Credible–Authentic Leadership Principles

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ABSTRACT

Credibility and authenticity in leadership are two crucial values that determine both the leader’s and follower’s effectiveness. With the current global changes and emerging trends in the business environment, credible and authentic leadership is indeed the next organization’s unique competitive advantage. As most leadership authors have noted, the influence a leader has on his/her followers is dependent on their personal credibility. In an era characterized by leaders giving empty promises, exuding greed and other practices of moral decadency, emphasis on credible and authentic leadership come in handy to restore hope, confidence and optimism in leadership. It’s very clear from the available literature that credible and authentic leadership has a significant effect on a leader’s effectiveness as well as that of his/her followers. This paper seeks to explicate various principles that enable leaders to develop credibility and authenticity. The paper has also analyzed various discussions on leadership credibility & authenticity and concluded that developing and strengthening leadership credibility and authenticity is an ongoing process.

Keywords: Authenticity, Credibility, Leadership, Leadership Principles.

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, as noted by Ivancevich et al. (2013), leadership was defined by traits or behavior but currently, other factors have contributed to the definition of leadership. According to Northouse, (2019), there are as many definitions of leadership as there are authors on the subject; however, there is an agreement among all of them that leadership involves influence, process, a group of people, and attainment of goals. Northouse (2019) thus defines leadership as a process of influence where one individual is able to influence other people toward a common goal. Karmakar and Datta (2015) define leadership as the process of offering direction, and guidance and influencing others towards attaining the organizational goals for the good of all. It’s also defined by Manichander and Manjula (2016) as a position an individual holds in a group set up, which gives him/her the rights to exercise interpersonal influence on the group members to mobilize and direct them towards a common goal. Most leadership scholars have agreed that leadership is about relationship between the follower and the leader and not much about position or title. Leadership is therefore the ability to recognize and bring out the best in oneself and also to recognize and bring out the best in others.

With the current challenging times, leadership has been severely tested and there has been a social outcry for credible/authentic leadership. The new market trends, stiff business competition and other unexpected changes in the environment, have created a refocus on what comprises genuine leadership. People are more desperate for solutions than ever before, thus triggering a renewed search for credible, authentic leadership. Avolio and Luthans (2006) and Seligman (2002) agree that, these turbulent times call for an authentic leadership strategy development that would guarantee desirable organizational performance. Society is thus looking for leaders that are purposeful and uphold acceptable values, lead their teams to high performance, and anchor their organizations on a competitive advantage.

Avolio and Luthans (2006) confirm various factors that stimulate the development and sustenance of credible/authentic leadership. These include critically examining personal experiences and deriving crucial lessons, ability to remain in constant state of personal development and the ability to bring the future to the present. Kouzes and Posner (2011) have explicated six disciplines which if put in practice, would accelerate credible- authentic leadership development in an individual. These principles are self-discovery, appreciating constituents, affirming shared values, developing capacity, serving a purpose and sustaining hope. Gardner et al. (2006) identify that, to develop credibility and authenticity, win respect and trust from followers, leaders should act in accordance with their deep personal values and convictions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Northouse (2019) has given a detailed analysis of how the definition of leadership has evolved over the last century. According to Northouse (2019), domination or control and centralization of power was the main theme of the first three decades of the 20th century. Later in 1930 as noted by Northouse, the theme changed from dominion to influence.
which was characterized by the traits of the leader. Though the leader was expected to influence the rest of the people, the leader could also be influenced by the people. In the 1940s, Northouse (2019) notes that leadership became more of persuasion rather than coercion. Leadership during this period was therefore about the behavior of the leader in directing group activities. In the 1950s, leadership was defined by three themes namely; leadership performance in group activities, behavior of the leader, and the ability to influence the overall group effectiveness.

