

# Credible and Authentic Leadership Development in Organizations

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**Abstract:** Leadership practice that is founded on values is the new order in contemporary organizations that operate under complex and dynamic environments. The survival of such organizations requires the review of classical leadership theories and the adoption of newer approaches that have heightened the demand for effective leadership. Leaders' misdeeds such as those witnessed in Enron and WorldCom, hypocrisy in the pulpit, infidelity in the family unit, politics of deceit, and so on have dented the leader's image and the followers have lost the confidence they had in them. These developments justify the need to embrace authentic and credible leadership as an alternative leadership approach to rebuild followers' trust and sustain operations of the organizations. The principles of authenticity and credibility are more critical than ever before in the restoration of confidence to followers where credibility has waned. It is on this basis that this qualitative study was undertaken to understand authentic and credible leadership development. The objective of the study was to identify how credibility and authenticity relate and the values and qualities that leaders perceive as important for defining credible and authentic leaders. The study adopted a qualitative research design. Three congregants from a Baptist church located in Nairobi city, Kenya were interviewed for their views about leadership, differences between authenticity and credibility, qualities of credible leaders, how credible leadership can be developed, outcomes of credible leadership, and the followers' role in credible leadership development. The findings resonated with what is known in literature and in theory. The qualities that were found to define credible leaders included being forward-looking, visionary, compassionate, supportive, good listener, having integrity, being firm, being fair, and acting as role models. The fear instilled by leaders to the followers was found to be an impediment to the followers to effectively play their oversight role. The conclusion drawn was that credibility is a must-have tool for leaders to meaningfully engage their followers with a view to providing solutions to the problems faced at the workplace and addressing their needs. It smoothenes the relationship and provides an enabling environment where leaders and followers can freely engage.

**Keywords:** Credible Leadership, Authentic Leadership, Credibility, Authenticity, Values, Qualities

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## 1. Background

### 1.1. Introduction

The demands for higher standards in leadership practice based on values have in the recent past become a commonplace discussion in contemporary organizations. Leaders are today operating in new paradigms where the environment has become global, complex, and constantly changing. Uncertainty in the organizations is the new order and the future is blurred with no precise formula that can guarantee survival (Kouzes & Posner (2011). To circumvent

these challenges, academicians, theorists, and practitioners have reviewed classical leadership theories and recommended the adoption of newer ones that have heightened the demand for effective leadership [35]. Satisfaction of these demands requires shedding the older leadership styles and embracing atypical leadership practices that have not been tested [4, 29]. Northouse views leadership as an influence process between the leader and the followers [27]. Kouzes and Posner consider leadership as a construct that entails the building of relationships between individuals who have aspirations to lead and those willing to follow them [21]. To effect any meaningful leadership change requires an

appreciation of the social aspects of these relationships that explain how leaders connect with their constituents.

Hemby opines that one way to strengthen these relationships is to develop leadership approaches that build the followers' trust for their leaders [17]. Trust ensures a sustained interaction between leaders and followers which in turn translates opportunities into success [21]. Various authors have shown that the principles of authenticity and credibility in leadership espouse trustworthiness as a virtue [20, 28]. This, therefore, makes authentic and credible leadership approaches perfect choices that leaders can employ to build trust among followers in the era of uncertainty that today's organizations find themselves in. When followers trust their leaders, it means they perceive the leaders' actions as meant to benefit and not inflict damage on their well-being [12].

Unfortunately, leaders' misdeeds such as those witnessed in Enron and WorldCom, hypocrisy in the pulpit, infidelity in the family unit, politics of deceit, and so on have dented the leader's image and the followers have lost the confidence they had in them [1, 20, 36]. Additionally, digitization has reduced face-to-face interactions between leaders and followers and this also has been a cause of some of today's organizational leadership challenges [21]. As a consequence, mistrust and cynicism have engulfed followers' minds. Further, the need for authentic and credible leadership is justified and considered as the preferred leadership approach to rebuild followers' trust and sustain operations of the organizations [23]. Gardner et al. observe that authenticity as a leadership attribute is more critical than ever before in the restoration of confidence to followers where credibility has waned and more so with the turbulence being experienced in the organizations [14].

Genuine credible leadership is challenging and difficult to practice [17]. Effective organizational leadership is founded on sound character, trustworthiness, integrity, and credible actions and when these are dented, followers become skeptical and this may impede the organization's smooth operations. The degree of damage caused may be extensive and irreparable. Kouzes and Posner believe a majority of leaders in private and public institutions lack the mettle to navigate their organizations to prosperity in a globalized market [21]. Further, the authors wonder if the world today has any credible leaders left who can be trusted and relied upon by their followers. This paper is designed to address the credibility and authenticity issues being experienced in the world today and how such issues impact the leader-follower relationships.

