



Inside - Out

**Authenticity, brand reputation
and organisational character**

*Be what you seem to be,
and seem to be what you
really are.*

Shaker saying

Authenticity, brand reputation and organisational character

- what does it mean to be authentic? As a brand?
As an organisation?
- what is the relationship between brand reputation and how in reality an organisation operates?
- does it matter if there is a mismatch between brand reputation and organisational culture?
- is it possible to build greater authenticity, or is the attempt fundamentally contrived and misguided?
- where should we start if we want to build organisations that sustain authentic success?

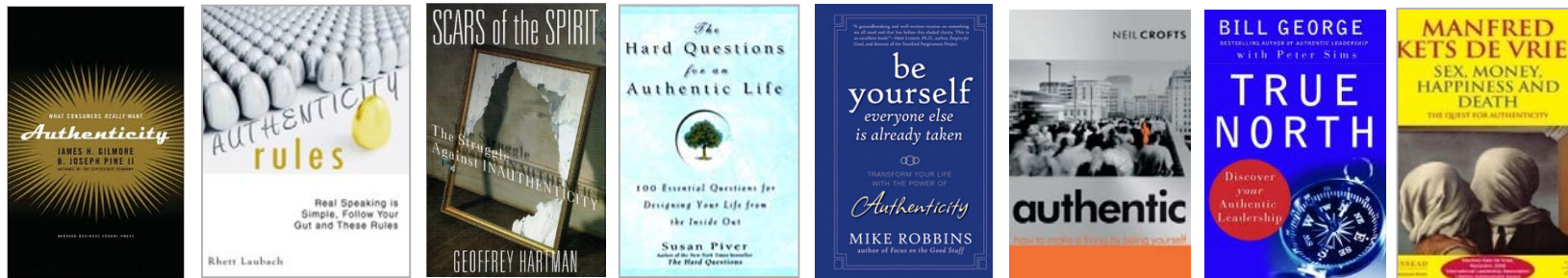
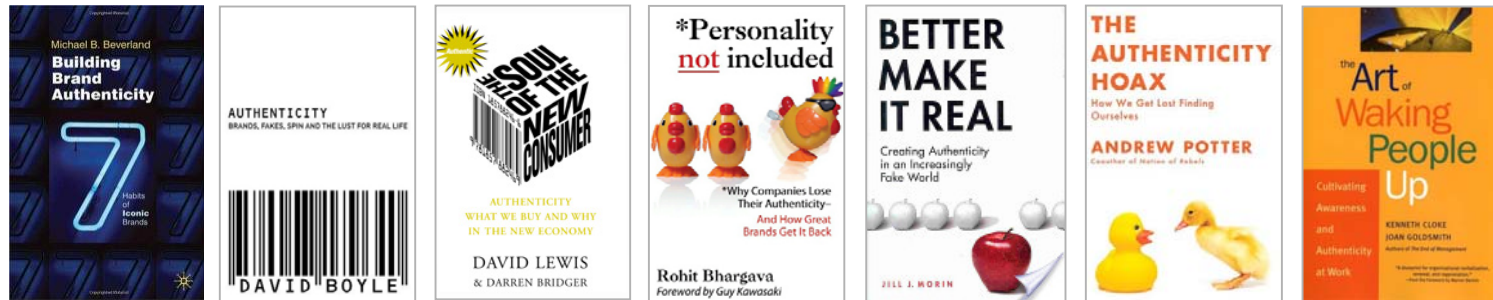
The authenticity paradox: individuals long for authenticity but struggle with how to gain it. Businesses long to fulfil that need by selling authenticity, but cannot really provide it

Gilmore & Pine

Authenticity as an emerging theme

The emergence and recurrence of the “authenticity” word: in marketing, organisational development, in leadership and our personal lives.

Why?



Why authenticity is becoming a key imperative

There is a struggle between real and artificial...I believe this struggle will be a clue to the way the future is going to be.

David Boyle

- levels of societal trust are low and there is a cynicism about institutional and corporate life
- greater access to information through social networking to cut through the noise and get to the “truth”
- increasing savvy and sophistication to pull back the “curtain of the wizard” and spot what is fake
- the search for meaning and purpose in an increasingly complex and uncertain world
- a changing consumer sensibility; customers want a “real experience” that connects to them as individuals



Authenticity: getting to grips with a difficult concept

Authenticity, from the Ancient Greek - *authentikós* - “principal, genuine”; conforming to reality and therefore worthy of trust, reliance, or belief.