In the 1960s, leadership scholars seemed to agree on the major role of influence in leadership. As noted by Northouse (2019), leadership during this time was identified by the role of influencing people towards a shared vision. In the 1970s, the leadership definition focused on the organizational behavior approach as further noted by Northouse. During this time, leadership was viewed in terms of goal realization through people mobilization. In the 1980s, leadership scholars as noted by Northouse (2019) grew rapidly and so did the definitions. However, the period saw a comeback of definitions that identified leadership in terms of influence and traits. Some of the remarkable authors were Burns (1978) who defined leadership in terms of the transformation where both the leader and the follower affect each other to greater performance. Another author is Peters and Waterman (1982) in their best-selling book “in search of excellence” which referred leadership to as a personal trait.

From the 1990s into the 21st century, we see the emergence of other leadership approaches which include, authentic leadership, servant leadership, adaptive leadership, and spiritual leadership. As noted by Northouse (2019), this further complicated the search for a common definition and leadership scholars concluded that finding a common definition of leadership may not be feasible. Leadership is therefore conceptualized from various perspectives that include personality, group processes, power relationships, and transformational processes (Northouse, 2019).

### A. Credibility

According to Kouzes and Posner (2011), leaders are regarded as credible when their behavior and actions align with their words. Kouzes and Posner observe various attributes that characterize credible leadership which include honesty, vision, competence, and inspiration. These attributes define the expectations people have of leaders. As further noted by Kouzes and Posner (2011), credibility is the foundation of leadership and it is the fragrance that attracts followers to leaders. Credible leaders are motivated not only by their own needs but more so by those of their followers. Kouzes and Posner (2011) refer to leadership credibility as esteeming followers highly by supporting, motivating, and encouraging them to reach their potential.

### B. Authenticity

Avolio et al. (2004) advance authentic leaders as those who exhibit great awareness of their own thoughts and behavior and are also aware of their own and others’ values and strengths. Authenticity involves owning one’s personal experiences and acting in accordance with one’s true self. According to Avolio and Luthans (2006) developing authenticity is a process that could even last a lifetime. It means being true to self and having all compartments of one’s life that is career, family and other aspects reflecting one person. Authentic leaders conform to specific values that demonstrate honesty, ethics, moral behavior and competence.

### III. INTEGRATION OF AUTHENTIC AND CREDIBLE LEADERSHIP

From the above literature on authentic and credible leadership, it’s clear that though these two are different concepts, their constructs somehow integrate. Some of the features that are shared by both authentic and credible leadership approaches are self-awareness and self-regulation. Both approaches identify leadership in terms of knowledge of self that include values, beliefs, and principles and striving for excellence and competence through capacity building. To grow in credibility, leaders need to discover who they are, their mission in life, and the capacity they have to accomplish that mission. Self –regulation according to Avolio and Luthans (2006) involves constant learning or personal development. Kouzes and Posner (2011) advanced the same concept by noting that credible leaders treasure feedback and consistently develop their capacity and that of their followers. Consistency is another factor that is shared by both credibility and authentic concepts that promotes growth. Avolio and Luthans (2006) advocate for continuous learning from experiences and taking stock of every progress. Kouzes and Posner (2011) agree on following through with one’s convictions and being consistent. Our values and beliefs need to correspond with our actions.

### IV. PRINCIPLES OF DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP CREDIBILITY/AUTHENTICITY

Developing and strengthening leadership credibility and authenticity is an ongoing process. There’s no one who can confirm that they’ve already attained the maximum level of leadership credibility and authenticity. Avolio and Luthans (2006) and Thomas (2008) agree that certain life experiences help shape or develop credibility and authenticity in leadership. Avolio and Luthans (2006) further advanced that, to grow in authentic leadership, there is a need to take note of those unique moments, whether positive or negative that trigger authentic leadership development. Thomas (2008) refers to those moments as crucial moments or the capacity to transform a seemingly negative experience into a learning experience. As posited by Avolio and Luthans (2006), transformation occurs when leaders constantly re-examine and re-evaluate their values and the philosophies they live for. As discussed by Kouzes and Posner (2011), below are various disciplines that promote credible, authentic leadership development.