## 1.2. Statement of the Problem

The print, electronic, and broadcast media is today awash with news of impropriety related to corruption, toxic leadership, violence, and a host of other ethical issues that bedevil organizations and hurt relationships between leaders and their constituents. While supporting this opinion, Hemby notes that articles published in the main print media in the recent past point to gaps in the credibility of leaders across

various disciplines [17]. Sahatjian and MacDougall observe that the current increase in corporate financial scandals, corruption-related cases, sexual malfeasance in the church leadership, bribes, employee manipulation, mistreatment, and other cases of misconduct have dented the trust of stakeholders and eroded brand loyalty among the consumers [30]. Additionally, employee commitment and retention have declined, and unanticipated costs such as penalties, fines, legal fees, and overall loss of revenue have increased.

Ribeiro et al. suggest that leadership is a critical factor that organizations can employ to navigate these crises because of the power to influence and enhance social relationships within the organization [29]. Ardaa et al. observe that in the midst of this chaos, organizations need leadership approaches that embrace ethics and new concepts in leader behaviors [1]. Many authors have proposed authentic and credible leadership as possible leadership approaches that can restore followers' confidence in their leaders and organizations [14, 23]. Further, the leadership practices also enhance the leader's believability and truthfulness and therefore have the ability to persuade the followers [40]. The emerging paradox is how followers' trust and confidence can be restored in the midst of high levels of skepticism and mistrust. To unravel this paradox, several questions need to be answered.

Firstly, both credibility and authenticity have been viewed as critical leader attributes that rebuild followers' confidence and enhance individual productivity and organizational performance in a fast-paced context where leader trust has waned [20, 40]. They are both driven by a set of values and certain ethical principles [21, 33]. Gardner et al. observe that despite authentic leadership being of interest to many researchers, it has not been universally defined [14]. Similarly, although Kouzes and Posner have propounded credibility as the foundation on which leadership is laid, Williams Jr et al. identify several ways in which different authors define credible leadership [21, 40]. Further, the qualities and expertise possessed by credible leaders enable them to be believable and trustworthy. The various authors of both credible and authentic leadership agree that the two constructs enhance followers' confidence and trust and have a set of values that drive them. However, the terms are defined in different ways by different authors and practitioners. This paper proposes the need for a study that identifies a common definition and the set of values and qualities that followers look for in authentic and credible leaders and how each impacts the leader-follower interaction.

Secondly, Hemby observes that leadership that is credible leads to better performance both at an individual as well as at organizational levels [17]. Unfortunately, it is a leadership attribute that is difficult to develop and sustain. Similarly, authentic leadership encourages organizational citizenship behavior by influencing individuals' attitudes and work behaviors which result in improved performance of tasks [29]. According to Shahid, authentic leaders are selfless and willingly admit their mistakes [33]. These are attributes that are not embraced by many and that may be difficult to enact. A study by Robert F. Hurley and reported in *Harvard*

*Business Review* showed that 69 percent of individuals in the population are disillusioned, lack trust with leaders and struggle identifying with the most trusted leader [10]. Kouzes and Posner while referring to the six principles that leaders can adopt to sustain credibility, wonder what actions leaders can undertake to rebuild trust and confidence and reinforce credibility [21]. Hemby wonders whether training efforts can strengthen attributes of credibility to persons who would be future leaders and influencers of followers in different spheres [17]. Avolio and Luthans in their book *The High Impact Leader* emphasize that authentic leadership can be developed in individuals to actualize possibilities [3]. Similar sentiments are shared by Ardaa et al. who posit that authentic leadership is a process that entails self-development and growth of oneself [1]. These arguments by different scholars suggest that both authentic and credible leadership can be developed. This leads to a second question which asks what actions leaders can undertake to become more authentic and credible with their constituents.

Lastly, extant literature shows that leadership practices that embrace trustworthiness, competence, and dynamism result in high employee productivity and better organizational performance. Ouedraogo et al. opine that credibility is a construct that is multidimensional and whose effectiveness is dependent on a leader's competence and trustworthiness [28]. Just like credibility, authenticity enactment is also complex due to the dynamic social contexts that leaders interact with [39]. Different authors have proposed different models that describe authentic and credible leadership [2, 21, 37]. The authors acknowledge the complexity and multidimensionality of these constructs and the need to develop a model that connects authentic and credible leadership and the imports they bring to the organizations. This observation and the two critical questions posed in the previous paragraphs provide the overall purpose for why this study is done and the multidimensional approach on which it is considered. Therefore, the overall purpose of the study was to understand the values and qualities that are perceived to define authentic and credible leaders, how they impact follower leader relationships and how authentic credible leaders can be developed.

### 1.3. General Research Objectives

The general research objective of this study was to understand the values and qualities that are perceived to represent authentic and credible leadership, how they impact the follower leader relationship and how authentic credible leadership can be developed and sustained.

### 1.4. Specific Research Objectives

This study sought to meet the following Research Objectives;

- (1) To understand the qualities and values that are perceived to define authentic and credible leadership.
- (2) To explain how authentic and credible leadership impacts the leader-follower relationship.

- (3) To understand how credible leadership can be developed and sustained.

