Elements of credible leadership: Perspectives from a Kenyan context

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Abstract: **This study seeks to explore what constitutes credibility and how a credible leader is made focusing on leaders in a Kenyan context. The study uses a grounded theory qualitative study approach and conveniently samples three leaders (two male and one female) known as credible leaders in Kenya. Value-based leadership approaches that connect with the credibility construct have been discussed as part of the brief literature review in this study. Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain the views and lived experiences of the participants. The study found that credible leaders are defined as those who exhibit attributes of honesty, trustworthiness, inspiration, accountability, and skill. Further, the study showed that personal values, life experiences, and role models are pivotal in the making of credible leaders. Finally, the findings demonstrate that credible leaders beget credible followers and there is mutuality and reciprocity between leaders and followers in terms of the benefits derived from their relationship when leaders foster credibility.**

Keywords: **Accountability, Authentic, Credible, Credibility, Role model, Value-based.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Background to the study

Leadership has been defined as a process whereby intentional influence is exerted over other people to guide structure and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization (Yukl, 2013). Northouse (2016) defines leadership skills as "the ability to use one's knowledge and competencies to accomplish a set of goals or objectives "(p.44). A leader can only be one if there are followers (Maxwell, 2007). Chaleff (2003) advances that as much as the leaders have responsibility for those that they lead; the followers have a responsibility as well over their leaders in the sense that the way the followers interact with the leaders will determine whether it is their strengths that will grow or their weaknesses. In addition to Chaleff, Maxwell, Northouse, and Yukl, nearly all other writers who have tried to define leadership advance that it entails influence, it will involve followers, it will be towards a common purpose or goal and it is a process (Surji, 2015; Legaard & Bindslev, 2006). Kouzes and Posner (2011) observe that leadership is about relationships.

Although leadership has been practiced throughout human history, its systematic study started within the 19th and 20th centuries. Studies in the discipline began with the traits perspective, also called the "great man" theories where the focus was on the innate and inborn qualities that differentiated leaders from followers (Northouse, 2016). In the middle of the 20th century, the skills perspective on leadership emerged. According to Northouse, the skills perspective removes the focus from the leader and places the emphasis on the knowledge and skills that make leadership effective. Katz (1995) propounded that leaders need to develop technical, human, and conceptual skills. Further studies as advanced by Mumford et al (2000) yielded a skill-based model of leadership that promoted competencies, individual attributes, leadership outcomes, career experiences, and environmental influences as five components critical for leadership. The behavioural perspective is another approach to leadership that was advanced within the 20th century. The behavioural interpretation of leadership focuses on what and how leaders do. The Ohio studies (1964), the Michigan studies (1978),

and the studies by Blake and Mouton (1985) as cited in Northouse propounded the behavioural perspective. At the core of leadership from the many attempts at defining are the influence and relational aspects which introduce the complexity and contingent nature of the discipline. This has led to the evolution of leadership into situational and contingent perspectives. There are many other approaches that have been advanced over time with the conclusion being that leadership is a complex phenomenon that has no single and simple approach that would apply in all situations.

Apart from the consensus among many scholars on the importance of leadership and its complexity is the centrality of the need for leadership to exercise care and justice over the people it is exerted upon (Northouse, 2016). Avolio & Gardner (2005) underscore the importance of leaders' transcendental values, for example, the pursuit of social justice, equity, broad-mindedness as well as emotional connection with the people they lead.

Statement of the problem

Corporate failures, conflicts instigated by and because of leaders, societal collapses, and a host of challenges that have faced the world all have created tension, uncertainty, and mistrust for leaders by many followers. Salicru (2017) observes the despair, frustration, doubt, dissent, and distrust that characterizes people's attitudes because many leaders have been seen to lack the ability, willingness, and commitment to meet the expectations of those they are supposed to lead. Salicru promotes that the best leaders are "authentic, respectful, empathetic, inclusive, consultative, and collaborative"…"lead with integrity and uncompromising commitment to ethical excellence" (p. 30). Many of these values and attributes are advanced by Kouzes and Posner (2011) in what they refer to as credibility, further noting that credibility is the foundation of leadership. It is clear that organizations, be they private or public, for-profit or non-profits, and the world at large experience a gap in leadership; between the expectations of the led and the capacity and willingness of many that lead. Kouzes and Posner propound that credibility is the highest quality that is expected of leaders all over the world. Like most of the world, Africa, in many ways, lacks the much-needed credible leadership. While it has been easy for Africans to lament the way they were treated like underdogs by the colonial masters, Kim et al as cited in Jallow (2014), note that even worse is that, the relationship between African leaders and the led Africans ended up being a case of "rooting for and then abandoning the underdog" in that those African leaders who took over from the colonial masters perpetuated evils against their own countrymen, squashed any form of dissent, deprived them of their human rights and superimposed oppressive structures that have hitherto retarded the continent. Jallow upholds the continued cry for credible leadership by noting that many African nations required transformative-servant leadership that would appreciate the local culture and empowers the citizens of the new nations in a manner that helps them to actively question their governments and assume leadership of their nations but far from it, many of them continued the autocratic regimes that had characterized the colonial rule. African leaders will do well to reconsider their values, and the long-term interests of the African people and selflessly pursue these for the betterment of the continent. In spite of the pervasive need for credible leaders, few studies have provided insights into how credible leaders develop and even fewer have covered Africa. Kouzes and Posner's study, one of the most popular studies on credible leadership, glaringly did not collect views from leaders or followers domiciled in Africa yet there is a prevalent understanding that cultural differences influence leadership and its practice. An understanding of the credible leadership perspectives from African leaders in regards to how they define a credible leader, attributes they associate with credibility, experiences that shape the making of credible leaders, their opinions of how leaders lose credibility and the impacts of credible leadership would be a critical addition to knowledge as well as a basis for its practical application. This study attempts to fill these knowledge gaps.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study was to explore, from the perspectives of selected Kenyan leaders, elements that constitute the making of a credible leader. The sub-objectives are:

a) To understand how the selected Kenyan leaders define a credible leader.

b) To establish what makes the selected Kenyan leaders consider themselves credible.

c) To explore the experiences that have shaped the selected Kenyan leaders to be credible.

d) To understand the selected Kenyan leaders' perspectives as to what makes leaders lose credibility.

e) To derive the impacts that the credibility of the selected Kenyan leaders has had on the relationship with their followers.