Lionel Trilling in “Sincerity and Authenticity” identifies authenticity as **provenance**. From the world of art history, authenticity refers to “a work that deserves the admiration that it appears to demand or worth the price that is paid for it” and highlights the difference between appearance (how something seems) and reality (how it actually is).

Authenticity IS:

- consistency between values, words and actions around a known purpose
- courage and conviction to remain true to fundamental beliefs
- knowing who you are and what you represent
- facing business life “as it is” to keep it real
- the open and honest expression of what is important and matters
- a respect for the past that maintains continuity with the present to meet future challenges

Authenticity IS NOT:

- vague ideals to be the best or a “holier than thou” sanctimonious attitude
- uncompromising in refusing to adapt to changing circumstances
- an inflexibility that is slow to respond to changes in the market-place and becomes “stuck in time”
- wishful thinking about “what might be”
- sentimentality that “bares all to the world”
- a nostalgic longing for better times or a fantasy dream for the future

Brand authenticity

“The quest for authenticity is the contemporary advertising equivalent of the search for the Holy Grail, the ultimate marketing position that can elevate a brand name above the shiny, fabricated world of spun messages and concocted experiences.”

Authentic brands:

- have **integrity** to do what they say they do; consistency to minimise the gap between the advertising message and the consumer experience
- a **distinctive point of view**; “a story to tell that fixes their identity in people’s imagination”
- are **true to their values**, a purpose and mission to serve a larger purpose than short-term profit making
- **build trust** to establish long-term relationships and reassure consumers of their dependability



Authenticity is the benchmark against which all brands are now judged.

John Grant, The New Marketing Manifesto

Achieving brand authenticity: a marketing wheeze or an elusive dream?

Is brand authenticity little more than the attempt to:

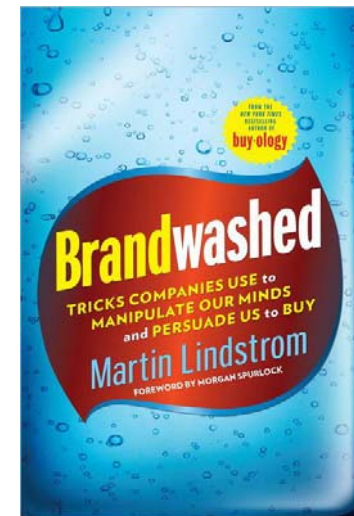
- revitalise fading brands through an appeal to the past
- create a sense of originality around “me too” products
- inject contemporary relevance into brands that have lost their way
- manipulate customer sensibilities about the importance of a new product/service
- a contrived appeal to what is “cool”

Authenticity. If you can fake that, the rest will take care of itself

Seth Godin

“However much the new marketeers use the language of authenticity, it still seems somehow to slip through their fingers.”

Is brand authenticity an elusive dream?



How brands achieve authenticity

Brands establish their authenticity through one or a combination of the following¹:

- **appeal to “natural” simplicity** to provide reassurance of their origins; not artificial or synthetic
- **being original** to be the first of a kind; not a copy or imitation
- **provide exceptional service** to demonstrate personalised care; not performed in a disingenuous or contrived way
- **deliver an outstanding and unique experience** to tap into something important; not derivative or trivial
- **create a transformation** and connect to a better way or higher purpose; not inconsequential or meaningless

Authenticity is what we stand for. It's part of who we are. If we compromise who we are to achieve higher profits what have we accomplished?

Howard Schultz, Starbucks



¹ “What Customers Really Want: Authenticity”, James Gilmore & B. Joseph Pine

Models of brand authenticity

The **Authentic Brand Index** of Australian consultancy Principals derives a summary index of brand authenticity from seven dimensions:

In an age of abundant choice, consumers are drawn toward brands with an original story, an engaging identity and a sincere commitment to deliver what they promise.