### 1.5. Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following research questions;

- (1) What qualities and values are perceived to define authentic and credible leadership?
- (2) How do credible and authentic leadership approaches impact leader-follower relationships?
- (3) How can credible leadership be developed and sustained?

### 1.6. Significance of the Study

This study has immense significance to the leadership practice and makes several key contributions to the authentic and credible leadership literature. From the perspective of its enactment, organizations, their leaders, and followers are bound to benefit immensely from the findings of the study. Organizations are navigating very turbulent environments and therefore yearning for value-based leadership approaches that promote trust amongst followers and enhance leader-follower relationships. From the findings of this study, academicians, researchers, and theorists can also find valuable insights about authentic credible leadership that can be used for additional future studies. Through the findings, the organizations at large will benefit through a better understanding of the operationalization of authentic credible leadership. Authenticity and credibility can make the world a better place to live in.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Credible Leadership

Credibility is a leadership construct that is widely applied in different disciplines that include the media and public relations where source credibility is discussed, in the accounting discipline where auditors evaluate information source credibility, and in the marketing sector where brand credibility is assessed [40]. A review of extant literature posits that credibility is perceived and defined in different ways by various authors. Kouzes and Posner have extensively written about credibility and credible leadership [21]. The authors emphasize that credibility is a critical leadership component and it is the foundation on which all leadership approaches are based. Credibility is the process through which leaders earn the constituents' confidence and trust. Perceived differently, credibility is the expectation that constituents have of their leaders that consequently becomes the driving force for their commitment to undertake tasks. Hassi et al. consider credibility as an assigned leadership characteristic with a multidimensional orientation and founded on followers' perception [16]. Johnson and Johnson perceive credibility as a concept that describes believability [19]. Fettweis define credibility as the possession of the capability to be trusted and be believed in [11].

When followers consider their leaders as reliable and competent, it means they believe in their actions and perceives them as individuals exercising high levels of credibility. Hovland et al. (1953 as cited in Hassi et al.) opine that leaders gain credibility through trustworthiness and competence that is bestowed on them by their followers [16]. Hassi et al. define trustworthiness as reliability and dependability whereas competence is the possession of the requisite skills and capabilities to effectively accomplish a role [16]. Williams Jr et al. summarize the varied views of different authors and define credibility as the degree to which a communicator is perceived to be assertive and the degree to which their intention to communicate is anchored on what they consider valid [40]. Thus, credibility according to the authors is concerned with an individual's expertise or knowledge and trustworthiness. From the views of the different authors, the definition of credibility can be described from several dimensions which include: (1) trustworthiness, (2) confidence and assertiveness, (3) believability, (5) reliability and dependability, and (6) competence. To conclude, credibility is a leadership concept that encompasses ethical actions, moral character, and authentic aspirations that better the followers' wellbeing [40]. Credibility in leadership has been shown to have an impact on attitudes and behaviors exhibited by employees which create job commitment and better organizational outcomes.

## 2.2. Authentic Leadership

Novicevic et al. note that the principles of authenticity trace back to the 1960s [26]. Different approaches to defining the construct have been mooted with no universality of acceptance [14, 22]. Ardaa et al. associate authentic leadership with self-development and individual growth [1]. An authentic leader leads a life that is guided by certain values that are consistently played in public and private life [18]. The key dimensions that describe authentic leadership include self-awareness, behavioral self-regulation, trust, and emotional intelligence [24]. Openness and transparency are other aspects that are attributed to authenticity [34].

Walumbwa et al. have extensively delved into authenticity and authentic leadership, and understanding the four dimensions that the authors consider as the constituent elements of authentic leadership can bring out clarity in its definition [37]. The four dimensions are self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective. Self-awareness relates to understanding one's weaknesses and strengths and the impacts this might have on association with others. Relational transparency concerns an individual's true self or authentic self that precisely brings out their true thoughts and honest feelings. It abhors fakeness and dualism. Balanced process attributes concern objectivity and rationality in decision making that takes into account the views of followers. Internalized moral perspective is a self-regulation aspect based on held values and leader's standards versus external pressures. The actions of authentic leaders are guided by the values and beliefs that they hold true and not the pressures from society or the

organization.

Authentic leadership is driven by a purpose and is built on integrity and a set of values which in turn enhance trust for the leaders by the workforce [34]. It is a leadership process that uplifts morals [20]. Kouzes and Posner opine that authentic leadership has a positive transformative impact on the leader as well as on the organization and therefore it promotes credible leadership practice amongst individuals [21]. Wang and James observe that authentic leadership is the foundational base for all the positive components of leadership practice and therefore is central in solving problems associated with organizations and societies [38]. From the discussion, attributes that describe an authentic leader are true to oneself, possession of values, self-awareness, openness, and transparency. In conclusion, the application of the various dimensions of authentic leadership enhances credible leadership practice and builds leader-follower relationships which in turn influence followers' attitudes and behaviors that affect commitment to the organization and ultimate performance.

