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Characteristics of Authentic Entrepreneurial Leadership Within Information Technology Startups in Kenya

Christine Mukhwana
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Christine Mukhwana

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Abstract

Characteristics of Authentic Entrepreneurial Leadership Within Information Technology

Startups in Kenya

by

Christine Mukhwana

MPhil, Walden University, 2019

MBA, Africa Nazarene University, 2013

BBIT, Africa Nazarene University, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

May 2021

Abstract

In Kenya, over 60% of nascent entrepreneurs start businesses with minimal leadership experience, engendering founder-CEOs who cannot sustain a business beyond its formative years. The problem is the nascent entrepreneurs' lack of understanding of effective leadership. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to develop a more nuanced understanding of authentic leadership behavior from the perspective of nascent entrepreneurs. Authentic leadership theory and the three-factor model were used to conceptualize the study. The research question focused on nascent entrepreneurs' lived experiences and understanding of authentic leadership. The participants in the study were entrepreneurs from the information technology industry in Kenya aged 18 to 29 who had operated a business for at least 2 years. In-depth, semistructured interviews of a purposeful sample of 10 founder-CEOs and a review of archival documents yielded the study data. Phenomenological data analysis involving the application of the hermeneutic circle and the constant comparison method yielded eight themes: unbiased information sharing, relational openness and transparency, values-centered leadership, people-oriented leadership, self-leadership, purpose-driven leadership, futuristic mindset, and learning culture. A recommendation for further research is to explore authentic leadership across other economic sectors to determine its importance in enhancing positive venture outcomes. The study findings could contribute to positive social change by providing strategies that can improve entrepreneurial leadership and business practices to enhance venture outcomes, growth, and sustainability.

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Dedication

To God be the glory, honor, and praise. To my parents, Rachel and Wilbert Mukhwana, for being the most loving and authentic role models. I thank God for giving me the best. To Roger for inspiring the dream of pursuing doctoral study, providing all the resources, and being my greatest motivator. My children, Shaka and Rozelle, siblings, nieces, and nephews, and extended family members, this doctorate is the fruit of your love, support, and fervent prayers. To my Cohort 18 members for the constant motivation and collaboration that enhanced our collective learning experiences. To my friends, Nchike and Leadler, for appreciating the arduous task and committing to cheer me on constantly. Last but not least, to all my friends in Cte d'Ivoire and Kenya for your prayers, support, and genuine understanding during difficult times when I was deeply immersed and unavailable.

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Living your purpose is about being in alignment with your best and most authentic self, EVERYDAY.

—Stacey Martino, Relationshipdevelopment.org

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The global unemployment problem has necessitated a boost in entrepreneurial activities to create job opportunities, with entrepreneurship seen as the panacea for solving the problems of slow economic growth and persistently high rate of unemployment (Ikebuaku & Dinbado, 2018). Entrepreneurial leadership, the process of influencing others through effective communication to recognize opportunities that can potentially create value for stakeholders and sustain business competitiveness, is essential for startups (Fontana & Musa, 2017). Entrepreneurial leadership is a unique leadership style that manifests in a special setting accentuating opportunity seeking and exists at the fusion of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial orientation, and leadership concepts.

Mandhachitara and Allapach (2017) posited that the attitude and behaviors of founder-CEOs of new ventures is crucial in instituting a business culture based on the owner's values and beliefs that support positive organizational outcomes. Walumbwa et al. (2008) stated that authentic leadership instills "greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development" (p. 94). Further, they argued that leaders who act in accordance with their values and beliefs nurture effective interpersonal relationships and a work environment that encourages creativity and improved organizational performance. This view is also shared by Jones and Crompton (2009), who asserted that the success of startups is contingent on the ability of founder-CEOs to use their leadership skills to enhance social capital within their firms. Mwangi and Ngugi (2014) argued that effective entrepreneurial leadership

may play a significant role in the growth and sustenance of new ventures in Kenya and could be the antidote of the prevalent high rate of youth unemployment.

Background of the Study

Muchira (2018) posited that entrepreneurial activity, which includes a significant domestic labor percentage, is crucial in addressing youth unemployment's global challenge. Further, Muchira noted that a significant number of youths in Kenya are not engaged in the labor force due to the slow growth of formal sector jobs, a situation that has compelled the youths to either engage in entrepreneurial activities or remain unemployed. The majority of the youths start businesses without the prior formal entrepreneurship and leadership training necessary to manage a business in the highly complex and uncertain context in which startups operate (Huxtable-Thomas et al., 2016). Startups face the constant threat of failure. As high as 60% fail each year, and most do not survive beyond 3 years after inception (Mwangi & Ngugi, 2014). Baldegger and Gast (2016) argued that leadership within startups is a crucial factor in determining firm success and failure because new ventures operate in a unique context that is highly complex and unstructured, compared to mature organizations.