ORIGINALITY

The extent to which the brand has brought something new and different to market

PERSONAL UTILITY

The extent to which the brand delivers real utility to users that they feel they can't live without

DECLARED BELIEFS

The extent to which the brand stands for more than just making money

SINCERITY

The extent to which the brand tries hard not to let people down

FAMILIARITY

The extent to which the brand is well known by everyone

MOMENTUM

The extent to which the brand has an aura of becoming more popular

HERITAGE

The extent to which the brand has a relevant and engaging story

Models of brand authenticity

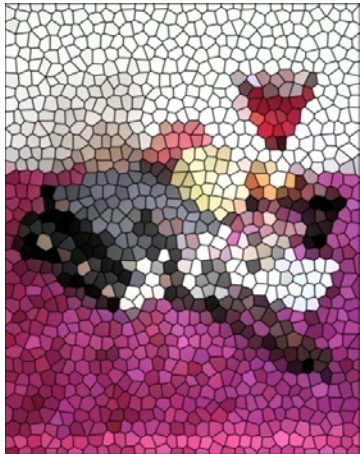
In “Authenticity: Brands, Fakes, Spin and the Lust for Real Life” David Boyle outlines 10 factors:

The world is evolving...it may be ambiguous or paradoxical or hypocritical, but authenticity is going to take an increasingly strong grip on the way we live our lives.

David Boyle

1. **Ethical:** not the expectation of “moral purity” but a confidence that the organisation and its products is not “undermining people or the planet”
2. **Natural:** the preference for natural processes and products
3. **Honest:** the intolerance of the “subtle big lies”
4. **Simple:** the desire to cut through the complexity of a chaotic life
5. **Unspun:** the desire for straightforward communication that doesn’t manipulate
6. **Sustainable:** long-lasting for tomorrow is better than today’s quick fix
7. **Beautiful:** the appeal to harmony and aesthetics
8. **Rooted:** grounded in a place and time of origin
9. **Three dimensional:** the preference for experiences that have “depth”
10. **Human:** humanity is better than the output of a mass production factory

Models of brand authenticity



Authenticity is not just another brand attribute to be explicitly used by marketers to differentiate their offer from others.

Michael Beverland

Michael Beverland's seven habits of Brand Authenticity:

1. **story telling**; the capacity to keep a particular narrative going
2. **appearing as artisanal amateurs**; the passion of people who care
3. **sticking to your roots**; the retention of key traditions
4. **loving the doing**; the sincerity of a commitment to quality
5. **market immersion**; breakthrough innovations that are less about focus groups and more about real consumer concerns
6. **being at one with the community**; becoming part of the culture to reflect key myths
7. **indoctrinating staff into the brand cult**; employees who believe

The authenticity paradox for marketers

“Organisations today must learn to understand, manage and excel at rendering authenticity.”

But in the process of attempting to render authenticity, do we lose it?

Three axioms of authenticity:

- if you **are** authentic, then you don't have to say you are authentic
- if you **say** you are authentic, then you had better be authentic
- it's easier to **be** authentic if you don't say you're authentic

The moment one tries to be real, tries to be authentic, and the trying is detected, the bubble bursts and the inauthenticity spills out.

Michael Benedikt

Where to start?



Authenticity from the inside builds authenticity from outside

Authentic brands are deeply rooted inside the company. They are much more than the marketing veneer applied to the exterior face of the company. Authentic brands are powerful mechanisms guiding decisions and directions across all functions of a company.

Michel Hogan

What we believe + What our actions show = Our Brand

Michel Hogan argues that authentic brands can't be created through logos, strap lines and marketing messages.

Instead brands evolve from real customer experiences that emerge from "the authentic representation of the inside of the company" and an operating style that "filters out to the market through the combined beliefs and actions of everyone who touches it."



Authenticity: where to start

"There is no one exclusive and definitive path to authenticity. To be authentic means to invent one's own way and pattern of life."

"Authenticity is not just about brands and customer perceptions, but a total experience for stakeholders and employees."

People want to copy us...to do what we're doing. We keep telling them "your success isn't doing what we do; it's in discovering your own way. Commit yourself to being who you say you are; act like, think like, look like, feel like, speak like..be it! Your challenge is to "just be" who you want to be."

John Yokoyama
Pike Place Fish Market

**It starts from inside out.
Authentic brands that sustain
success need authentic
organisations with authentic
leadership**



Authenticity at an organisational level

Character is like a tree and reputation like a shadow. The shadow is how we think of it; the tree is the real thing.