## 2.3. Integration of Authentic and Credible Leadership

The nexus of authentic and credible leadership is captured by Edward R. Murrow in his famous quote, "To be persuasive we must be believable; to be believable we must be credible; to be credible we must be truthful" [5]. According to Murrow, the very basic foundation of credibility is being truthful. Truthfulness is a credibility attribute embedded in authenticity. To expound this connection, Gardner et al. opine that the actions of an authentic leader are dictated by their "true self" which means their behaviors must be reflective of the thoughts and feelings that they harbor within their inner selves [13]. Relationships between human beings are founded on truthfulness. Truthfulness on the other hand builds trust which in turn results in cooperation [31]. Trust is a concept that describes the extent to which an individual has an expectation of reliability and competence [19]. Mineo relates trust with glue that puts the leaders and their followers together in an effort to attain organizational success [25]. Effectiveness of leadership is associated with credibility and this is influenced by among others the leader's trustworthiness [28]. This, therefore, means credible leaders are authentic because their credibility is founded on the principles of truthfulness which are embedded in authenticity.

Walumbwa et al. view authentic leadership as a leader's behavioral patterns that stimulate one's psychological capabilities and promote a positive ethical climate which in turn arouse self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced information processing, and relational transparency between leaders and followers [37]. Important observations from this description of authentic leadership are self-awareness and relationship building. Ardaa et al. opine that the attributes of self-awareness and self-esteem are the foundations on which relationships are built [1]. To bring the connection of credibility into the discussion, Kouzes and Posner opine that leadership is a relationship influence

process and that credibility is the foundation of leadership [21]. Therefore, it can be concluded that credibility determines the quality of relationships between leaders and followers. Further, the self-awareness attribute of authentic leadership influences the process of relationship building. This paper considers trueness and self-awareness attributes of authenticity as the interfaces that connect authentic leadership to credible leadership. Because they are intertwined, the paper will consider the qualities and values that followers expect of credible leadership from this perspective. To enhance these arguments, the paper also considers the relational developmental systems theory that expounds on the relationship development between leaders and followers.

#### ***2.4. Relational Development Systems Theory***

According to Ettekal et al. Relational Development Systems Theory is premised on how human behaviors and actions are related to each other [8]. The theory explains the causes of changes in human behaviors and how human development can be understood. Further, human development arises from an interactive process between people and the contexts in which they live. The theory according to Kahn [28] explains the psychological component that enhances employees' relational attachment to their workplaces. Employees will be committed to the organization when they feel they have a connection with others and have an emotional closeness to the organization. Similarly, employees become committed and emotionally attached to the organization when they feel the behaviors and actions of their leaders meet the credibility threshold. Thus, the self-awareness and trueness nature of authenticity affects the leader's psychological components that cause them to exhibit credible behaviors. The credible behaviors exhibited by the leader arouse the follower's emotions which result in employee commitment to the organization.

#### ***2.5. Values and Qualities Expected from Credible Leaders by Their Constituents***

Credible leadership according to Kouzes & Posner is perceived as the expectations that constituents have of their leaders that consequently become the driving force for their commitment to undertake tasks [21]. Grasse et al. state that leaders' ability to transform their organizations is dependent on the leader's perceived degree of credibility by the employees [15]. Ribeiro et al. note that organizations can enhance the practice of credible leadership by promoting authentic leadership values and encouraging self-development which in turn positively impact the society and environment [29]. Out of several studies carried out by Kouzes and Posner that investigated the qualities that followers associate with admirable leaders, there was consistency in the attributes of honesty, competence, inspiration, and forward-looking [21]. These attributes are explained by previous studies by Kouzes and Posner in which they identified a list of five practices and a set of ten

commitments that are espoused by credible leaders [15]. The studies showed that credible leaders challenge the process, inspire a common vision, enable others, act as role models, and encourage the heart.

"The Great Place to Work Model" developed by Robert Levering and Amy Lyman identifies several dimensions that enhance relationships between employees with each other, with their leaders, and with their jobs and therefore promote credibility [6]. The model focuses on five dimensions that credible leaders can embrace to maintain relationships between employees and their leaders in order to foster better organizational outcomes. The dimensions mentioned are credibility, respect, fairness, pride, and camaraderie. The first three dimensions, that is credibility in leadership, respect for others and exercising fairness in the decision-making process are the key attributes on which trust is built [25]. Credibility according to Burchell and Robin is defined by effective communication, competence, and integrity [6]. Effective communication under credible leadership is open, free, and accessible. Leaders who are knowledgeable and with effective communication skills as well as other capabilities motivate and guide their workforce to achieve set goals [28]. Competence according to Seijts et al. is defined as the ability of an individual to accomplish obligations by application of natural talents, motivation skills, conflict management mechanisms, delegation, and collaborative team member roles among others [32]. Kouzes and Posner consider competent leaders as those talented and effective [21]. Competent leaders effectively coordinate resources that the organizations require for performance. Integrity keeps the leader focused on the envisaged goals and ensures that they are pursued with consistency.