#### A. Self-Discovery

Leadership as expounded by (Gardner et al., 2006; Drucker, 2008; Kouzes & Posner, 2011) begins with an inner persuasion to discover oneself and the purpose of one’s life. Thus, self-evaluation creates a personal awareness that enables a person to first of all lead self before leading others as posited by Drucker (2008). Self- awareness according to Kouzes and Posner creates confidence and belief in one’s...
ability to make a difference. As noted by Bandura (1997), self-discovery enhances a person’s control beliefs that affect their behavior. One of these control beliefs is the locus of control which as explicated by Bandura, determines the extent to which a person believes to be in control of a certain situation. With a high internal locus of control, leaders are more enthusiastic and passionate about their work, because they believe that the outcome depends on them. Avolio and Luthans (2006) suggest that leaders improve themselves through learning and therefore, with a high internal locus of control, leaders become more authentic through self-development.

Self-discovery is a crucial ingredient in authentic leadership development and as posited by Gardner et al. (2006) comprises the awareness of both the strengths and weaknesses as well as the holistic nature of the self. Self-discovery leads to self-mastery which according to Drucker (2008) is the ability to lead oneself. It includes the awareness of one’s competence and placing oneself in the areas of maximum performance as per one’s strengths and abilities. Gardner et al. (2006) suggest that self-discovery is not an end in itself, but a process of discovering one’s values, goals, potential and abilities and is usually activated by external experiences.

Kouzes and Posner advance that self-discovery is the process that develops credibility and authenticity in a leader. It starts by defining our values and principles. It’s only after we have accurately examined ourselves and determined our expectations then and only then can we set expectations for others. Kouzes and Posner (2011) argue that discovering the self leads to the process of self-development. It’s important for a leader to know their leadership philosophy and value proposition and as further noted by Kouzes and Posner (2011), this enables them to withstand every leadership challenge. As posited by Goleman (2013), self-awareness is a component of emotional intelligence that enables leaders to be aware of their and other people’s emotions.

There are various advantages of self-discovery that include; first, it enables leaders to place or involve themselves in activities that bring maximum productivity. According to Avolio and Luthans (2006), competence is one of the qualities of authentic leadership. Secondly, self-discovery enables a leader to work on the areas of weakness. It leads to self-development through learning and as noted by Drucker (2008), identifying and working with others who are endowed with the talent that one lacks, in order to succeed in the leadership mission. Thirdly, people follow credible, authentic leaders who understand what they stand for. Leadership according to Northouse (2019) is influence and self-discovery that will attract followers to a person. Finally, with self-discovery, leaders stand firm irrespective of the challenges that come their way. In the Bible, (Daniel 6, NIV), Daniel chose to distinguish himself among the administrators in Babylon. He knew what he stood for, his values and beliefs and due to that, he couldn’t bow to a graven image set up by the king. Avolio and Luthans (2006) and Kouzes and Posner (2011) have noted that, clear value system will keep a leader on the credible, authentic leadership development journey.

B. Appreciating Constituents

As posited by Kouzes and Posner (2011), appreciating constituents is another component of developing leadership authenticity and credibility. It’s about understanding the followers at a personal level, knowing their values, what motivates them, and their strengths. Kouzes and Posner (2011) posit that this allows leaders to align constituents around a central focus and work towards a common goal. According to Kouzes and Posner (2011), appreciating constituents and their diversity also involves understanding their aspirations and being sensitive to their needs.

Appreciating constituents has many benefits for leadership which include; first, increasing organizational performance. Kouzes and Posner (2011) agree that everyone can contribute to their highest potential if assisted to do so. Secondly, it allows for feedback from the constituents. Leaders improve themselves through feedback and this improves credibility and authenticity. This is the ability to look at issues from other people’s perspectives. Leaders need to incorporate their philosophy with that of others and as stated by Kouzes and Posner (2012), allow others to act. Soliciting feedback from constituents demonstrates how leaders value their followers. Finally, in appreciating constituents, the followers feel valued and this creates loyalty.

