Significance of Authenticity in Developing a Successful Leadership Practice

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Abstract

Many organizations in different sectors have experienced challenging moments related to changing business environment due to competition, new disruptive technologies, and tough economic times. The presence of leaders who may not easily pass the test of credibility make the situation worse and this perhaps is what has resulted in compounded problems of leadership in Africa today. This paper therefore explores the relevance of authenticity in regards to leadership by looking at how authentic leadership is developed, common characteristics as well as qualities of authentic leaders. The scholarly views are then married with biblical perspectives in a way that brings out the relevance of credibility based on character and values of leaders with examples from scripture. Authentic leadership being a process takes intentional effort, dedication and commitment oiled by emotional intelligence through self-regulation and self-awareness. To become a successful leader in practice, the ability to inspire others, leading by example and consistently observing moral principles in word and deed are some of the suggested ways towards achieving authenticity. Recommendation for authentic leadership qualities including high regard for values such as honesty, integrity, trustworthiness and care for others as they influence the followers towards easily believing in their leaders

Key Words: *Leadership, authenticity, emotional intelligence, scripture, values, behaviour*

1. Introduction

Leadership according to Silva (2016) is the process of interactive influence that occurs when, people accept a person as their leader in order to achieve common goals. In order for this to happen, Kretzschmar (2002) indicate that effective leaders should exercise authority and influence over others while having an impact on their follower's lives, situations, systems and structures. Authentic leadership is not the same thing as general leadership even though the two have some things in common. According to Hughes and Beatty (2005), strategic leadership can be described as a situation where leaders think, act and influence others in ways that promote sustainable competitive advantage for the organization.

However, authentic leadership development is according to Avolio and Luthans (2006), a process that involves situations, events and experiences in life that have effects on how leaders perceive who they really are. These moments could be from childhood experiences, in the work place, at social events and even while going about leisure activities. It is no wonder that Quist (2009) note that two of the qualities of an authentic leader are the ability to demonstrate competency and honourable intent. Oginde (2011) also suggest that followers

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expect their leaders to have some qualities like listening and communicating ability, high integrity and character. These in the end, positively affect the relation between the leader and followers.

The purpose of this paper therefore is to explore the existing literature on authentic leadership from both scholarly and biblical context with a view to demonstrating how to achieve successful leadership practice. Based on the review, a conclusion is drawn and recommendations made in order to serve a reference point for leaders, more so in an era where credibility appear to be on trial.

2. Significance of Authenticity in developing a Successful Leadership Practice

In seeking to demonstrate the significance of authenticity for a successful leadership practice development, various dimensions have been factored and related literature reviewed. Leadership effectiveness is founded on the basis of authenticity and scholars have articulated how that can be developed over time. In the same measure, exploring the characteristics of authentic leaders helps in offering a glimpse of expected behaviour with the aim of serving as a yardstick for others. Moreover, behaviour is linked to qualities that could be either inborn or acquired over time through learning and practice and a section on this has been set aside in order to offer sufficient clarity to both leaders and followers. Given that the bible is considered a rich source of content on matters values, leadership and followership, scripture on relevant examples has been considered and backed up with scholarly context.

2.1 Authentic Leadership Development

According to Avolio and Gardner (2005) leadership has always been difficult in challenging times and that alone call for renewed focus on what genuine leadership really is. However, in turbulent and challenging times, scholars agree that relevant strategies on how to develop authentic leadership for desired outcomes are required. According to Quist (2009), being in a new situation or role with bigger responsibilities and more so during a time of crisis, may cause a leader not to know what to expect. In this regard, authentic leadership development according to Avolio and Gardner (2005) happens through increased self-awareness, self-regulation and positive modelling that leaders demonstrate to their followers.

Authentic leadership can be looked at from a point of being true to self and Novicevic, Harvey, Buckley, Radford, and Evans (2006) attest to this by noting that it's the idea of being oneself or true to oneself and is often associated with taking responsibility for personal freedom and organizational obligations. Agreeing with this view, Haskins and Smith (2004) but from a strategic leadership point of view, suggest that it is about those with the overall responsibilities in an organization which includes their character and what they do. According to Tracy (2014), leadership in general may refer to the ability to elicit extraordinary performance from ordinary people but is also about the ability to get and influence followers.