Jones et al. (2018) contended that research into entrepreneurial leadership in the African cultural milieu remains inadequate despite the urgent need for effective leadership behavior to alleviate systemic issues like poverty, business inefficiencies, and high unemployment. Further, they argued that by highlighting key leadership and management skills, entrepreneurs who are predominantly owner-managers can develop and incorporate those skills in their businesses to enhance outcomes. Liu et al. (2018)

argued that an authentic leadership development strategy that nurtures positive self-development is essential in modern organizations to achieve desirable outcomes. The authors identified self-awareness, self-regulation, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency as the key dimensions of authentic leadership development strategy, arguing that this strategy results in high motivation and job commitment on the part of followers.

Huxtable-Thomas et al. (2016) postulated that effective leadership is essential for small-sized firms' success as it leads to behaviors that enhance a firm's performance. They further argued that emotional intelligence mirrors the dimensions of authentic leadership associated with business success, rendering it crucial for nascent entrepreneurs to survive today's dynamic business environment. Beddoes-Jones and Swailes (2015) concurred with this view and posited that lack of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral traits in the leader is the cause of failure in contemporary organizational leadership. The authors asserted that authentic leadership corresponds to crucial traits that leaders require to be successful. In addition, they argued that authentic leadership is a relational model that sits on the bedrock of trust and is comprised of three key pillars: self-awareness, self-regulation, and ethics, which correspond to essential traits that authentic leaders develop over time by consistently evaluating their values and beliefs and subsequently modeling the same to their followers.

Jones and Crompton (2009) asserted that developing effective authentic leadership is critical for new ventures as it enhances excellence in the business, an insight that rests on the proposition that the entrepreneur's life experiences positively impact

employees' commitment. Additionally, the success of new ventures depends significantly on founder-CEOs' ability to employ their social skills in developing authentic leadership behavior, a viable tool for promoting a positive organizational climate that enhances employees' creativity and innovativeness.

Problem Statement

Entrepreneurial activities undertaken by owners of micro and small businesses are the driving force of economic transformation and business sector advancement in developing nations (Nafukho & Machuma, 2010). Startups grapple with the constant threat of failure, with an estimated 60% failing to survive beyond 3 years after inception (Mwangi & Ngugi, 2014). The general problem for nascent entrepreneurs is determining effective entrepreneurial orientation that enhances business success and is antidotal for the slow growth of formal sector jobs, to alleviate systematic problems, including youth unemployment (Jones et al., 2018; Were, 2017). The specific problem is that although researchers have determined that leadership with an authentic approach is beneficial among startups, there is a paucity of research on how nascent entrepreneurs understand, experience, and enact authentic leadership. Baldegger and Gast (2016) and Zaech and Baldegger (2017) argued that there is scarcity of research studies on leadership within startups despite leadership being identified as a vital factor of firm success and failure. Furthermore, the few researchers who have examined leadership within startups have produced inconsistent results. Costas and Taheri (2012) and Walumbwa et al. (2008) argued that there is a paucity of research studies on leadership with an authentic approach

despite the approach being beneficial and effective in promoting a positive psychological and ethical climate to enhance positive organizational outcomes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to develop a more nuanced understanding of authentic leadership behavior from the perspective of nascent entrepreneurs. New ventures in the information technology (IT) industry face many challenges and exploring their leadership experience could provide a comprehensive understanding of effective leader behaviors (Lavery, 2003; Todt et al., 2019). The participants were entrepreneurs from the IT sector in Nairobi, Kenya, who have operated a business for at least 2 years. There is a paucity of research studies on leadership in new ventures despite leadership being identified as a vital factor of firm success and failure, particularly in the business's formative years (Baldegger & Gast, 2016). Researchers have also highlighted the need to explore newer forms of leadership theories such as authentic leadership that are effective and beneficial in improving organizational outcomes (Semedo et al., 2018). This study's results may provide a more comprehensive understanding of authentic leadership behavior among nascent entrepreneurs, proffer information that could help scholars and practitioners identify core competencies for entrepreneurial leadership success, and enhance future research on authentic leadership.