Leaders as noted by Armstrong (2014) manage diversity by recognizing the different characteristics between people and ensuring that everyone irrespective of their diversity feels valued and that the talents of all employees are optimally utilized. According to Ivancevich et al. (2013), organizations that are committed to diversity and allow inclusiveness, strategically position themselves for growth. It’s therefore important for credible leaders to identify and appreciate other people’s uniqueness. Leaders develop credibility by listening more to their teams and their confidence should not be in what they know, but in what they can learn from others (Kouzes & Posner, 2011).

C. Affirming Shared Values

According to Kouzes and Posner (2011), shared values are the glue that holds organizations together. To develop credibility and authenticity, leaders promote shared values to enable people to work as a team and increase productivity. Though they still embrace people’s unique diversity, they also understand that unity in purpose produces high performance. According to Kouzes and Posner (2011), credible leaders enable followers to agree on something that is acceptable to all. They recognize the power in agreement and maximize it. Leaders build community by enabling people to view themselves as part of a larger whole.

Holding shared values generates energy and enables people to focus on a common goal. According to Armstrong (2014), when employees share in the organizational goals and values, they are more effective in their work than when they work as individuals. In shared values, employees become aware of what is expected of them and perform to their full potential. It’s however not adequate to write down the values and expect people to follow them. The leaders as posited by Kouzes and Posner (2012) should model the way and ensure that the values are ingrained in people’s hearts. It therefore takes focused, deliberate training on the acceptable values.

Shared values promote organizational citizenship Behavior (OCB) which according to Oginde (2011), refers to individual behavior that is exceptional, intrinsically motivated and
aimed at promoting the overall performance of the organization. This definition is further expounded by Ivancevich et al. (2013) as extra activities that employees engage with to give their organizations a unique competitive advantage. According to Ivancevich et al. (2013), OCB has not only been associated with personality characteristics but a higher occurrence of OCBs has been identified among employees with a higher collectivist orientation.

D. Developing Capacity

People are not able to perform unless they know how to. To build credibility and authenticity, effective leaders build the capacity of their followers thus enabling them to increase their performance. Through developing skills, credible, authentic leaders bring out the leadership skills in others. As noted by Armstrong (2014), capacity building increases the productivity of every employee and thus contributes to organizational effectiveness. The commitment and enthusiasm of the employees are improved through capacity building.

According to Kouzes and Posner (2011), credible leaders need to understand the capacity of the people they lead. This will enable them to understand the knowledge or skill gap and provide the necessary training. Capacity building empowers constituents and enables them to act. Credible, authentic leaders identify the potential in their followers and as noted by Mintzberg et al. (2005), place them in the areas they serve best. Employees that are skilled in the area of their operation are more confident and as noted by Drucker (2008), people perform best when placed in areas of their greatest potential. Learning is a continuous process and credible, authentic leaders understand that to be effective, they have to continually train their constituents.

Capacity building increases the employees' desire to go the extra mile and as noted by Oginde (2011), the two major components of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) are calling and membership. Oginde (2011) further noted that these two components influence an employee's sense of belonging and loyalty to the organization. Employees with a high sense of calling as posited by Oginde (2011), see their work as a spiritual vocation and will demonstrate a high level of commitment and performance. According to Ivancevich et al. (2013), credible, authentic leadership is a major influence on OCBs especially when confidence has been built through capacity building. Creating an atmosphere for learning is therefore critical for credible, authentic leadership development.

E. Serving a Purpose

To develop credibility and authenticity, leaders commit themselves to a purpose that includes serving not their own interest but that of the constituents. According to Kouzes and Posner (2011), leaders are the first to take responsibility for every situation and hold themselves accountable for the promises they make. They are innovative, and creative and envision the future of the organization. They act on what they believe and as posited by Kouzes and Posner (2011); their strong value system becomes their guiding compass. They view themselves as liberators to set free the leadership trapped in people. Credible leaders spend their lives for others and are not afraid to lay down their lives for their constituents.