To add to the above, Winston and Patterson (2006) define a leader as a person who identifies, trains and influences other people with diverse competencies and gifts towards achieving the organizations mission both willingly and enthusiastically. This is the point at which credible leadership start to separate with general leadership since for a leader to be able to influence and identify talents in others, more so followers, they need to have certain qualities. One of the major components of emotional intelligence according to Goleman (2000) is self-

awareness which he describes as the ability to identify strengths and weaknesses and having the confidence to talk about them. Indeed as Klenke (2005) notes one of the contexts in which authentic leadership and followership are embedded is the complex organization, which is often characterized by chaos, complexity and uncertainty.

2.2 Characteristics of Authentic Leaders

Emotional intelligence is argued to be one of the most important elements of authentic leadership. This perspective is supported by Avolio and Luthans (2006) who observe that a fundamental starting point for authentic leadership development is self-awareness. According to Ilies, Morgeson, and Nahrgand (2005), awareness as a component of authenticity refers to one's awareness and trust in own personal characteristics, values, motives and feelings. Additionally, contradictory self-aspects do influence ones behavior, thoughts, feelings and actions and it is this knowledge that eventually become essential qualities of authentic leadership.

Contrasting the above observations against how Paul and Peter in the book of Galatians 2:11 (NIV) bring out the aspects of values, beliefs, genuineness, reliability and trustworthiness. The bible offer that, when Peter had arrived in Antioch, Paul stood against him to his face because he was blameworthy; he was not consistent in his behavior and would vary his stand based on the company he was in. According to Engelbrecht, Heine, and Mahembe (2014), an employee tends to trust a leader if he or she is trustworthy in the first place and if he or she displays characteristics like honesty, generosity, kindness and acceptance.

According to Mare, Meyer, Coetzee, and Roux (2015), an openness to learn continuously enables one to adapt to changing situations and this learning is based on the credible leadership development. To support this view, Avolio and Luthans (2006) suggests that in a time when change is the only constant, a leader's self-concept cant remain fixed and authentic leadership development is also about changing one's cycle of life development. According to Avolio and Gardner (2005), when leaders foster the authenticity of their followers, they in turn achieve some level of authenticity that contributes to their well-being and as a result, attainment of sustainable performance. The benefits of such actions on the part of a leader is according to Quist (2009) experienced during times of turbulence when leaders are expected to build their trust on integrity. It is such times when trust with colleagues and followers rise and fall on the perceived integrity of a leader.

Additionally, Datta (2015) agree with the notion that authentic leadership development leads to trust and positively affects group performance. Avolio and Luthans (2006) support this argument by suggesting that authentic leadership is also about focussing on positive moments and not spending too much energy and attention on negative moments. According to Ilies et al. (2005), authentic leaders are concerned with building their followers strengths, increasing their thinking while remaining aware of the values and beliefs that drive them.

Additionally, such leaders are self-confident, genuine, reliable and trustworthy. The importance of trust as a quality for authentic leaders has also been supported by Simons (1999) who confirms that trust is necessary for risk taking. Strategic leaders have a high degree of trust with those around them a relationship that is useful both in good times and when there is turbulence. In terms of values, integrity goes well with trustworthiness and according to Quist (2009) the value comes in handy during times of turbulence.

As suggested by Sharma and Sehrawat (2014), emotional intelligence is more important than intellect and other managerial competencies while Goleman (2013) suggests that it is an increasingly indicative reason for stellar performance. This happens especially when one rises up the ranks as opposed to cognitive and technical capabilities. According to Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, and Peterson (2008), an advanced level of moral development is a requirement for achievement of leader authenticity. This development includes being consistent in both word and deed and as Goffee and Jones (2005) suggest, everyone understands the need for consistency when establishing authenticity and leaders must go beyond paying lip service.

These views are supported by Klenke (2007) who posit that a key factor contributing towards becoming an authentic leader is self-awareness which includes values, emotions, identity and goals. In addition, self-efficacy is another important aspect of credible leadership as it represents a leader's self-perceived capabilities to perform cognitive and behavioural functions. In agreeing with this perspective, Avolio and Gardner (2005) note that authentic leadership development encompasses an inherent moral component.