Research questions

The main research question was: What constitutes the making of a credible leader based on the perspectives of selected Kenyan leaders? The sub-questions were:

i. How do the selected Kenyan leaders describe a credible leader?

ii. What makes the selected Kenyan leaders consider themselves credible?

iii. What recent examples can the selected Kenyan leaders give in demonstrating why they consider themselves credible?

iv. What experiences have shaped the selected Kenyan leaders to be credible?

v. What, in the opinion of the selected Kenyan leaders, makes leaders lose credibility?

vi. What impacts, according to the selected Kenyan leaders, have their credibility had on the relationship with their followers?

Assumptions of the study

The study assumed that the selected leaders would be truthful in their responses and would not favourably assess themselves. Secondly, it was assumed that the opinions of the selected leaders would be representative of the broader views of leaders in Kenya and to some extent in Africa.

Significance of the study

The findings of this study are important to the leaders across the divide in Kenya in evaluating how they are aligned to credibility so as to inspire, influence, and motivate their followers towards the accomplishment of a common vision. In addition, the findings of the study will be instructive to current and potential leaders on pitfalls that they should guard against so as not to lose their credibility Through the findings of the study, organizations can identify potential leaders for nurturing and development as well as continue to build the capacity of the already known ones by exposing them to experiences and opportunities that can build their credibility. Finally, the findings from this study will expand the knowledge on the credibility and making of credible leaders within a non-Western context.

Scope of study

The study's scope is three participants within the Kenyan context who were purposively selected based on the fact that they are well known as leaders who have exhibited credibility. The three participants were drawn from the private, public, and non-profit sectors and further comprised of two male and one female leader in a bid to ensure balance from a sector and gender perspectives.

Limitations and delimitations.

One of the limitations of the study was that by only interviewing leaders, information was only sought from one side of the leader-follower dyad yet the perspectives of the followers would have been critical in corroborating what the leaders said and further in confirming the leaders' views regarding the impact of their credibility on the relationship with their followers Further, the likelihood of participants seeing themselves only in a positive light was another limitation.

In terms of delimitations, the researcher conveniently sampled the participants due to time and financial resource considerations. In addition, a sample of three participants was selected but in full recognition of the implications of the limited scope and consequently the extent of the results' generalizability.

The main purpose of this study is therefore to add to knowledge on what constitutes credible leadership and how credibility in leadership develops from an African perspective bearing in mind that major studies on credibility glaringly miss the African perspective

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section I contains the introduction to the study on the making of a credible leader with subsections relating to the background of the study, the statement of the problem under study, the objectives, research questions, assumptions, significance, scope, limitations, and the delimitations. Section II contains the related work on leadership and more broadly value-based leadership under which the gist of the topic lies w while Section III contains the methodology that has been adopted in this study. Section IV contains the results and discussions of the study while section V captures the conclusions and directions for future research in the area of the making of a credible leader.

II. RELATED WORK

This section presents and discusses what has been written in relation to credible leadership and related value-based leadership approaches. The nature and origin of leadership and ethics have been briefly discussed. Further authentic, ethical, transformational, and servant leadership approaches have been discussed and the connection with credibility highlighted. The research gaps around credibility have been synthesized in a bid to situate the focus of the current study.

Leadership and ethics

There exists a general consensus that leadership is not effective until it is underpinned by ethics, care for others, and an underlying component of justice. According to Northouse (2016), ethics in leadership concern what they do and who they are; their actions and decisions will essentially be informed by their ethics, their rule, and principles of what constitutes right and wrong. Ethics are closely related to the leaders' moral development. Ciulla (1998) documented some of the earliest writings in relation to leadership ethics. Daft (2016) posits that "companies that put ethics on the back burner in favor of fast growth and short-term profits ultimately suffer. To gain and keep the trust of employees, customers, investors, and the general public, organizations must put ethics and social responsibility first"(p.393). Butts as cited in Mathooko (2013) posit that leadership styles that are character-based are critical and have become even more urgent due to the continued disappointment by leaders in the 21st century.

Critical to leadership that is ethical and character-based, is the need for leadership credibility. According to Kouzes and Posner (2011), credibility is a composite of being honest, competent, and inspiring. They advance that people all over the world want to know that their leaders can be trusted, are capable of delivering what they say they will, and have a transferable sense of enthusiasm that is contagious to their followers regarding what needs to be accomplished. Kouzes and Posner further advance six steps of building credibility: discovery of self, appreciation of the people that one is leading, affirmation of shared values, developing the constituents' capacity, focusing on serving a purpose, and sustaining hope. A leader's self-knowledge, clarity of their self-concept, and perception of the merger between who they are and their role can be reflected by their life stories (Shamir & Eilam, 2005). Shamir and Eilam further observe that the life stories expose how the leaders deduce meanings from the events that have occurred in their lives; these meanings are important for guiding the followers as well as for further developing the leaders over time as they reflect on the events and meanings.

Kouzes and Posner (2011) note that leaders cannot be considered credible and authentic if they are aloof, distant, and opaque. Credible leaders will also selflessly appreciate the followers and the role they play in pursuing the common purpose. The constituents will be more empowered and have their capacity developed which will ultimately lead them to take greater ownership of the shared values and vision (Ilies et al, 2005). According to Kouzes and Posner, it is these shared values as affirmed and lived out by the leaders that form a reference point for all whenever there is an ethical dilemma that faces them. Credible leaders are inspired and driven by a purpose that is not about them but is focused on the common good. By being guided by the purpose rather than their own interests, credible leaders reinforce credibility among their followers and attract commitment. Kouzes and Posner posit that while credible leaders will at times suffer and face challenges, they sustain hope by painting positive and optimistic pictures of the future. Indeed, it is during the times when the future looks bleak that credibility is heavily demanded by followers.