Abraham Lincoln



“We work on improving the shadow - the organisation’s reputation - and forget the tree - the activities that underpin this reputation.”

What does it mean for an organisation to be authentic?

At the most fundamental organisations: “align their identity, image and actions” with consistency across:

- **identity** to outline a clear and distinctive reason why they exist
- **image** and how they present themselves to the world
- **actions** and a shared understanding of what they do and don’t do and how they do it

Which impacts on:

- **marketing and branding** and how products and services are promoted
- **relationships** and dealings with different stakeholders
- **employees** and how they behave toward their people

Authenticity as inside out

Companies and the brands they promote must fundamentally give a shit about their employees, customers, partners, shareholders and the rest of the world.

Keith Gerr

Brand authenticity that sustains for the long term:

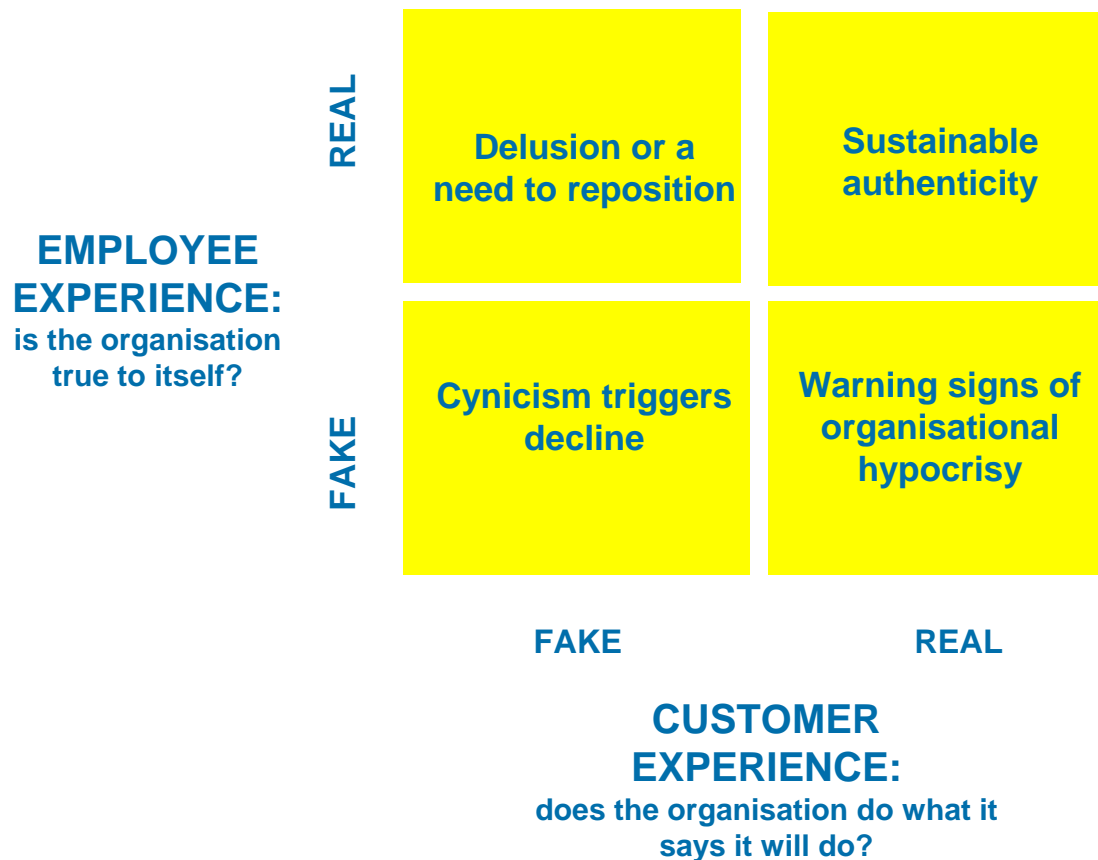
- **tells a compelling story about its origins, promotes defensible attributes, and has an openness and transparency to the world**

which requires an inside-out perspective and organisational authenticity to:

- **operate with integrity around shared values**
- **persevere with resilience and patience to do the hard stuff and stay the course**
- **display courage to innovate and stand out and be “special”**

Authenticity as congruence between the customer and employee experience

“Being true to yourself and being what you say you are.... then you find alignment.”