2.3 Qualities of Authentic Leaders

According to Northouse (2016), one of the primary functions of a leader is to produce change and this is directly tied to improved and sustainable performance. Datta (2015) agree with this theory by noting that employee's perception of their leaders authentic behaviour serves as the strongest single predictor of their job satisfaction. In this regard, Avolio and Luthans (2006) suggest that self-awareness can be reinforced through self-reflection and taking advantage of trigger moments that are both planned and unplanned. Mare et al. (2015) argue that authentic leadership is about both competence and character on the part of the leader and some of the required skills are business, interpersonal and communication skills. On character, they suggest that aspects like respect, trust and behaviour driven by values are necessary.

According to Quist (2009) organizations in times of challenges require leaders who are credible and this includes ability to act with honourable intent and commit self and others to continuous learning. To support the argument of trust as a necessary skill in authentic leadership, Mineo (2014) argue that the trust that leaders place in those they lead, enables both the leader and follower to excel. In addition, the foundation of a great workplace is created by organizational credibility, respect and fairness all of which lead to trust.

Suggestions by Goleman (2013) indicate that people with high levels of emotional intelligence have qualities that are similar to those of effective leaders. Such qualities also help leaders to establish what gaps their followers have and how to build or close them up. In support of this perspective, Avolio and Luthans (2006) suggests that part of being a great coach implies an ability to translate events into meaningful learning to those who have not yet experienced the same. In addition, Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, and Walumbwa (2005) suggest that through increased self-awareness, self-regulation and positive modelling, authentic leaders foster the development of authenticity in their followers.

2.4 Biblical Perspectives of Credible Leadership

There is an interesting perspective by Quist (2009) that two of the qualities of an authentic leader are the ability to demonstrate competency and honourable intent and in this regard, the bible notes that Paul when writing to Galatians introduces himself to them as a credible preacher of the gospel. In Galatians 1:1 (NIV) it is stated that "Paul, an Apostle, not from men and not through man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead". This speaks of someone who has been transformed through a process and a series of events as suggested by Avolio and Luthans (2006) and as such, whatever he would then preach to the Galatians, would be authentic. Indeed in verse 12 Paul add "And I did not receive it from man, nor did I learn it, except through the revelation of Jesus Christ" a point that underscores the importance of his earlier message in the introduction.

To support the argument of trust as a necessary skill in authentic leadership, Mineo (2014) argue that the trust that leaders place in those they lead, enables both the leader and follower to excel. Oginde (2011) note that followers expect their leaders to have some qualities like listening and communicating ability alongside high integrity and character. According to Ilies et al. (2005), authentic leaders are aware of their values and beliefs, are self-confident and genuine. However, that is not the impression we get from Galatians 2: 12 (NIV) where Paul note that the cause of his confrontation with Peter was indeed the fact the Peter would eat with the Gentiles but as soon as Jews arrive, he would withdraw and separate himself from them in fear of the circumcised.

The inconsistent behaviors of Peter does not therefore reflect the perspectives shared by Ilies et al. (2005) in that those close to him indeed got influenced by his pretense as seen in Galatians 2:13 (NIV) where it is noted that "the other Jews consented to his pretenses, so that even Barnabas was led by them into that falseness". Mineo (2014) suggest that organizational credibility, respect and fairness all work together to strengthen the foundation of trust. Additionally, certain elements allow people to trust others and they include the leader's willingness to take risks and the ability to express thoughts and feelings. It can then be argued that Paul was confronting Peter for failing in character by being fearful of reprisals by Jews.

Paul's motive to confront Peter in front of everyone as per scriptures in Galatians 2:14, was meant to correct a wrong after having realized that Peter and company were not walking correctly by the truth of the Gospel. It is worth noting that Bass, Avolio, Jung, and Berson (2003) support this argument but from a transformational leadership point of view where they suggest that authentic leaders exhibit charismatic behaviours, arouse inspirational motivation, provide intellectual stimulation and treat staff with individualized consideration. According to Northouse (2016), one of the primary functions of a leader is to produce change and this is directly tied to improved and sustainable performance.. In this regard, Avolio and Luthans (2006) suggest that self-awareness can be reinforced through self-reflection and taking advantage of trigger moments that could be either planned or unplanned.