Leadership approaches related to credibility

There are various leadership approaches that have been advanced that promote the need for credibility: leaders' honesty, followers' inspiration, and competence. They include authentic leadership, ethical leadership, transformational leadership, and servant leadership.

Authentic Leadership

Cashman (2008) defines leadership as the influence that is authentic and value-creating. Cashman further explains authenticity as self-awareness that is well developed and faces strengths, weaknesses, and challenges in an open manner. Shamir and Eilam (2005) describe authentic leadership from an intrapersonal perspective the main focus being on the leader, his self-knowledge, self-regulation, and self-concept being part of what is within the leader. They describe authentic leadership as a demonstration of genuineness, conviction, and originality in one's leadership. A leader's life experiences and the weight the leader attaches to these experiences are critical to their authenticity's development

(Northouse, 2016). An interpersonal perspective is a second way in which authentic leadership has been theorized. Proponents of this perspective view authentic leadership as a reciprocal process between the leaders and the followers and they believe that leaders and followers build each other. The third perspective about authentic leadership postulates that authentic leadership can be nurtured and ultimately develops over a lifetime triggered by tragic occurrences in one's life, for example, severe sicknesses or debilitating accidents (Avolio & Gardner,2005; Gardner et al,2005).

Assuming the developmental process perspective of authentic leadership, its theoretical framework is based on four components: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency. Self-awareness entails a leader's capacity to understand their own emotions, and feelings and to come into terms with what their essence is deep within. The leader knows and trusts their own feelings and hence can be decisive and confident thereby attracting the trust and confidence of the followers (Gardner et al, 2005). Trust and confidence are indicated as critical components of credibility according to Kouzes and Posner (2011). For a leader to grow in self-awareness, they require to exercise self-observation, appreciate feedback, and also evaluate themselves so as to predict their personal behavior and hence control it when needed (Bandura, 1977). Internalized moral perspective is a self-regulatory process in which a leader does not give in to external pressure whenever they need to make decisions but are consistent in line with their beliefs and standards of morality. The exercise of balanced processing means that the authentic leader welcomes the views of others, analyses the views, and makes unbiased decisions devoid of favoritism. Further, authentic leaders consider even the opinions of those who differ from them. In regards to relational transparency, authentic leaders openly share, express both positive and negative feelings, and are real in their relationships. Kouzes and Posner buttress these dispositions of authentic leaders by advancing that credible leaders influence, inspire and drive performance because they choose to be involved rather than be aloof, they know their followers and are known by them and they get close enough to those that they lead in a way that makes them real and felt. There are also other factors that influence authentic leadership that include positive psychological attributes like optimism, confidence, and hope as well as moral reasoning and critical life events (Northouse, 2016).

Ethical Leadership

Brown et al. (2005) provided one of the most common definitions of ethical leadership in which they define ethical leadership as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making"(p.120). This definition by Brown et al emphasize the role-modeling relational, communication, reward, and punishment as well as decision-making elements of ethical leadership. Van Wart's (2014) construct of ethical leadership propounds that ethical leadership is comprised of six leadership styles which he advances as contemporary theories of ethical leadership. The six styles are characterized in leadership that is (a) virtuous, (b) authentic and positive, (c) moral management, (d) professionally grounded, (e) espouses social responsibility, and (d) transformational. Ethical leadership thus concerns itself with not only what the leader does but also who they are, their motivations, their behavior and their basis in making decisions, and their focus on developing others and commitment to sustainability. Northouse (2016) advances that ethical leadership is concerned about the exercise of leadership in a manner that perpetuates a just and caring society. It has been observed that most researchers have conceptualized ethical leadership from how ethical leaders ought to behave, in other words, from a normative perspective (Brown et al, 2005; Shakeel et al., 2019). Brown and Trevino advance that care for people, honesty, and being trustworthy are central concerns of ethical leadership. They conceptualize ethical leadership as characterized to constitute a "moral person" and a "moral manager" (p. 597). The moral person relates to the perceived traits, altruism in motivations, and the character of the leader while the moral manager explains the explicit and intentional behavior of the ethical leaders to reward and entrench ethical behavior while punishing unethical behavior.

The conceptualization by Brown et al (2005) has the overarching dimensions of the moral person and the moral manager. The moral person is characterized by qualities of honesty, being trustworthy, fairness, being principled, caring for both the immediate people that surround them as well as the society at large, and being ethical in their personal and professional lives. The moral manager dimension, on the other hand, is the aspect of ethical leaders whereby they are deliberate and committed to influencing others towards ethical behavior by using rewards and discipline. These two dimensions are thus about the leader themselves as well as the activities they do to inculcate ethical behavior in others (Shakeel et al, 2019). The definition by Brown and Trevino underscores three key activities that ethical leaders carry out: communication, reinforcement, and decision-making.