Research Question

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the leadership experience of nascent entrepreneurs to develop a comprehensive understanding of authentic leadership behavior from the perspective of nascent

entrepreneurs. The overarching research question was: What are nascent entrepreneurs' lived experiences and understanding of authentic leadership?

Conceptual Framework

In this phenomenological study, authentic leadership theory and the three-factor model of authentic leadership formed the basis of the conceptual framework to provide a deeper understanding of nascent entrepreneurs' lived experiences and understanding of authentic leadership behaviors. Beddoes-Jones and Swailes (2015) developed the three-factor model of authentic leadership, a relational model founded on trust that comprises three pillars: self-awareness, self-regulation, and ethics. Within the three pillars are three traits, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive, which are essential in shaping a leader's values and beliefs and form the basis of all positive behaviors. The foundation of authentic leadership is leader behavior that espouses positive mental capabilities and a positive ethical climate that fosters self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing of information, and internalized moral perspective, in the leader-follower dyad (Gatling et al., 2016; Miao et al., 2018). As opposed to established organizations, owners of new ventures operate in a complex environment with higher degrees of risk that compel them to play the essential role of shaping and developing the organization to achieve success (Baldegger & Gast, 2016). Thus, leadership is a crucial aspect for the successful development of new ventures. The authentic leadership theory's premise is that an authentic leader influences and motivates employees to learn positive behaviors and attitudes that foster excellence in the firm by committing to the firm's goals and organizational learning to achieve a competitive edge (Delić et al., 2017).

Baldegger and Gast (2016) argued that authentic leadership influences employees' attitudes and contributes to the leader-follower dyad's positive emotional bond. This view is also shared by Sims and Morris (2018), who posited that entrepreneurship is an act of authenticity where the leader exhibits behaviors following his or her true self to produce a positive effect on employees and enhance the firm's performance.

Nature of the Study

The study participants were entrepreneurs from the IT industry in Nairobi, Kenya, who have operated business for at least 2 years. Technological startups play a vital role in socio-economic development by escalating the creation of jobs and individual and national wealth, and propagating new technology (Jahangir et al., 2018). According to Global Innovation Index Report (2019), Nairobi, Kenya's capital city, is at the heart of East Africa's technology ecosystem and home to over 90% of IT startups due to its infrastructural development. Qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study to provide an in-depth understanding of how people experience the world in their everyday lives and the meanings they make from this experience (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I adopted a hermeneutic phenomenological design suitable to explore nascent entrepreneurs' reflective lived experiences (Laverty, 2003; Vagle, 2018). Burkholder et al. (2016) and Smith et al. (2009) recommended a sample size of 15 participants, a number they argued is reasonable for interpretive phenomenology to generate a detailed account of individual experience. I interviewed 10 founder-CEOs of IT startups to achieve data saturation. The selection of participants was through purposive sampling, a technique recommended by

Babbie (2017) as suitable for selecting participants based on their knowledge and characteristics to provide valuable information related to a research study. I explored the participants' experience through semistructured interviews in a participatory process complemented with field notes and reflections, and the analysis of secondary data, such as archival documents and statistics from government agencies (Bryman & Cassell, 2006; Van Manen, 2016). In analyzing the qualitative data from the interviews, I coded the data to generate patterns, categories, themes, concepts, and assertions as recommended by Saldana (2016). Phenomenological data analysis involved co-construction of data with the participants in an iterative and participatory process called the hermeneutic circle to explore themes and concepts. Theme analysis was done through the three approaches of wholistic reading, selective reading, and detailed reading of the texts from the transcription of the digitally recorded interviews to understand the meanings embodied in the participants' experiences (Van Manen, 2016).

Definitions

Authentic leadership: An authentic leader “draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capabilities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development” (Walumbwa et al., 2008, p. 94).

Entrepreneurial leadership: The process of influencing organizations through various management functions in creating value for stakeholders by assembling a unique

and innovative idea that corresponds to a recognized opportunity (Fontana & Musa, 2017, p.6).

Entrepreneurial orientation: Decision-making and strategy-making processes used by entrepreneurs that facilitate entry and support of business activities and a basis for entrepreneurial actions (Mwangi & Ngugi, 2014, p. 3).

Entrepreneurship: A social process that individuals and teams use to create wealth using a unique combination of resources to exploit marketplace opportunities under leadership (Fontana & Musa, 2017, p .3).