The respect with which credible leaders handle their followers guarantees support, collaboration, and care [6]. Credible leaders support their followers through appreciation and career development. They show collaboration in the decision-making process through the encouragement of participation in dialogue and open feedback. Credibility also involves extending care to the employees that go beyond the formal job relationships to those that may encompass social considerations. Fairness according to the Great Workplace Model includes equity, impartiality, and justice. When leader exercises equity, it means they treat their employees in a balanced manner, and rewards are based on merit. Impartiality guarantees equal opportunity for all employees during selection, hiring, promotion, and employee development. When justice is exercised, it means the credible leader embraces diversity and there is no discrimination in the workplace. Further, the leader has an open-door policy that lends itself to criticism and gives the employee an opportunity to appeal decisions.

According to Burchell and Robin, the three attributes of trust, that is credibility, respect and fairness promote trust of the leader among the employee, and as a result, leader-follower relations are enhanced [6]. As a consequence, the workplace is engulfed with an atmosphere of camaraderie and pride. The employees pride themselves in their assigned

jobs, roles in the team, and overall organizational performance in terms of its products and brand reputation. The atmosphere of camaraderie in the workplace entails intimacy that promotes closeness, hospitality that promotes friendliness and warmth, and community that promotes identification with a family or a group.

Mineo places trust in the centrality of credible and authentic leadership. From this discussion, it can be concluded that the credibility qualities that employees look for in their leaders include honesty, competence, inspiration, being forward-looking and visionary, role modeling, having respect for others, exercising fairness, and enabling others [25]. These qualities cause employees to be proud of their workplace and identify with the organization. This builds more commitment to the organization and therefore leads to better firm performance. Unfortunately, trust is not a trait but a characteristic that can be developed in building credible and authentic leaders in the organization. This argument puts a case for organizations through their leadership structure that they can indeed inculcate credible and authentic practices within their operations.

### 3. Research Methodology

The study intended to explore how credible leadership can be developed among leaders and how it impacts the relationship with followers. A research design according to Creswell is the process that entails the collection of data, followed by measurement and finally analysis of data [7]. This study adopted a qualitative research method with the design of a case study being employed. It was conducted among three congregants of a church located in Nairobi County, Kenya. They were chosen because of the positions that they hold in the church leadership and in society and also because of their love for the gospel.

The choice of the research design was found ideal because a study by Oginde in which the author explored the most admired leader behaviors applied a similar approach and the findings resonated with the expected outcomes. Data were collected through the use of semi-structured and open interview questions. The interviewer posed initial questions to the interviewee and issues that arose were clarified through follow-up and probing questions. These enhanced the depth of the quality of data collected. The interview was conducted via online zoom engagement and data recorded by taking short notes and audio records which were transcribed. Data collected were reviewed for any mistakes, compiled, and analyzed. Though there is computer software for the analysis of qualitative data, this specific study applied thematic analysis through hand-coding [7]. The data collected from the three participants were manageable and the researcher did not find it necessary to apply any computer software. The repeating patterns, recurring concepts, and common themes from the responses of the interviews were identified and coded. They were then grouped into wider categories that related to various concepts of credible leadership and based on the questions that were asked in the

interview. Appropriate terms were given to these categories in line with how the interviewees thought described authenticity and credibility. These grouped categories constituted what the study identified as the qualities and characteristics of authentic and credible leadership. The analyzed data were represented in form of tables that summarized the responses according to the objectives of the study.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Definition of Leadership in General

The initial question sought to understand what each interviewee thought was the meaning of leadership. All the interviewees responded and the responses in all cases captured the word influence between individuals that causes some form of change from point A to B. These responses resonated with the definitions of Northouse which describes leadership as a process of influence in which one individual influences others to perform and realize organizational objectives [27]. The three leaders seem to have a good understanding of what leadership is and what is expected of them.

### 4.2. Definitions of Credible and Authentic Leadership

The interviewees were asked to explain in their own words what they understood by authentic leadership and credible leadership. The table below summarizes the responses that they gave.

From the analysis of what defines credibility, the key themes that emerged about its definition were being trustworthy, having values, being confident, being reliable, and being believable. Authenticity was described as being true to self and having values and beliefs. Walumbwa et al. identify self-awareness and moral campus as what maintain authenticity [37]. The self-awareness and self-regulation tendencies keep the individual in check and exhibit behaviors in line with their values, both in public and in private. One of the interviewees captured authenticity well by stating that “it is not a façade neither is it saying one thing and doing the other”. Another one said, “it is not about pleasing people but doing what is morally right”.

Kouzes and Posner state that credibility is believability and being trustworthy [21]. These definitions were captured well by the interviewees. Further, a credible leader is competent and that is why he is confident. A credible leader does what he says he will do and that is why he is believable and reliable. Followers can bank on his words and can predict his actions. In both authenticity and credibility, having values that guide the leaders’ behaviors was key. The line between authentic leadership and credible leadership was blurred. In fact, one of the interviewees said that “we use credibility to measure if you are authentic”. This reasoning resonated with arguments by Ardaa et al. and Walumbwa et al. about self-awareness and self-regulation that keeps one’s true to self on which authenticity is laid [1, 37]. This helps one to exhibit credible behaviors.