The proponents of ethical leadership advance that it has several critical outcomes at an individual, organizational and societal level. Ethical leadership enhances the ability of an organization to be competitive. According to Engelbrecht et al (2017), ethical leaders are trusted by their followers, are perceived to be credible and consequently, the followers give their best thus raising the organization's competitiveness. This is closely related to Kouzes and Posner (2012) who promote credibility as foundational to leadership noting that when leaders are perceived to be credible, the employees are loyal, committed, and give extra time, effort, and creativity consequently leading to organizational regeneration rather than mere compliance. Babalola et al (2018) show that ethical leadership builds employees' capacity to effectively deal with conflicts in their places of work.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership "serves to change the status quo by articulating to followers the problems in the current system and a compelling vision of what a new organization could be" (Achua, 2010, p.348). According to Achua, transformational leaders are often clear with their sense of purpose, who they are, and their personal meaning. A compelling vision is critical for transformational leadership (Northouse, 2016). Transformational leadership is also driven by dissatisfaction with the status quo and hence change. Transformational leaders can emerge at different levels of the organization and can be many (Yukl, 2013). Northouse and Yukl further advance transformational leadership as an empowering type of leadership. Transformational leadership is about motivating followers to work for goals, achievement, and self-actualization rather than for short-term interests and security (Ivancevich et al, 2013). Transformational leadership seeks to raise a courageous follower who "has a clear internal vision of service while being attracted to a leader who articulates and embodies its external manifestation" (Chaleff, 2003, p.14). Transformational leaders transform organizations (Antonakis et al., 2016). A transformational leader empowers followers and treats them as partners in the quest for the achievement of the objectives they are focusing on. Yukl notes that transformational leaders, therefore, distance themselves from the centre of the desired change and only position themselves as part of the players. Transformational leaders not only empower followers and reinforce the message that they are pivotal in the transformation agenda, but also seek to create a sense of independence on the part of the followers.

Burns' (1978) conceptualization of transformational leadership excludes the exercise of leadership that is devoid of morals and is focused on the interests of the leader at the expense of the followers. Bass (1998) calls leadership that seeks to bring about change through practices that are immoral, exploitative, and self-absorbed pseudo transformational. Leaders like Osama Bin Laden or Idi Amin Dada can be considered to have been pseudo transformational.

Avolio (1999) advances that transformational leadership is focused on the improvement of followers' performance and growing them so that they can rise to their fullest potential. Transformational leaders are driven by strong internal values and ideals which make them effective in motivating followers towards the greater good and not self-focused interests. There are four factors or components that constitute transformational leadership (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration.

Idealized influence is also known as charisma. It describes the emotional connection in leadership where followers deeply respect their leaders and want to follow and emulate them because of their high moral standards and ethical conduct (Northouse, 2016). Ibrahim et al (2014) note that through their confidence, dignity, integrity, and self-sacrifice transformational leaders earn admiration and consequently influence their followers. The second factor is inspirational motivation. According to Northouse, the leader articulates the vision and communicates the high expectation to the followers and through motivation inspires them to be committed to the vision. Northouse further asserts that intellectual stimulation is where the leader encourages the followers' initiative and thinking for problem-solving. It is geared toward nurturing creativity and innovation by not providing solutions to the followers but empowering them to question the leader's beliefs and their own. Transformational leaders encourage followers to think about creative ways to solve problems and welcome contributions even when they differ from established norms (DuBrin, 2016).

Individualized consideration is the fourth factor and describes leaders who listen to the follower's individual needs. The leader here coaches and advises the followers to support them to self-actualize (Northouse, 2016). They foster an enabling environment that helps the followers in their own individual uniqueness by deploying an appropriate leadership style that matches the needs of the follower. Transformational leaders, therefore, do not just think about their followers as a group but also seek to understand the individual followers in their uniqueness so that they are better equipped to develop and nurture them towards achieving their unique goals while integrating these individual goals with a common purpose (Judge & Bono, 2000).

Servant Leadership

Greenleaf (1973) promotes that servant leadership is a leadership approach whereby the leader holistically develops the followers by engaging their ethical, relational, emotional, and spiritual dimensions based on the leader's own altruistic and ethical values. The followers are empowered to grow to their full capacity. Servant leadership stewards the followers and their organizations without emphasis either but focusing on how the two can be empowered in a mutually reinforcing manner and with long-term sustainability in mind (Eva et al, 2019). Van Dierendonck et al (2014) distinguish between servant leadership and transformational leadership by highlighting that while servant leadership's primary goal is the followers' psychological needs, transformational leadership prioritizes the organizational goals while the followers' needs are secondary. Thus while it is followers' first and organizational goals second for servant leadership, for transformational leadership, it is organizational goals first and then followers' needs second (Sendjaya, 2015). Eva et al advance that the distinction between servant leadership and other forms of leadership is that the focus of servant leaders emanates from a strength of character that makes their motives for leadership others-rather-than-self-oriented, they entrench interaction with their followers driven by a concern for the well-being of the wider community and further seeing themselves as trustees with a responsibility to cultivate the followers to the best they can ever be.

There are many dimensions of servant leadership that have been advanced. They include healing of emotions, community value-creation, empowerment, ethical behavior, prioritizing and supporting followers towards their growth and success, being authentic, being morally responsible, transformatively being influential, being transcendentally spiritual, voluntarily subordinating, accountable, allowing others to step into the front while one steps back, being courageous, stewardship and interpersonal acceptance (Liden et al, 2008; Liden et al, 2015; Sendjaya et al, 2008; Sendjaya, et al, 2019; van Dierendonck et al 2017; van Dierendonck & Nuijeten, 2011).

A synthesis of research gaps

There exists an overlap among the various value-based leadership approaches; with all of them advancing the need for focusing on the well-being of the people and their communities. The differences across the various value-based leadership approaches are mainly the emphasis given under each range and the prioritizing of the two facets of the leader-follower dyad. Credibility, as described by Kouzes and Posner (2011) to constitute honesty, inspiration, and competence, is clearly a connecting theme whereby if a leader is to be authentic, they of necessity must be credible; authentic leadership entails inspiring trust and confidence, transparent relationships and being clear about one's strengths (competencies) and weaknesses. Ethical leadership and its moral person, moral manager, and justice orientation dimensions underscore the place of credibility. Idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration are all tenets conveyed under credibility in many respects. The dimensions of servant leadership such as ethical behavior, empowerment, moral responsibility, transformative influence, accountability, and community value-creation are all closely related to a leader's credibility. In spite of the recurrent credibility theme, several gaps can be pinpointed in past studies and theoretical propositions.