Innovation: The process of socially and economically introducing a new technology or a combination of existing technologies in converting or transforming input into output such that it creates a significant change in monetary and utility value (Fontana & Musa, 2017, p. 4).

IT: Acronym for *information technology*. These are capabilities that organizations derive from hardware, software, networks, and telecommunications to disseminate data, knowledge, and information to individuals and processes (Attaran, 2003, p. 441).

Startup: A young company with an innovative business model that demonstrates significant growth in turnover and in the number of employees (Nopadol, 2018, p. 31)

Assumptions

Assumptions are ideas and beliefs presumed to be true and necessary to conduct the research but which cannot be proven (Simon & Goes, 2013). One of the assumptions in this study was that the participants responded candidly in answering the interview questions. The second assumption was that the research participants remained in business

throughout the interview period. The third was that the participants' views adequately represented all entrepreneurs' views with regards to authentic leadership.

Scope and Delimitations

In this phenomenological qualitative study, I explored nascent entrepreneurs' lived experiences concerning authentic leadership behaviors in Nairobi, Kenya, to understand the leadership behaviors that foster a positive psychological and ethical environment that encourages self-development and positive organizational outcomes in the leader-follower dyads. I delimited the study by selecting as the target population youths in Nairobi from age 18 to 29 who had operated a business for at least 2 years. Although limited resources of finances and time constrained the study to the stipulated sample and geographical coverage, I achieved data saturation after interviewing 10 entrepreneurs. The choice of qualitative study, as opposed to quantitative, makes it difficult to generalize the study results to a larger population (Burkholder et al., 2016). To mitigate researcher biases and provide a better understanding of participants experiences, I recorded the possible biases that I may have brought into the study in a researcher identity memo, which I kept updating during the data collection and analysis process in order to reflect on my own position as a researcher in relation to the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Khalili (2017) proffered authentic leadership as the foundation of all positive leadership styles owner-managers of new ventures can adopt to foster the creativity and innovation that businesses require to be successful. The choice of authentic leadership theory ensured theoretical validity and may contribute to developing effective leadership

behaviors that enhance creativity and innovation that are replicable across other startups to stimulate positive organizational outcomes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Another delimitation is that although the leadership problem affects other business sectors, I limited the study to the IT sector. Also, the choice to focus on founder-CEOs to share their lived experiences and understanding of authentic leadership excluded their followers, whose perspectives might have affected the study findings. Finally, the founder-CEOs' lived overall experiences in managing their ventures could have provided additional context and insights, but these broader experiences were not included in this study. These delimitations could limit the transferability of the study's findings.

Limitations

Simon and Goes (2013) defined limitations as obstacles beyond the researcher's control even though they could affect the outcome of the study. The first limitation in this study was the choice of qualitative methodology which renders the study findings ungeneralizable. In this study, I used multiple data sources to enhance reliability, validity, and credibility. The selected sample size of 10 was negligible compared to the population of nascent entrepreneurs and may not be representative of the population. The findings of the study depended on 10 participants to reach data saturation. Some of the strategies I used to enhance the quality of data were building a good rapport with the participants prior to the interview process and assuring them of confidentiality to share their experiences candidly (Simon & Goes). Researcher biases could have arisen during the data collection and analysis process that can affect the study results. To counter the biases, as recommended by Ravitch and Carl (2016), I wrote an identity memo to provide

a continuous reflection during data collection and analysis of how my experience and identity could have influenced the study findings' interpretation.

Significance of the Study

Research into entrepreneurial leadership in new ventures is less prominent than other fields of leadership despite the widespread recognition of the need to understand effective entrepreneurial behaviors that foster desirable organizational outcomes (Baldegger & Gast, 2016). This study may help fill the knowledge gap by providing an understanding of how authentic leaders influence individual employees' performance to produce positive organizational outcomes (Semedo et al., 2018). Semedo et al. (2016) posited that leadership in organizations is an essential element of success as it positively influences creativity. They further argued that authentic leaders pursue truthful relationships with their followers, stimulating critical thinking and higher levels of emotional intelligence among employees, enhancing individual performance.

Significance to Practice

Governments worldwide are keen to provide interventions to foster entrepreneurial success due to the potential benefits that entrepreneurship has to offer. The government's efforts to promote entrepreneurial activities and reduce barriers to trade include the provision of credit and support to strengthen enterprise management through training (The World Bank, 2014). Khalili (2017) contended that exploring the leadership behaviors of owner-managers within startups may help the governments in conducting interventions geared towards improving business practices and entrepreneurial leadership that enhances firms' outcomes. The author further asserted that

authentic leadership behaviors is the epitome of creativity and innovation that firms require for growth and sustainability. This study's results may be vital in the development of creative and innovative leadership behaviors within new ventures. This study may also assist policymakers, scholarly community, and practitioners in developing policies and entrepreneurial leadership programs to improve individual and organizational performance.