**Table 1.** What is your understanding of authentic and credible leadership?

| Interviewee   | Credible leadership   | Authentic Leadership  |
|---------------|---|---|
| Interviewee 1 | a. Leadership that can be vouched for (++)<br>b. Based on principles and values (**)<br>c. Can be showcased (*)<br>d. For the good of the people (+)<br>e. Values the process (**)<br>f. Does not compromise (**)<br>g. Espouse integrity (**)<br>h. honesty (*)<br>i. transparency (+)<br>j. sincere (++)<br>k. exercises firmness (**)<br>a. Principles of goodness (+)<br>b. Leading with principles of humanity (**)<br>c. Not being injurious (+)<br>d. Leadership for growth and prosperity (+) | 1) Not fake (***)<br>2) Not a façade (***)<br>3) Not about pleasing people for the sake (+++)<br>4) Being seen in a certain way (+++)<br>5) What you see is what you get (***)<br>6) Not dualism (***)<br>7) Not saying one thing and doing the other (***) |
| Interviewee 2 |   | 1) Real leadership (***)<br>2) Measure of credibility (+++)   |
| Interviewee 3 | a. Walking the talk (**)<br>b. Disciplined (**)<br>a. Walking the talk (**)<br>b. Disciplined (**)  | 1) Not fake (***)<br>2) True to myself (***)  |

The following emerged as the key themes for credibility and authenticity from the data analysis process:

Definition of Credibility

Trust++

Value-based (\*\*)

Confidence (\*)

Reliable and Believable (+)

Authenticity

True to self (\*\*\*)

Values and beliefs (+++).

**Table 2.** From your experience with followers, what qualities do you think your followers expect of you as a credible leader?

| Interviewee   | Qualities of Credible Leaders   |
|---------------|---|
| Interviewee 1 | a. Being visionary (*)<br>b. Having a strategy (*)<br>c. Has interest of followers at heart (+)<br>d. Constant communication along the process (*)<br>e. Open door policy (**)<br>f. Receives feedback (**)<br>g. Listens to the followers (**)<br>h. Corrects you when you are wrong (++)<br>i. Admits mistakes and apologizes when on the wrong (+++)<br>j. Follower opinion counts (**)<br>a. Exercises integrity (+++)<br>b. Compassionate (+)<br>c. Firm (***)<br>d. Visionary (*)<br>e. Fair (+++)<br>f. Listens to both sides before judging (**)<br>g. Does the right thing (+++)<br>h. Rational (++++)<br>i. Leads by example (****)<br>j. Openly communicates about his beliefs and values (++++)<br>k. Not corrupt (+++)<br>l. Can be dependent upon (++)<br>m. Open channels of communication (**)<br>n. Creates time to interact with followers (+)<br>a. Extends influence (*)<br>b. Role modeling (****)<br>c. Mentoring (++)<br>d. Do what you say you will do (++)<br>e. Do what is right (+++)<br>f. Start with yourself (****)<br>g. Be credible at heart (+++)<br>h. Deliberate and intentional (***) |
| Interviewee 2 |   |
| Interviewee 3 |   |

| Interviewee | Qualities of Credible Leaders   |
|-------------|---|
|             | i. Honest (+++)<br>j. Does not do good for show off (****)<br>k. Has selfdiscipline (***)<br>l. Own up their mistakes (+++) |

The collected data were analyzed and the following themes emerged:

Forward-looking and being visionary (\*)

Compassionate (+)

Supportive (++)

Listener (\*\*)

Integrity (+++)

Firm (\*\*\*)

Fairness, equity, and justice (++++)

Role Model (\*\*\*\*).

#### 4.3. Qualities of Credible Leaders

From this analysis, the interviewees were able to bring out their experiences on follower expectations about the credibility attributes. Based on the findings, the qualities that came out were having compassion, being forward-looking, supportive, good listener, showing integrity in their actions, being firm, being fair, and being a role model. On role-modeling, one interviewee gave an example of the burning of schools happening around the country and this is what he said “how do you expect students who have been raised by absentee fathers who are drug addicts or where families have been broken to behave when in school. They can only emulate what they see happening in their homes”. Grasse et al. emphasize why modeling all the way is an important credibility attribute, and why leaders should set a good example to their followers [15]. Credible leaders should have compassion for their followers. One interviewee said, “when

you are a leader, you should lead with the heart and not with the mind". Another stated that "when followers know you have their interest at heart, they will entrust their lives with you". On fairness, another interviewee said, "do not be quick to judge, take your time to listen to the issues that led to the mistake". On values, one interviewee said, "be intentional about what you stand for. Speak out your beliefs and let people be aware of what you can stomach and what you

cannot. They will not even bother to come to you or compromise you because they know you only stand by the truth". A very important attribute of credibility is emphasized by all leadership books. Having a vision is key. Kouzes and Posner call it being forward-looking [21]. One interviewee stated that, "a credible leader must have an idea of when the firm is going, and how it is going to get there. I call this a strategy..... who is going to follow a blind man anyway"?