First, many of the studies lean heavily towards Western contexts thus limiting their generalizability due to the cultural nuances in leadership. While Kouzes and Posner (2011) do not involve any African participants in their study, Eva et al (2019) reviewed relatively few studies conducted in Africa. This introduces one of the gaps that the present study seeks to address. Secondly, many of the past studies mention the dimensions that are related to the respective value-based leadership approaches without a deeper interrogation from lived experiences of the leaders as to what those dimensions, and in particular, those that speak to credibility are about (Avolio, 1999; Bass, 1998; Brown et al, 2005; Burns, 1978; Gardner et al, 2005; Greenleaf, 1973; Northouse, 2016; van Dierendonck et al, 2014). A qualitative study provides an opportunity to interrogate the lived experiences of the participants so as to construct their understanding and experience of credibility. Third, credibility lacks a well-developed theoretical underpinned by data that has been empirically obtained, the context notwithstanding; hence the current study attempts to empirically obtain data and make a theoretical proposition toward continued knowledge build-up in the area of credibility. Finally, the moral aspect of credibility introduces many considerations such as psychological capacities in authentic leadership discussions (Northouse, 2016), moral symbolization and moral internalization in regards to ethical leadership (Mayer et al, 2012), and moral responsibility and transcendental spirituality in servant leadership (Sendjaya et al, 2008; Sendjaya, et al, 2019) which are on themselves complex dimensions; the effect being to broaden the construct in a way that makes its analysis. While the complexity makes be reflective of the reality of leadership, focusing on one aspect like credibility and gaining insights from leaders' experiences and articulation is helpful in the integrative and incremental build-up of knowledge.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study utilized the grounded theory design. According to Terrell (2016), in grounded research, the research moves past the phenomenon to develop a set of best practices or guidelines or a theory based on data collected from a research process. This study, therefore, sought to develop a theory on the making of credible leaders.

Population

The population in this study was the leaders considered to be credible in Kenya.

Selected Sample

Three leaders known to the researcher were selected as the sample. Leader 1 is a Senior Consultant in a private medium consulting practice that equips organizational leaders in strategy and capacity development. He also holds an influential leadership position in his local church. Leader 2 is a Public Policy Specialist and heads a department in a private university in Kenya. She (Leader 2) is an advisor to many women who hold or aspire to hold elective leadership positions in Kenya. Leader 3 is a Governance expert who has held senior Government positions and currently leads a pro-family Non-Governmental Organization.

Sampling method

Purposive sampling of a convenient nature was used to select the sample. This was because the study was predicated on an assumption that the participants would be credible leaders themselves for their responses to be relevant. The participants, therefore, needed to be fairly known to the researcher or his networks for them to provide the kind of insights that were expected in the study.

Type of data

Qualitative data was obtained through open-ended semi-structured interview questions.

Data collection methods

Interviews were conducted and recorded on the Zoom online meeting platform. Each interview lasted an average of 45 minutes. Before the interviews, the researcher explained to the participants the purpose and nature of the study, the harm, and benefits of participating, and further sought informed consent. Once the consent was obtained, the participants were requested to have their videos on so as to create a proximity effect and provide the researcher with the benefit of making observations including gestural during the interviews. The researcher also took notes during the call on his laptop. Audio recordings and transcripts from the semi-structured interviews were obtained and password protected during storage.

Instrument pre-testing

The questions were first tested on a colleague at work who is a credible leader in his own right. The researcher corrected potential misunderstandings before using the interview guide with the actual participants.

Data analysis

The responses were categorized into common themes on an Excel spreadsheet and manually coded. The themes and patterns were identified and an understanding of these patterns was sought. The recorded interviews were repeatedly reviewed to obtain further insights that may have been missed when taking notes during the interviews. The insights were assigned to the identified themes and additional ones were captured in a separate group.

Ethical considerations

Informed consent was sought from every participant before the start of the interview including the express authority to record the interviews. The researcher explained the benefits and potential harm of participating in the research, the highlighted specific harm being that it might have led them to relive past uncomfortable situations. The participants were assured that their anonymity would be assured and that the recordings and notes would be password protected, stored securely, and would not be shared with any other party. The interviews only started when the participants had been explained to and voluntarily consented to their start.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data from the interviews was tabulated and analyzed on an Excel spreadsheet while participants and emerging themes were manually coded. The participants were designated as L1 for Leader 1, L2 for Leader 2, and L3 for Leader 3 to preserve their anonymity. The results are presented and discussed as follows:

Definition of a credible leader

Each participant was asked to give their definition of a credible leader. Table 1 below summarizes the responses from each participant.

Table 1: How do you define a credible leader?

Participant	Definition of a credible leader
L1	Honest+ Genuine++ Empathetic Accountable*** Someone others can look up to Someone people identify with not just one who follows the written code+++ Can be sought for advice^^^ Approachable+++ Liked by people+++ Can effectively work with and in teams Inspires people Goes the extra mile in their work
L2	Trustworthy+ Does what they say and say what they do*** Has expertise and knowledge in a certain field^^^ Dependable+
L3	Is authentic++ Is real++ Is secure and does not worry about their limitations being known Is confident Articulate their areas of strength Honest+ Connects with others+++ Knows when they are to be on the front and when to take the back seat Is focused Are gender-blind Are skillful^^^ and lead from the integrity of heart ***

The following emerged as the key themes that characterize the definition of a credible leader

+ Honesty

++ Authenticity

+++ Good interpersonal relationships and connections

^^^ Skilful

*** Integrity, consistency, and accountability

The participants' definitions of a credible leader emphasize honesty, authenticity, interpersonal relationships, skillfulness, integrity, consistency, and accountability. It is noteworthy that these attributes are similar to the definitions derived from the work of Kouzes and Posner (2011) where at the top of the most cited attributes associated with credible leadership are honesty, inspiration, and competence. The definitions also align with Brown et al (2005) moral person and moral manager dimensions of ethical leadership. Further, strong internal values, morals, and a focus on followers characterize transformational leadership (Avolio, 1999; Bass, 1998; Burns, 1978). Indeed both authentic leadership and servant leadership espouse similar values.