Significance to Theory

One way to ensure the survival of new ventures and reduce failure is to foster employees' creativity and innovation. This study's results may contribute to the development and adaptation of authentic leadership theory to promote the creation of an ethical climate that fosters positive self-development among leaders of startups. By focusing on positive achievements, founder-CEOs of new ventures with authentic leadership behaviors promote trust, enhancing emotional safety and creativity among employees (Xu et al., 2017).

Significance to Social Change

The findings of this research may influence positive social change by understanding leadership behaviors that owners of startups can adapt to effectively manage their businesses and minimize failure. Identifying and understanding the necessary competencies could help nascent entrepreneurs manage their businesses to enhance growth and venture outcomes. The growth and sustainability of startups may benefit the organizations, the youths and their communities, the government by

minimizing the rate of unemployment in Kenya, and the entire national economy (Muchira, 2018).

Summary and Transition

The global business environment is changing rapidly, creating new challenges for existing businesses and an extremely competitive landscape for new entrants. To encourage growth and survival, founder-CEOs of new ventures should embrace entrepreneurial behaviors that enhance innovation while fostering an environment conducive to more wealth creation opportunities (Fontana & Musa, 2017). Sims et al. (2017) argued that creating a new venture is an act of authenticity that entails displaying one's true-self, actual values and beliefs, fostering a positive environment essential for organizations to remain adaptable through constant innovation and, survive in the global competitive business environment.

The authentic leadership model can positively influence the organization by improving the leader-follower relationship, team-level motivation, and employees' psychological state to enhance individual creativity (Xu et al., 2017). Muchira (2018) and Mwangi and Ngugi (2014) postulated that entrepreneurial orientation, the decision-making activities that support entrepreneurial activities, is a key factor for a firm's growth. They argued that lack of entrepreneurial orientation, lack of formal entrepreneurial training or experience, and the slow growth of formal sector jobs have resulted in business failure and prevalent unemployment in Kenya. Liu et al. (2018) contended that authentic leadership creates a positive psychological and ethical environment that encourages employees' commitment to the organizational goals and

increased innovation. Thus, exploring the lived experiences of nascent entrepreneurs regarding authentic leadership could benefit the organization, nation, and region.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Entrepreneurial leadership is essential in the increasingly changing competitive global business landscape, compelling business leaders to embrace behaviors and attitudes that promote positive organizational outcomes (Khalili, 2017). Baldegger and Gast (2016) and Walumbwa et al. (2008) described business leaders as decision-makers and persuaders who play a vital role in determining the success or failure of a firm, particularly in the formative years of the business, and authentic leadership as an essential behavior in helping leaders to promote a positive psychological environment in organizations thus enhancing creativity and innovation, critical for startup success.

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to develop a more nuanced understanding of authentic leadership behavior from the perspective of nascent entrepreneurs. Baldegger and Gast (2016) and Jones et al. (2018) postulated a paucity of research studies focusing on effective entrepreneurial behaviors among startups despite the widespread recognition of the important role startups play in assuaging the problems of youth unemployment, poverty, and economic stagnation. This literature review aimed to provide knowledge to enhance understanding of authentic leadership theory and identify core competencies for entrepreneurial leadership success. This chapter's organization begins with the literature search strategy, conceptual framework, and relevant literature review. The literature review section contains subsections highlighting the emergence of authentic leadership, a discussion of authentic leadership in the context of entrepreneurship, dimensions of authentic leadership, and venture outcomes

attributable to authentic leadership. The chapter ends with a summary and conclusion and a transition to the next chapter.

Literature Search Strategy

The review of the relevant literature began with a critical examination of topics pertinent to the research question and problem statement. I searched and collected research for this literature review primarily through online electronic databases available via Walden University Library, such as EBSCOhost, ProQuest, Emerald, and SAGE. Also, I used the scientific database Google Scholar to search for relevant literature using the keywords *entrepreneurial leadership*, *authentic leadership*, *nascent entrepreneurial leadership*, *authentic entrepreneurial leadership*, *authenticity*, and *authentic leadership in new ventures*. In the initial search, I limited the period for conducting the review to 5 years (from 2014 to 2019), which yielded 152 peer-reviewed articles. The purpose of limiting the period was to include the most recent works that have shaped the field of leadership and to identify existing gaps in authentic leadership research. Nonetheless, I also included peer-reviewed articles and seminal publications that were older than 5 years to provide a historical background of related leadership theories relevant to understand the authentic leadership experience of nascent entrepreneurs.