Paul in the Bible in (Galatians 2: 11-18.NIV), demonstrated credible, authentic leadership when he stood up for what he believed in. His purpose was clear, he was defending the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul realized that he needed to set things right so that his followers would not be confused. His rebuke of Peter may not be a show off but a demonstration of responsibility. Paul was courageous to speak out in spite of the hostility that could have been meted on him by the Jews. This is because he was committed to His purpose. According to Kouzes and Posner (2011), leadership credibility is developed through a commitment to a purpose. Peter on the other hand, at this juncture, did not demonstrate credible, authentic leadership. He faltered in acting differently than what was expected of him as a leader. This doesn’t mean that Peter wasn’t credible or authentic, but as posited by Avolio and Luthans (2006) and Kouzes and Posner (2011), leaders and other human beings are prone to mistakes. It’s therefore important to commit to a continuous process of self-evaluation and learning.

Being committed to a purpose means being consistent in our personal values and continuously improving ourselves. As posited by Avolio and Luthans (2006) credible leaders learn through experiences and interactions with people. This consistency becomes like footprints that the constituents follow. Making meaning out of every situation is one of the credible leaders’ purposes. As posited by Kouzes and Posner (2012), leaders challenge the status quo. They enable their constituents to challenge every situation in order to make progress. This leads to innovation and creativity. They allow for mistakes because they understand that people learn through experience and while experimenting, mistakes are inevitable. They handle inconsistencies by maintaining the right values despite the challenges involved.

F. Sustaining Hope

Leaders develop credibility by remaining focused and optimistic irrespective of the situation. According to Kouzes and Posner (2011), credible leaders express optimism for the future and as noted by Kouzes and Posner (2012), they encourage the heart. With the current global challenges where changes are the major constant thing, followers are looking for leaders who remain hopeful and enthusiastic irrespective of the challenging situations. Whereas authenticity does not mean being fake, credible, authentic leaders have the ability to understand and control their own emotions and those of others (Goleman, 2013).

As explicated by Kouzes and Posner (2012), credible leaders strengthen other people’s beliefs and model the way by removing obstacles to make the path clear. The current business environment is characterized by great uncertainty. There is therefore a great quest for leaders who have the ability to keep hope alive. Credible, authentic leaders take charge of the situation; they take note of the current situation even as they create mental pictures of the future they want to see. According to Hughes and Beatty (2005), effective leaders are strategic thinkers who always assess their environment for signals that would lead to change. Hughes and Beatty (2005) have further noted that strategic thinking enables leaders to look outside of their available knowledge and information to accommodate as many perspectives as possible so that they can understand the dynamic nature of the environment.

Credible, authentic leaders do not accept every verdict.
According to Kouzes and Posner (2011), credible leaders challenge every situation and look for a way out of every negative situation. As posited by Kouzes and Posner (2012), they challenge the status quo and look beyond the prevailing circumstances. They are strategic thinkers and create a mental picture of the future they want to see (Hughes & Beatty, 2005). Credible, authentic leaders find humor even in the gloomiest situations. They encourage their followers to envision the future; this enables them to understand that, every situation is seasonal. No situation lasts forever or even circumstances. They, therefore, create hope by looking at the bigger picture.

V. CONCLUSION

From the above study, it’s important for all leaders to exude credibility and authenticity in their leadership journey. However, as noted by Luthans and Avilo (2006) and Kouzes and Posner (2011) developing and strengthening credibility and authenticity is a lifelong process. Leaders who intend to develop their credibility and authenticity need to take an interest on their daily experiences and make learning their constant habit. It takes humility for a leader to desire to learn from the constituents. Acknowledging human limitations and accepting feedback from other people is crucial. As noted by Kouzes and Posner (2017), it takes a lot of courage to admit our human limitations and that we are not always right. With this realization, a leader is able to grow in credibility and authenticity.

Building and strengthening credibility and authenticity takes sacrifice. It’s not easy to remain credible and authentic, especially with so many environmental constraints that dictate otherwise. Standing up for the truth and for the values we believe in even in difficult situations, strengthens the habits that keep leaders on the journey of credible, authentic leadership. As stated by Bandura (1997), every moral act strengthens a person’s self-efficacy and thus consistency is paramount in credible-authentic leadership development.

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