Honesty, authenticity, integrity, consistency, and accountability

The participants used various words to emphasize the moral and ethical aspects of their definition of a credible leader. According to Brown et al (2005), ethical leaders exhibit the moral person dimension, which speaks of the leader's honesty, trustworthiness, altruism, and character, as well as the moral manager aspect, which speaks of their deliberate efforts to entrench ethical behavior through rewards and reinforcement. Transformational, authentic, and servant leadership approach all underscore the integral place of leaders' morals and values as critical levers towards their being influenced towards the realization of the common good.

Good interpersonal relationships and connections

Brown and Trevino (2006) advance that ethical leadership fosters a climate of trust between the leaders and the followers and even among the followers themselves; trust is integral to good working relationships which ultimately lead to productivity and a general state of well-being. Mayer et al (2012) buttress the issue of healthy relationships by noting that ethical leaders act as a deterrent to task, relational and procedural conflicts that emanate from unethical behavior as such behavior is punished by the leader. Transformational and servant leadership all emphasize the leader-follower dyad to be cemented by deep and caring connections to each other for both individual and organizational goals to be accomplished. Avolio and Gardner (2005) underscore the relational nature of authentic leadership further noting that this is a core component when it comes to motivation and people development. In conclusion, it is clear that a credible leader must of necessity be good at fostering good interpersonal relationships.

Skillful

L3 quoted Psalm 78:72 (NIV) which speaks of David having led the Israelites with the integrity of heart and skillfulness. He noted that this scripture summarizes the intricate balance that a credible leader needs to exhibit; must be both rooted in integrity and hence all-rounded in character as well as skill. Skilfulness connects to competence as advanced by Kouzes and Posner (2011). It is evident from the participants' responses that a credible leader must be well-versed and have the appropriate expertise in the area where he purports to be a leader, otherwise, when knowledge is demanded of such a leader, their credibility is at stake if they do not demonstrate it.

Why do the leaders consider themselves credible?

When asked why they consider themselves credible leaders, the participants responded as summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Why do you consider yourself a credible leader?

Participant	Why I consider myself as a credible leader
L1	The team looks up to me+++ I go the extra mile to pursue and maintain relationships with my followers+ Followers seek my support even long after we are no longer working in the same organization++
L2	Not sure if I am one Pursue unity Keeping own word^^ Appreciation of other people's points of view Empathetic and respectful Influenced many++ Recognize the need to develop self and continually sharpen skills Inspire people in what they are doing+++ Recognize that I may not please everybody and have to earn their trust Maintain high levels of integrity and trust** I appreciate that it is a life-long journey
L3	Self-aware; know my strengths and weaknesses Keeps his word^^ Is accountable** Not shy to deploy strengths when appropriate and hold back when unsure about own strengths

The following emerged as key themes in light of the leaders' responses as to why they consider themselves credible:

+ Pursuit of relationships with followers

++ Influencing and supporting followers

+++ Being inspirational and looked up to for direction by followers

^^ Keeping own word

** Accountability, trust, and integrity

Most of the participants mentioned interpersonal relationships, integrity, trust, and accountability as the key basis for considering themselves credible. It is interesting to note that Kouzes and Posner (2011) advance that it is one's followers that determine whether they can trust and follow their leader or not. When the followers determine that the leader is credible, they give their full commitment and dedication to the common purpose and when they do not, they are half-heartened and demonstrate mere compliance. It is also noteworthy that none of the participants cited their skills and abilities as part of the reasons why they consider themselves credible.

Relationship with followers.

It is interesting to note that both the participants' definitions of credible and the reasons they associated with why they believe they are credible leaders were in synchrony. The participants mentioned their pursuit of a relationship with followers, influencing and inspiring them as well as being looked up to by the followers as some of the aspects that made them consider themselves credible leaders. This emphasizes the relational element of credible leadership as advanced by Kouzes and Posner (2011) who note that leaders earn trust by being involved, being open, reaching out to their constituents, knowing and being known, and even shaking their hands.

Keeping own word, accountability, trust, and integrity

Just like in their definitions of a credible leader, the participants underscore the place of integrity, keeping one's words, being accountable, trustworthy, and consistent as some of the ways they have lived out their credibility. Kouzes and Posner (2011) advance credible leaders can be counted on to fulfill what they have promised even when that is at a great cost and inconvenience to them.

Recent examples where the participants had demonstrated credibility

Each of the participants was asked to share recent examples of how they had demonstrated their credibility. Table 3 below summarizes the participants' responses.

Table 3: What are some of the recent examples of why you consider yourself credible?

Participant	Recent examples of how I have demonstrated credibility
L1	Have maintained relationships with past followers to the extent that several even recently have been reaching out to me for recommendation letters.
	Have been recently asked to take up leadership positions that speak to the endorsement of trust and credibility by others+
L2	Recently offered to support a needy student in the University where I teach even when I did not know where to get school fees; I believed in the course and followed through to meet the need even when it meant sacrificing my own financial comfort++
L3	I refused to use my public office for personal gain even when I was offered opportunities so long as they contradicted my commitment to integrity, accountability, and public trust++
	I tactfully navigated through sensitive impropriety attempts
	I have worked behind the scenes and others have taken the credit for my work++
	I was due to be appointed to a senior public office but because of my uncompromising stand for integrity, my appointment was canceled at the last minute which I handled graciously++

From the responses from the participants, two key themes emerged, namely

+ Endorsement of trust and credibility by others

++ Readiness to sacrifice for others, own values, and for a common purpose.

Credibility demands that a leader is self-aware and remains on the journey of self-discovery (Kouzes & Posner, 2011). Authentic leaders are also self-aware and self-regulated (Walumbwa et al, 2008). The responses demonstrated that the participants were aware of and deliberate about their actions so that they remain consistent with their personal beliefs and values.