The most referenced journals in the literature search were *Leadership and Organization Development Journal* and *Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research*. Other resources referenced were book chapters, websites, government databases such as the Kenya Bureau of Statistics, and seminal papers that provided relevant information for conceptual and theoretical development, critique, and insights on

positive outcomes of authentic leadership in new ventures and business organizations in general.

Conceptual Framework

Latham (2014) and Turner and Baker (2018) asserted that while there is no shortage of advice on how to lead, the validity of this advice varies considerably due to a paucity of a coherent theory among researchers and organizational leaders that predicts success. Researchers and practitioners have explained what constitutes effective leadership in varying contexts; however, of the plethora of leadership theories, none offers solutions to the leadership challenges presented by globalization, hyper-competition, technological advancements, and economic turbulence. Besides, the question of what makes leaders effective still remains moderately explained. Armandi et al. (2003) and Mello (1999) asserted that the focal point of leadership theories is on the components that effectively influence followers to achieve the desired outcomes, including aspects such as leader's behavior, personality traits, work processes, organizational culture, interpersonal relationships, perception of followers, style of leadership and other dimensions. Further, the researchers outlined the most common leadership theories as the following: the great man, trait, behavioral, contingency, transactional, and transformational.

King (1990) and Spector (2016) postulated that the great man theory, with its focus on the personality and behaviors of world-renowned, great men that were considered worthy of emulating, evolved in the mid-19th century. Caryle (1841, as cited in Jackson, 2008), a proponent of this theory, argued that great leaders possess intrinsic

leadership traits and can only be born, not made. In 1860, Spencer (as cited in Simon, 1960), an English philosopher, critiqued Carlyle's view that most effective leaders possess quite distinct personalities and their actions are simply the results of the social conditions and that it is an arduous and futile task to try emulating another individual's personality. To solve this impasse and disassociate leadership from specific individuals, theorists developed trait theory centered on leaders' distinctive qualities, notably, self-confidence, intelligence, sense of responsibility, creativity, and other values that enhance their performance. Individuals with these characteristics were presumed to be great leaders (King, 1990). However, empirical researchers have since established that no single trait or set of characteristics can predict leadership success (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

The great man and trait theories proved to be of minimal value to practitioners for failing to consider leadership situations, the nature of leader-follower interactions, and subjective determinants of appropriate leadership traits. Except for trait theory, modified and added to later theories as explanatory variables, the two theories became extinct (King, 1990; Mello, 1999). Researchers then shifted the perspective from personality traits to behaviors that make leaders distinct in their performance, incorporating psychometrics to measure specific human behaviors, and this led to the emergence of behavioral theories (Shafique & Loo-See, 2018). According to Shafique and Loo-See (2018), the behavioral theory describes particular behaviors in leaders that influence their interactions with followers or employees. Further, each behavior becomes a leadership style that individual leaders can adapt and is geared towards achieving a particular response. Badshah (2012) and Turner and Baker (2018) posited that behavioral theories

have two distinct dimensions: people-oriented leaders focus on interpersonal relationships with employees, whereas task-oriented leaders are more concerned with the activities to be undertaken to achieve the set organizational goals.

Another approach to leader behavior as recommended by Notgrass (2014) involves identifying leadership styles from the context of leader-follower interactions. The researcher outlined three types of leaders based on Kurt Lewin's behavioral leadership model: autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire. Autocratic leaders are authoritative and employ a control-and-command approach to lead followers towards achieving the organizational goals, evident in how they make decisions without involving subordinates or employees. This leadership approach does not incorporate employees' input and divergent views, resulting in poor quality decisions. Shafique and Loo-See (2018) described democratic leaders as those who consider the suggestions and proposals of subordinates or employees to make decisions in a participative approach that motivates employees to achieve goal congruence as they feel appreciated and valued hence giving their best to achieve organizational goals while fulfilling their interests. Leaders who take the laissez-faire approach mandate their followers to make and implement their own decisions in achieving the targeted organizational goals, an effective style in smaller organizations with competent, motivated, and intelligent employees.

