) representing different leadership approaches along two dimensions derived from Authentic and Machiavellian archetypes. Inspired by the lay-out of the well-known Managerial Grid proposed by Blake and Mouton (1964), in the present model Authentic leadership is represented on the vertical Y-axis, while Machiavellianism is represented on the horizontal X-axis. The resulting leadership types are: (1,1) the Null Leader with low morality and low authenticity, (1,9) the Authentic Leader with high authenticity and low Machiavellianism, (9,1) the Mecheavellian Leader with low authenticity and high Machiavellianism, (9,9) the Machiavelically Authentic Leader with mixed levels of high authenticity and high Machiavellianism, and (5,5) the Anomic leader who tries to position in the middle of both authenticity and Machiavellianism but that in doing so gives away a bit from each and is void of purposive action.

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Insert Figure 1



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## **Discussion and Conclusions**

In a climate calling for Authentic Leadership, it is increasingly difficult for leaders to escape scrutiny and be held to account by the media, NGOs, and concerned consumers. In an imperfect world, however, leaders are nonetheless challenged with making difficult pragmatic decisions that might conflict with authentic ideals. Interestingly scholars opine that Machiavelli is largely misunderstood (Cunha, Clegg & Rego, 2013). His intent was not to invert ancient Platonic ideals of virtue by advocating immorality and self-interest. Rather he sought to provide a realist explanation of the workings of power and statecraft. Living in a context where foreign powers were crippling Italy, Machiavelli argued that a strong leader must be prepared to use whatever means necessary in service of the higher social objective of creating a stable republic.

An example of a leader acting simultaneously authentically and Machiavellically is Mother Teresa, a canonized Catholic Saint, also dubbed in the media as “Hell’s Angel” (Crawly 2010). Amongst her various questionable behaviors, Mother Teresa controversially accepted money from millionaires convicted criminals to raise money for her causes of helping the less fortunate. Despite employing morally questionable methods of achieving them, her purposes were consistent with her values. Mother Teresa’s case illustrates how an otherwise authentic leader can, when acting in particular circumstances, exhibit behavior that is “Machiavellically Authentic”.

These Machiavellically authentic leaders are distinct from Machiavellian leaders who, when it suits them, appear to embody authentic leadership values to pursue personal profit and gain from a given situation (Belschak, Hartog, & Kalshoven, 2013). These proverbial ‘wolves in sheep’s clothing’ are immoralist in their values, but don a garb of

authentic values to manipulatively engender trust and gain personal advantage. A recent corporate example of such masquerading is Volkswagen's (VW) promoting its vehicles as the "world's most fuel-efficient," in advertising campaigns, accepting government tax breaks and green awards (Cogen 2015). It was some years before the world discovered that these vehicles were deceptively fitted with a "defeat device" to cheat environmental compliance tests, something that was reportedly known to 30 people at management level in VW (Hawranek, 2015). We see such managers as forming another independent category of "Authentically Machiavellian" leaders, not the (9,9) "Machiavelically Authentic" leaders considered in the model proposed in this text.

Our framework thus provides a way for navigating the moralistic complexity of leadership decision-making. Whereas society holds (9,1) Machiavellian leadership as reprehensible, (9,9) Mecheavelically Authentic leadership can be justified given the motivation of working towards a higher ideal of benefiting others (although it is not without taint – and maybe even legal consequences). It is noteworthy that the compromised approaches of (1,1) Null Leadership and (5,5) Anomic leadership are also inglorious options due to their lack of values, inspiration, and direction. In sum, our Authentic-Machiavellian leadership grid suggests context and consequences do count. Opportunities exist for further developing this model with empirical research. A validated questionnaire could also be constructed, providing a feedback score that maps against the grid, thereby offering opportunities for reflexivity, training, and development.

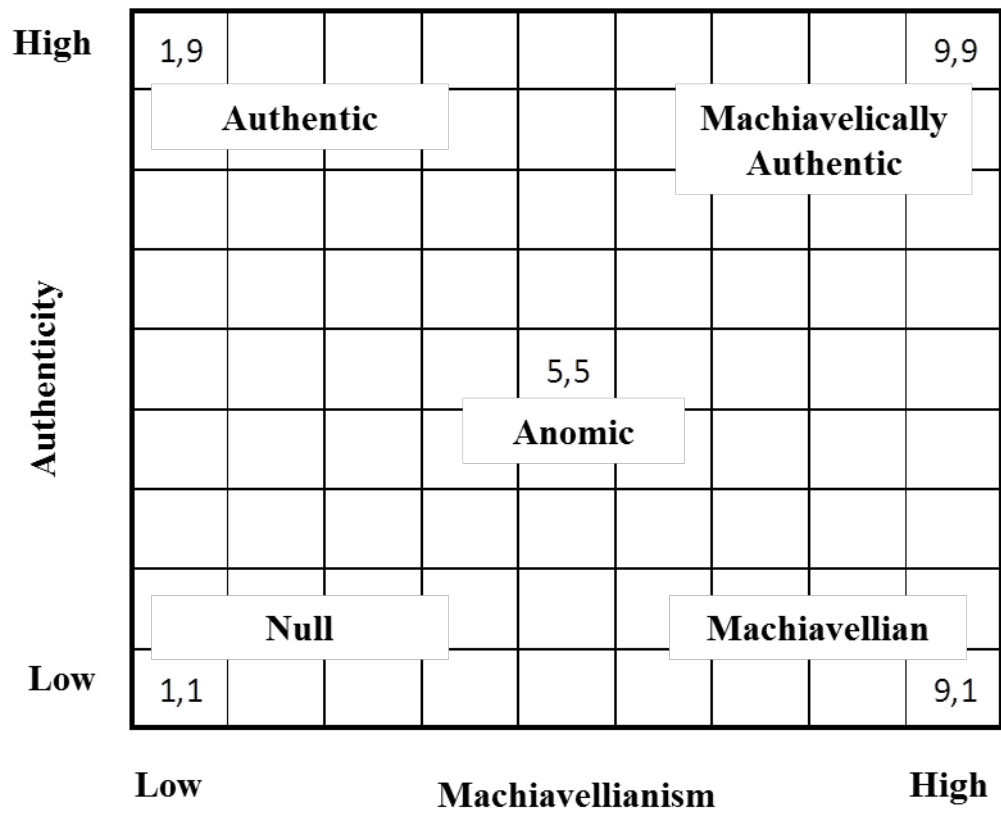
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Figure 1: Theoretical Model



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