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Authenticity.

FEATURE ARTICLE

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It is more than being original.

Authenticity is a broad term. It means different things to different people. It is nearly impossible to measure, and if asked to describe it, most will struggle to put it into finite terms. For me, I have always associated authenticity with being real or genuine. And for the most part, I think there is widespread agreement that those descriptors are appropriate. However, it is this lack of definitional clarity that has led both scholars and professionals alike to dive deeper into its meaning.

Dr. David W. Lehman, a Professor of Commerce at the University of Virginia, has published multiple papers on the subject of authenticity. One of these papers focuses on the interpretability of the trait and its associated complexities. To simplify his proposition, Lehman creates what he calls “**The 3C-View of Authenticity**”. This concept takes the intricacy of authenticity and breaks it into three distinct perspectives. It is from these perspectives that we see authenticity adopt new meaning.

1. “As **Consistency** between an entity’s internal values and its external expressions.”

A person or organization that is true to themselves and guided by personal values and beliefs. For many of us, this perspective feels the most familiar. It is projecting our true self and conveying our thoughts and feelings through outward expression.

2. “As **Conformity** of an entity to the norms of its social category.”

A person or organization that lives in harmony with, and according to the values accepted by their peers. Social norms have a significant influence on the development of our morals and ideals. We look to our colleagues for guidance; and many times, express the lessons we have learned along the way.

3. "As **Connection** between an entity and a person, place, or time as claimed."

A person or organization that is incorporated into their community. They live their life embedded in its history, value system, and expectations. This perspective broadens the scope of authenticity to capture the influence of community. Whether good or bad, our surroundings play a pivotal role in how we express ourselves.

I challenge you to take the three C's developed by Dr. Lehman and apply their different meanings to your own organization and business partners. From there you can begin to developing your own definition of authenticity.

Convey what matters most.

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