Shafique and Loo-See (2019) further argued that external environment and varying circumstances affect leaders' behavior, and theories such as trait and behavioral fail to demonstrate the link between situations and leaders' behavior. In their review of leadership theory literature, the researchers recommended that leadership style varies

with the situation or the circumstances a leader faces at a particular time, proffering contingency or situational theories of leadership as effective to that end. Badshah (2012) and Bolman and Deal (2013) concurred with this assertion, contending that a leader's performance depends on the situation and the degree to which the situation accords the leader influence and power. There is no one best way to lead as leaders are more likely to express a leadership style suitable to a particular situation and their relationship with followers.

Burns (1978) introduced transformational leadership to explain the psychological mechanisms in a leader's mind to transform the followers' values, concepts, perceptions, and aspirations through their charismatic and inspirational nature. According to Avolio et al. (1999) and Shafique and Loo-See (2018), the leader's attributes provide a sense of belonging to the followers and the willingness to identify with the leader and their goals, purpose, and vision. In developing the concept of transformational leadership, Bass (1985) argued that transformational leaders influence their followers to exceed their expectations through four main dimensions: idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and inspirational motivation.

Bass and Riggio (2006) defined idealized influence as demonstrating ethical and moral behaviors that inspire followers to enhance their efficacy and achieve organizational goals. Intellectual stimulation occurs when leaders challenge the followers' ideas to promote a rethinking of basic assumptions and enhance critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and restructuring problems, fostering creativity and innovation. According to Barth-Farkas and Vera (2014), inspirational motivation occurs

when leaders articulate their vision to appeal to the followers and stimulate them to work towards achieving those goals, whereas individualized influence is when leaders acclimatize themselves to the needs and requirements of followers and guide them towards achieving both their individual and organizational objectives through mentoring and effective feedback.

Zaech and Baldegger (2017) viewed transactional leadership as a motivation-based system characterized by a mutually beneficial relationship between a leader and a follower to accomplish assigned tasks to obtain a reward as the motivation. The leader communicates and clarifies the organizational goals and expectations to the follower and the rewards attached to those particular goals. In addition, the leader undertakes a series of corrective actions based on results achieved, either actively or proactively.

Gotsis and Grimani (2016) described ethical, spiritual, servant, and authentic leadership as positive forms of emerging leadership theories that encourage initiatives effective in reinforcing the perception of fairness and equity among employees to enhance helpful behaviors and provide a sense of belonging in the organization. Based on their review of extant literature, they posited that servant leaders, whose primary goal is to serve others, strive to put their followers' needs before their own. Latham (2014) contended that although researchers have failed to consolidate leadership theories to explain effective leadership in organizations, there is some degree of overlap between theories that are considered "positive" forms of leadership. Servant, transformational, and authentic theories have similar moral components, while some elements of servant, spiritual, and transformational leadership are similar in terms of advancing positive

leaders' behaviors and organizational culture. In concurrence, Hoch et al. (2018) categorized ethical, servant, and authentic leadership as moral values-based forms of leadership that emphasize leader-follower interactions to enhance employees' motivation and result in positive organizational outcomes.

Gotsis and Grimani (2016) described spiritual leadership as a form of leader behaviors that emphasize intrinsic motivation triggered through a sense of community and membership stemming from positive leader-follower dyads and a sense of calling, promoted through vision, common good, hope, and faith. In their integrated review of literature, Oh et al. (2018) concluded that spiritual leadership is closely related to authentic leadership due to similarity in dimensions such as: conscious reflective practices, ethics, and affective behaviors. Hoch et al. (2018) viewed ethical leadership as a leader's actions that reflect appropriate behaviors through personal acts and interpersonal relations and promotion of the same in the followers through communication, decision-making, and reinforcement. Gotsis and Grimani and Hoch et al. attributed the increased interest in ethical leadership to the recent surge in corporate scandals occasioned by unethical leader behaviors. Hoch et al. further noted that ethical leadership differs from other leadership approaches due to its emphasis on ethical dimensions and inclusion of traits, such as: social responsibility, integrity, fairness, and reflective actions, and behavioral dimensions that promote an ethical culture in the organization.