**Table 3.** In your own view, what do you find as the impact of credible leadership practice to the follower and to the organization?

| Interviewee   | Impact on the follower   | Impact on the organization   |
|---------------|--|--|
| Interviewee 1 | a. Motivated employees (*)<br>b. Does what is expected (+)<br>c. Owns the goal achievement process (+)<br>d. Good relationship with leaders (**)   | 1) Healthy work environment (*)<br>2) Realization of set goals (**)<br>3) Cohesiveness (+)<br>4) Good work climate (*)<br>5) Growth based on profits (**)<br>6) Efficiency of work processes (**)<br>7) If it is a church, more converts (**)  |
| Interviewee 2 | a. Job satisfaction (++)<br>b. Employee completeness (++)<br>c. Employee engagement (+)<br>d. Morale of employees is high (*)<br>e. Better individual productivity (***)<br>f. Follower participate willingly (++++)<br>g. Employee exercises selfleadership (+)<br>h. Responsibility (+)<br>i. More confidence to act (***) | 1) Better organizational performance (**)<br>2) Goals area attained (**)<br>3) Harmony in the workplace (+)<br>4) Unity of purpose (+)<br>5) No cases of corruption (*)<br>6) Organizational sustainability (**)<br>7) Orderliness (+)<br>8) Better teamwork (+)<br>9) Diversity is embraced (+)<br>10) Reduced cases of sexual harassment (*)<br>11) Credible culture in the organization (*) |
| Interviewee 3 | a. Creativity and innovation (****)<br>b. Organizational commitment (+)<br>c. Relationship with others (**)  | 1) Strong marriages (+)<br>2) Cohesion in organizations (+)<br>3) Innovative culture (**)<br>4) Trust pervades all departments (*)   |

The following themes emerged:

Individual Outcomes

Employee motivation (\*)

Commitment (+)

Cohesion and collaboration (\*\*)

Job satisfaction (++)

Effectiveness (\*\*\*)

Organizational Citizenship behaviors (++++)

Creativity and innovation (\*\*\*\*)

Organizational Outcomes

Healthy work environment (\*)

Achievement of goals & performance outcomes (\*\*)

Cohesion, collaboration, and teamwork (+).

#### 4.4. Outcomes of Credible Leadership Practice

The interviewees all agreed that when credible leadership is embraced, there are obvious benefits that are experienced both at the individual level as well as at the organizational level. Kouzes and Posner opine that the attribute of credibility in leadership is among the critical determinants of the effectiveness of leaders [21]. Hassi et al. observe that the level of credibility of managers in organizations has a positive relationship with the workforce performance, their attitudes to the organization, commitment, and loyalty [16]. Some of the benefits that were shown in the studies include motivation, commitment, cohesion, collaboration, job satisfaction, effectiveness, organizational citizenship behavior, creativity, and innovation. This is well explained by The Great Place to Work Model" by Burchell and Robin which

focuses on five dimensions that credible leaders can embrace to maintain relationships between employees and their leaders in order to foster better organizational outcomes [6]. The dimensions mentioned are credibility, respect, fairness, pride, and camaraderie. Credibility, respect, and fairness constitute truth and when followers trust the leader, they are happy to associate with him, are proud of their job and their organization and there is an aura of camaraderie. Care, love concern for each person pervades through the organization and employees identify with the organization. There is cohesion at the organizational level, the work atmosphere is healthy, and as a result, employees are committed to the organization. The performance of the organization is better as a result. This is supported by the sentiments of Kouzes and Posner that credibility is associated with certain outcomes [21]. One



interviewee gave the example of what governors of Kitui and Makueni have done with their development funds for the sake of their people and that was quoted as a mark of credibility. He also gave an example of what usually happens when leaders such as law enforcers do not take action and when people break laws

and said “the mob justice you witness, people being killed is because people know if they inform law enforcers, nothing will happen”. All three interviewees agreed that employees work for the boss and not the money. Excerpts from one of the leaders were that “people follow leaders and not organizations”.

**Table 4.** Do you think the practice of Credible leadership can be developed in Leaders?

| Interviewee   | Developing Credible Leaders                                     |
|---------------|---|
| Interviewee 1 | a. Yes, through training programs (*)                           |
|               | b. Through exposure (*)   |
|               | c. Role modeling (*)  |
|               | d. Rewarding good deeds (**)                                    |
|               | e. Affirmation of elements credibility (+)                      |
|               | f. Retooling and resourcing (*)                                 |
| Interviewee 2 | a. Establish policies and procedures within the workplace (++)  |
|               | b. Have rules and regulations (++)                              |
|               | c. Have a system of reporting (++)                              |
|               | d. Have job fit where one's tasks are matched with skills (***) |
|               | e. Leader to have values guiding their actions (*)              |
|               | f. Deliberate establishment of a credible culture (++)          |
| Interviewee 3 | a. Establish mentorship programs (*)                            |
|               | b. Establish governance systems within the organization (++)    |
|               | c. Enforcement of rules and regulations (**)                    |
|               | d. Punish wrongdoers (**)                                       |
|               | e. Credible leadership to be practiced in all levels (***)      |
|               | f. Explain the role of all individuals in an organization (*)   |
|               | g. Rewards system for good deeds (**)                           |