Endorsement of trust and credibility by others

According to Gardner et al (2005), authenticity, as demonstrated by the exercise of high moral standards and ethics, will create perceptions of altruism and virtue among the followers causing them to provide the leader with greater leeway for the positive influence which in turn cause both the followers and the leader to develop further in their authenticity. The participants' responses relating to being given responsibilities of trust demonstrate that credibility begets credibility.

Readiness to sacrifice for others, own values, and for a common purpose

Credibility is about selflessness and being of value to others and the common purpose even when that costs them dearly. Salicru (2017) notes that true leaders are selfless, humble, and focused on the good of others above their own. All the value-based leadership approaches and especially ethical and servant leadership approach position the good of others and the community at large centrally beyond that of a leader (Brown & Trevino, 2006; Greenleaf, 1973).

Experiences that have shaped the participants to be credible leaders.

The leaders were asked to share the experiences they believed had shaped them to be credible leaders. Their responses have been summarized in Table 4 below.

Table 4: What experiences have shaped you to become a credible leader?

Participant	Experiences that have shaped me to be a credible leader
L1	Working with and in teams+ Holding leadership positions Mentors++ Personal drive e.g. furthering my education from a high school certificate to a degree and professional accounting certificates holder+++
L2	Personal belief that everybody has the capacity to be great Mentors and people who have believed in me++ Personal failures+++ Seeing others fail and rise up again++ Personal reflection on how far I have come and the destiny I want to get to+++
L3	Growing up in the village which shaped my sense of collective good and vision; "my primary school was built through collective efforts of neighbors".+ My Christian faith, our home was next to a church, which makes me see myself as ultimately accountable to God as well as makes me live with an eternal rather than a temporal view hence making me want to be credible+++

The key emerging themes from the participants' responses on experiences that had shaped them to be credible leaders are highlighted as follows:

+ Collective responsibility and contexts

++ Influence of mentors

+++ Personal beliefs, reflections on own life, and drive

Diverse experiences shape leadership generally. Both good and bad leaders have experiences that shape them. Padilla et al (2007) point to the influences of role models, parents, and early life influences and supportive contexts to the emergence of toxic leaders. Authentic, ethical, transformational and servant leaders are also shaped by the exposures and the contexts they come under so as to exercise these respective approaches. For example, authenticity in leaders is developed by their life experiences and the importance they attach to them (Northouse, 2016). Avolio et al (2009) advance that early life experiences and the influence of parents are key determinants to not only the behavior that a child will exhibit but also the types of leadership roles that they take up in the future. The responses by the participants thus are consistent with past studies.

Collective responsibility and context

The participants observed that the contexts in which they had grown and worked had influenced them toward being ethical leaders. This is in alignment with past studies including an assertion by Gardner et al (2005) who alludes to the dependent relationship between the organizational context and leadership by asserting that while leaders shape the

context, they are also shaped by the context. Gardner further notes that uncertainty, inclusive, ethical, and positively oriented strength-based organizational contexts can directly influence the leaders' and followers' self-awareness and hence moderate the relationship the outcomes between the two.

Influence of mentors

The participants highlighted the influence of people they looked up to, persons who believed in them, and people who challenged them as central to their development as credible leaders. The social learning, attachment, and resource-control theories all concur in advancing the place of role-modeling, observation, reinforcement, and nurture in shaping leaders' ethical or unethical dispositions right from childhood. Montroy et al (2016) posit that parental input is a major determinant of how leaders make decisions in later life. Lastly, there is a general consensus that morality develops over a process where people grow from self-centeredness to being prosocial or otherwise depending on environmental and societal norms (Shakeel et al, 2019; Van Wart, 2014; Weaver et al, 2005).

Personal beliefs, reflections on own life, and drive

Self-awareness, self-discovery, self-regulation, self-confidence, and self-leadership are all attributes that undergird credible and authentic leaders (Kouzes & Posner, 2011; Walumbwa et al, 2008). It is clear that the participants were guided by a deep sense of personal values that become their moral compass when faced with dilemmas.

What causes leaders to lose credibility?

The participants were asked to highlight their opinions on what causes leaders to lose credibility. Each of them provided responses as summarized in Table 5 below:

Table 5: What causes leaders to lose credibility?

Participant	What makes leaders lose credibility
L1	Integrity gaps+ Misappropriation of power, influence, and wealth++
L2	When they entertain the excesses that come with power Being judgmental Dishonesty+ Insecurity to acknowledge the support they have received from others in their pursuit of success Not acknowledging failure and being ready to start all over again Not being accountable+ Lack of empathy Favoritism and discrimination+ Double standards+ Corruption+ Not having trust in others which makes some refuse to delegate+++
L3	Loss of focus on self, what matters, and what one was meant to pursue++ Pretending to know when one does not+++ Lack of required skills and abilities+++

The responses revealed that the following were the key themes related to why leaders lose credibility:

+ Loss of integrity

++ Misappropriation of power and influence

+++ Failure to admit weaknesses

Kouzes and Posner (2011) note that credibility is the foundation of leadership. It is notable that the participants were invariably emphatic about the automatic loss of credibility when leaders lose integrity, misappropriate power and influence, and do not admit when they fail or cannot step back to allow more endowed persons to exercise their competence.

Loss of integrity

Salicru (2017) notes that integrity helps to build trust and inspire reciprocal ethical behavior from followers. George and Sims (2007) promote that without integrity, leaders should not be trusted and further that followers do not judge leaders by what they say but by what they do when under pressure. If they cannot hold up to their professions, then they lose credibility.

Misappropriation of power and influence

Walumbwa et al (2008) highlight a tension or even a paradox for credibility and authenticity in leadership: on the one side the leader is to allow others to take the center stage and focus on their needs while on the other being true to self requires that a leader, given the inherent demands of their role, they be visible and certainly also have their own needs. This necessitates credible leaders to determine like Jesus to take the very nature of a servant (Philippians 2:7, NIV) and eschew the trappings of power and influence knowing that these have the capacity of destroying their credibility if allowed to muster the leader.