Stop trying to be something you're not and just be the best of who you are. And if you want to be considered the best thing since sliced bread, then actually be the best thing since sliced bread.

The Duffy Agency

Authenticity: the starting point

It's tough being a business in the age of authenticity.

David Boyle

It starts by asking a sequence of tough questions to begin a debate about:

- the organisational **past and its heritage** and the impact of its history
- the organisation's **current positioning** and the context in which it now operates
- the **direction and speed** at which the organisation is moving to a future to appeal to which customers in which markets
- what limits the organisation and represent **constraints** on its strategic options
- **the zone** that represents credible authenticity
- the future and a strategic intention that outlines the **destination and journey**
- the realities of **execution** to ensure the process of implementation reflects the organisation's values and strategic commitment



The AM Azure Inside Out framework of organisational authenticity

Making it easy to start the discussion through drawing on the views of employees and other potential stakeholders.

A short survey to see inside out drawing on a reality check from employees.



Purpose Towards Excellence: a long term view of success with the conviction to excel in some aspect of performance outcome, and a commitment to keep improving

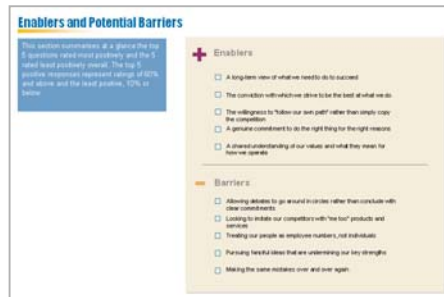
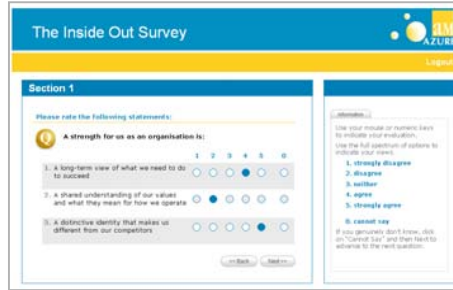
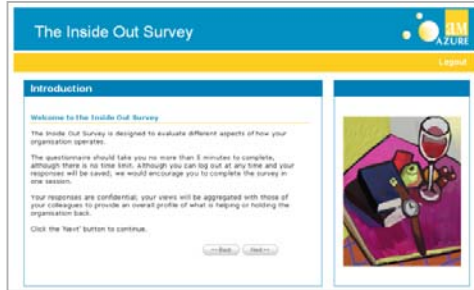
Principles in Action: values driven to clarify expectations and operate around shared ground rules to achieve consistency between “word and deed”

Positioning in the Market Place: an identity that stands out from the competition to connect to customers in a distinctive way

Past to Future Continuity: a thread that connects the past to the future, building on the past to respond to current challenges in building for the future

Passionate about our People: an engagement that draws on employee energy and enthusiasm to make things happen

Inside out survey: inputs and outputs



- a 5 minute on line survey as an analysis of organisational strengths and shortcomings in the dynamics and outcomes of authenticity
- the option to incorporate a shorter version from key stake-holders to capture an external perspective
- the flexibility to design bespoke versions to include additional questions and incorporate client branding
- rapid report back from overall trend analysis to break-downs by business area and level

About Us

AM Azure Consulting Ltd works with a broad portfolio of clients in the design and implementation of on line services in recruitment and selection; management assessment, development and career management; on line leadership tool kits, 360° feedback, performance management; and talent and succession management.

Over the past 15 years we have coordinated a series of surveys and long-term research programmes to identify the practices associated with organisational effectiveness. Generic survey products include:

- the **Predictive Index**: an analysis of the talent management practices and processes associated with long-term organisational survival and success
- the **Organisational Character Index**: the evaluation of the three dynamics that underpin a culture of organisational character
- **Employee Engagement**: the drivers of a highly engaged work-force
- **Client Service Diagnostics**: a review of the factors that clients value within professional services and the organisational factors of superior service

We have also worked with over a hundred organisations in the corporate and public sectors, as well as for other consultancies, in the design and implementation of bespoke survey projects.

If you are interested in our approach to surveys, and how powerful questions help generate robust solutions, call us:

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admin@amazureconsulting.com

*Authentic brands live or die
with the people in the
organization.*

Michel Hogan