The following emerging themes were identified:

Role modeling, training, and skill development (\*)

Proper HRM policies (\*\*\*)

Rewards and punishment schemes (\*\*)

Affirmation (+)

Governance structure (++)

#### 4.5. Developing Credible Leadership

A question that sought to know if credible leadership can be developed was responded to in the affirmation by the three leaders. This is in line with sentiments by Kouzes and Posner about the six principles of Credible leadership and how they can be developed in leaders [21]. Ardaa et al. talk about self-awareness and self-esteem as the cornerstones for authentic leadership development [1]. The interviewees agreed that to

develop a climate of credibility in the organization, there is a need to have leaders act as role models where they set a good example to others, establish sound human resource management policies that must be enacted, develop reward and punishment schemes for credible behaviors, affirmation of followers by their leaders and establishment of effective government structures within the organization. Training, mentorship, and intentional skill development were found to be important approaches to develop credible leaders in organizations.

**Table 5.** Do followers have a role in developing credible leaders?

| Interviewee   | Followers Role  |
|---------------|---|
| Interviewee 1 | a. Follower can provide valuable feedback to leaders (*)                        |
|               | b. Can accept instructions that are right and reject what is wrong (+)          |
|               | c. Follower not to follow the leader blindly (+)                                |
|               | d. Follower to hold the leader accountable (**)                                 |
| Interviewee 2 | a. Followers to hold the leader accountable (**)                                |
|               | b. Be a self-leader (+)   |
|               | c. Follower to be guided by values (+)  |
|               | a. Avoid peer pressure (+)  |
| Interviewee 3 | b. Walk the talk (+)  |
|               | c. Live by example (+)  |
|               | d. Be deliberate in doing the right thing and avoiding doing what is wrong (++) |
|               | e. Be of influence in the small area of operation (++)                          |

The following themes emerged:

Feedback mechanisms (\*)

Values and principles (+)

Followers to hold leader accountable (\*\*)

Intentionality (++)

#### 4.6. Followers Role in Credible Leadership Development

The last question sought to find out the followers' role in the process of developing credible leaders. Kouzes and Posner opine that credibility is the perception followers have about their leaders [21]. This means that where there is a climate of tranquility and free leader-follower engagement, it is possible for followers to play a role in influencing this process. The interviewees identified having feedback mechanisms, establishing values and principles that define them, intentionality in the actions of the leader are some ways in which the leader can be held responsible for observing credible behaviors and acting credibly. "The follower should not be like sheep who follow blindly but use their minds" was one of the comments by interviewees in their response. One critical issue that was raised as to why the follower may not effectively play the role of an accountability partner is where the leader instills fear such that they cannot give an honest opinion. He reminded us of the famous statement, "we shall revisit" made by a Kenyan presidential candidate after their win was nullified by supreme court judges.

## 5. Conclusions

The complexity and turbulence of the contemporary organizational environment emphasize the pivotal role of credibility in leadership practice. Johnson and Johnson state that there are credibility cues that followers look for in leaders which include being knowledgeable in what they communicate, their demeanor, and style of communication [19]. Fettweis observes that the credibility of an organization is expressed through the perception and reputation or prestige it has in society [11]. It is an asset that organizations should pride themselves in. Ouedraogo et al. note that followers will work for a certain organization because of a lack of alternatives for potential credible leaders in other organizations [28]. From the findings, there is a difference in definition between credible and authentic leadership but the boundary is blurred. Credibility is concerned with trust, values, confidence, reliability, and believability. Authenticity is concerned with being true to self, values, and beliefs. There are certain qualities and values that credible leaders are associated with. They include being forward-looking, being visionary, compassionate, supportive, good listener, having integrity, being firm, being fair, and acting as role models. To have a credible leadership practice in the organization, leaders can embrace role modeling, training, and skill development, establish proper HRM policies, have rewards and punishment schemes and proper governance structures. In conclusion, credibility is a must-have tool for leaders to meaningfully engage their followers with a view to providing solutions to the problems faced at the workplace and addressing their needs. Credibility smoothens the relationship and provides an enabling environment where leaders and followers can freely engage.

## 6. Limitation and Recommendations

Qualitative data were collected using semi-structured interviews and therefore the data collection tool was not validated. The sample used was only three members of the church and this represents a very small sample size for generalization of findings. The study employed a cross-section design therefore there could be a likelihood of biases. The participants interviewed were the leaders meaning the responses could be biased to some extent. In order to enhance the accuracy of the findings, a quantitative study may be done to find the strengths of the relations, allow the use of bigger sample size and a wider range of institutions.

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