Failure to admit weaknesses

Kouzes and Posner (2011) promote that followers are willing to continue following a leader who admits mistakes and makes amends for them. Recognition of one's weaknesses and willingness to admit them is a demonstration of self-awareness and regulation which are all attributes espoused by value-based leadership approaches. Woolfe (2002) notes that the more a leader rises, the more the impact of their mistakes and hence the greater the need for them to assume a humble disposition further noting that while humility can be risky it pays off with increased credibility.

Impacts of leaders' credibility on relationship with followers

The participants were asked to highlight the impact that their credibility has brought about in the relationship with their followers. Table 6 contains a summary of their responses:

Table 6: What impacts do you think your credibility has had on the relationship with your followers?

Participant	Impact credibility has had on relationship with followers
L1	Results to followers upholding integrity+ Better followers' performance+ Personal drive inculcated on the followers+ Commitment to good customer service at the place of work+
L2	Followers feel empowered++ They easily collaborate and uphold a team spirit+++ Embrace the need for unity and have changed the culture of selfishness+++
L3	Respectful relationships+++ The leader is well received and honored Has increased opportunities for both++ Is looked up to as a role model+ Leaders and followers are challenged and inspired to be their best++

The key themes arising from the question on what impact the participants' credibility had brought about in the relationships with their followers are highlighted below:

+ Leader being looked up to as a role model

++Reciprocal trust and inspiration to be better between the leader and the follower

+++ Team spirit and sense of unity

As Northouse (2016) posited, leaders affect followers and followers affect leaders; observation of a cycle of authenticity and credibility in the leader begetting authenticity and credibility in the followers. The participants' responses buttress this assertion by highlighting the aspect of being looked up to by their followers as role models, reciprocal trust between them, and a sense of unity and team spirit.

Role-modelling

Brown and Trevino (2006) found out that employees that had proximal ethical role models were more inclined to demonstrate ethical behavior than those who did not. This finding is in concurrence with the social learning theory as advanced in Bandura (1986). Bandura's social learning theory postulates that observation, modeling, and imitation is the major way in which people learn. The participants' assertion that their credibility had heightened their followers' perceptions of them as role models are thus well-anchored in past research.

Mutual trust, co-operation, team spirit, and unity

Kouzes and Posner (2011) advance that credible leaders include and respect other people's ideas, pursue the interest of others ahead of theirs and have the moral authority to lead their followers without the need to control them yet in a manner that inspires them. Northouse (2016) promotes that the inspirational motivation of transformational leaders promotes a team spirit and selfless pursuits by the group members.

V. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Summary of findings

Definition of a credible leader and ways in which credibility is demonstrated

The study found out that a credible leader is defined as one who is honest, authentic, has good interpersonal relationships and connects well with their followers, is skillful, and has integrity. Further, credible leaders will deliberately pursue relationships with their followers, will influence and support them, are inspirational, and are looked up to by their followers for direction and to keep their word. Accountability and trust are central to both the definition and the demonstration of credible leadership. In addition, credible leaders gain the endorsement of their credibility and trust which is often demonstrated through being appointed to positions of trust. Finally, credible leaders live out their credibility through sacrifice, a deep commitment to living their values even when it is costly and inconveniencing directed by the pursuit of a common and greater purpose than their own interests.

Experiences that have shaped the participants to be credible leaders

The key experiences that shape credibility were highlighted as contexts that espouse the need for the pursuit of collective responsibility and the greater good, the influence of mentors and role models, and personal beliefs and reflections that develop over time. Early life experiences were also implied to have a role in shaping the participants' credible leadership.

What causes leaders to lose credibility?

It was found that loss of integrity, misuse of power and influence, and failure to admit mistakes and weaknesses were the key ways in which leaders lose credibility.

Impacts of leaders' credibility on relationship with followers

The study also found that when leaders are credible, their followers look up to them as role models, there is the development of reciprocal trust and inspiration between them and their followers, and team spirit and unity are fostered. Ultimately, the relationship between the leaders and the followers is strengthened leading to better results in light of individual and organizational goals.

Conclusions

The overarching research question which was to explore how credible leaders are made was amply answered. From the responses, it is clear that credible leadership ought to portray values, mindful of the state of the relationships between the leaders and the followers and hence the leaders being deliberate to live out their values in a way that not only influences their followers but also makes them look and reach out to their leaders for support and inspiration. Secondly, the ordering of the responses by the participants shows that while the competence of leaders is part of the credibility, it cements it after personal and interpersonal values are in place giving credence to an anonymous saying that advances that "people do not care how much you know until they know how much you care". It also buttresses findings by Kouzes and Posner (2011) that competence was a much lower consideration than honesty and related attributes. Finally, credibility is shown to beget

credibility: credible leaders are more likely to influence their followers to be credible through role-modeling and inspiration towards a greater and common purpose.

Recommendations and areas for future research

The study was qualitative and hence would benefit from greater insights that can be derived from a mixed-methods approach where aspects like ranking of priority attributes in defining credibility would be employed. Future research can thus employ a mixed-methods approach to this study. Secondly, though the findings shed light on the perspectives of what credibility constitutes and how credible leaders are formed from the views of Kenyan leaders, the sample is fairly small for generalizability. Further, convenience sampling may have skewed the findings. A study with a bigger sample of participants randomly chosen is recommended so as to test the findings. The study explored credibility from the leaders' perspective and hence the possibility of favorable reporting or even a common source bias; it is recommended that future studies explore the construct from both sides of the leader-follower dyad to make the findings more representative of the reality. For example, it would be more insightful to hear the views of followers on what impact the credibility of their leaders has had on their relationship with them. Finally, controlling for demographic factors may help to gather insights as to their effects on credibility given that life experiences were cited as some of what has shaped the participants' credibility. For example, does age and gender matter in the making of a credible leader? This study has provided a springboard for further research based on these recommendations and others that can be inferred from a critical review of its findings.

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