Research by Brackett, Rivers, and Salovey (2011) indicates that emotional intelligence includes an ability to identify emotions accurately and to use it for cognitive processes like reasoning, problem solving and interpersonal communication. Oginde (2011) also note that leaders must have the ability to listen intelligently to those with whom they work with, a skill that leads to positive impact on individuals and teams.

Such behaviours according to Oginde (2011) includes having room for opinions of others, providing space for innovation and encouraging positive feedback. This is further supported by Riggio and Reichard (2008) who noted that through training, accurate assessment of information and constructive feedback, emotional and social skills of leaders can be improved. Making reference to research, Kumar (2014) note that when two groups with identical IQ are compared, the one with higher levels of EQ tends to outperform the one with low levels. This goes to show that emotional intelligence does have an impact on the life of a leader especially when issues of performance and effectiveness are concerned.
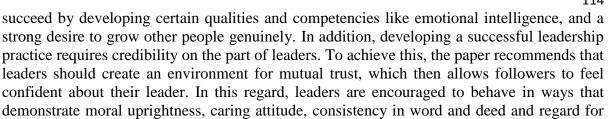
2.5 The Journey towards Becoming an Authentic Leader

Credible leadership is an issue that is attracting attention in many organizations and according to Goffee and Jones (2005), people want to be led by someone real, and will hardly follow a leader who does not invest in himself on matters leadership behaviour. However, much as credibility is an important aspect of great leadership, it is mostly misunderstood by many including the leaders themselves and in support of this view, Hemby (2017), note that credibility is critical in creating a climate of trust between leaders and followers. One may therefore argue that there is no point having continuous improvement on systems and not doing enough to improve interpersonal relationships.

Credibility for a leader is not something that happens accidentally, it is planned and one has to make deliberate efforts to grow and develop the skills and characteristics necessary for credible leadership. In agreeing with this view, Walumbwa et al. (2008) note that authentic leadership development is also about internalizing moral perspectives. Another emphasis is related to what Avolio and Luthans (2006) suggest that authentic leaders are deeply aware of how they think and behave, and that other people perceive them as being aware of their moral perspective, knowledge and strength. In addition, Klenke (2007) offers that spirituality, self-sacrifice which relate to sense of meaning and purpose, do actually act as precursors of authentic leadership. As indicated by Avolio and Gardner (2005), the moral perspective as part of authentic leadership involves ethical and transparent decision making where leaders drawn upon their moral capacity, courage, efficacy, and resilience to address ethical issues and sustain moral actions.

3. Conclusion

Based on the literature reviewed, this paper concludes that authentic leadership can be developed through increased self-awareness, self-regulation and a genuine care for others. Through certain qualities like trustworthiness, honesty, and consistency in following values, leaders become more effective in rallying behind followers while convincingly driving them towards goal attainment. Faithfulness and an ability to conduct oneself in a prudent manner equally earn a leader credibility and acceptance among followers and this is demonstrated in the scriptures. Additionally, being respectful to others and treating people fairly helps them to relate well with you as a leader while increasing cooperation and commitment. Being able to inspire others, leading by example, and ability to control one's emotions and impulses helps the followers to look up to the leader for support and direction which in the end enhances leadership effectiveness through influence. Credibility does not happen automatically just because one has leadership responsibilities; it is developed, nurtured, and matured like all other skills. The paper therefore recommends that leaders should enhance their ability to

succeed by developing certain qualities and competencies like emotional intelligence, and a strong desire to grow other people genuinely. In addition, developing a successful leadership practice requires credibility on the part of leaders. To achieve this, the paper recommends that leaders should create an environment for mutual trust, which then allows followers to feel confident about their leader. In this regard, leaders are encouraged to behave in ways that demonstrate moral uprightness, caring attitude, consistency in word and deed and regard for values like honesty, integrity, trustworthiness and humility.

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