The conceptual framework for this research study was authentic leadership theory and the three-factor model. The authentic leadership model constitutes leadership

behavior that espouses positive mental capabilities and a positive ethical climate in the leader-follower dyad (Gatling et al., 2016), whereas the three-factor model of authentic leadership developed by Beddoes-Jones and Swailes (2015) outlines three factors that define an authentic leader: self-awareness, self-regulation, and ethics. The authors asserted that modern leadership failure results from leaders lacking in one or more emotional, behavioral, and cognitive traits. The authors perceived a relational model that comprises three pillars: “self-awareness, ethics, and self-regulation” (p. 96), based on trust. Further, they argued that the three-factor model could be the underpinning construct for all positive leadership forms such as: Transformational, ethical, and servant. Miao et al. (2018) conducted a meta-analysis to examine authentic leadership behaviors, articulating the four main dimensions of the theory that foster positive self-development in both the leader and the followers as “self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing of information” (p. 681). These assertions were supported by Ribeiro et al.’s (2019) argument that authentic leaders create an open and transparent climate that is conducive for employees’ growth and fulfillment. The dimension of internalized moral perspective promotes honesty and integrity, discouraging unethical behaviors in the organization, whereas self-awareness, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency enhance trust and positive interpersonal interactions among followers.

Oh et al. (2018) proposed relationship or people-oriented attribute as the fifth dimension of authentic leadership, arguing that authentic leaders are people-oriented, focused on developing the interactive abilities and skills to improve the relationship

between them and followers based on authenticity. In a qualitative study of women business owners, Sims and Morris (2018) argued that the act of starting a new venture is perceived as an intrinsically motivated and authentic undertaking by the founder-owner and is a strong driver of the leader's behavior to demonstrate ethical caring. Further, authenticity is a root construct that underlies the positive leadership theories of charismatic, ethical, servant, and transformational.

Literature Review

The Emergence of Authentic Leadership

Avolio and Gardner (2005), Avolio et al. (2004), Tibbs et al. (2016), and Walumbwa et al. (2008) are among the scholars who traced the emergence of authentic leadership to Greek philosophy and the notion of being true to oneself. According to the scholars, authentic leadership as a concept derives its meaning from ancient Greek philosophers' timeless admonition of awareness of oneself and exercising self-control. The scholars described authentic leaders as highly virtuous and self-regulated individuals who strive for utmost moral standards, achievable through self-reflection, self-awareness, training, and leadership development. Moreover, authentic leadership's quintessence is behavior that pertains to understanding oneself, and departure from such behaviors leads to inauthentic self. Walumbwa et al. posited that although authentic leadership theory is in its infancy in terms of conceptual development, the concept of authenticity has deep roots in psychology and philosophy and has been used to describe stakeholders' perceptions of organizational leaders' values moral behaviors. Additionally, the meaning of authenticity was further refined through empirical research and theoretical

developments to encompass the advancement of positive behaviors to achieve positive and enduring outcomes.

Novićević et al. (2006) suggested that the proximal foundation of authenticity evolved from early philosophers such as Heidegger (1962) through his concept of “winning oneself” by making authentic and inspirational choices. In exploring the meaning of authenticity, Heidegger found no distinction between the organization’s authenticity and the leader’s personal authenticity, implying that an authentic leader stems from an authentic individual. Further, he contended that it was tempting to act “inauthentically” when faced with external pressures such as radical social change, given that change makes it difficult to distinguish between individual responsibility, freedom and autonomy on one hand, and shared responsibility on the other. Two philosophers, Satre and Adorno criticized Heidegger’s views, with Satre arguing that Heidegger’s conceptualization was open to negative politics of difference, contrary to the precepts of authenticity of promoting positive psychological values and skills to achieve a greater balance between individual responsibility and shared responsibility.

Adorno on the other hand termed Heidegger’s conceptualization as “slippery” on the basis that authenticity is an individual’s progression to develop his or her own capacity and subsequently develop the same capacity in others (Novićević et al., 2006). According to Ford and Harding (2011), the term authentic leadership was first used by Bass, a leadership scholar, in a discussion to validate the dimensions of transformational leadership theory and claims of the likelihood of authoritarian and narcissistic managers to masquerade as transformational leaders; and where he incorporated some aspects of

authentic leadership to his original model. In exploring authentic leadership in relation to its purported opposite of pseudo-transformational leadership, Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) argued that authentic leadership rests on legitimate values' moral foundation. Authentic leaders as agents of morality escalate the domain of effective freedom, the scope of altruistic intention, and the horizon of conscience.

In his 1938 seminal work on the functions of the executive, Chester Barnard, a management guru, argued that a leader's authentic capacity should be used as a measure of executive quality since leadership is the pre-eminence of the behavior of individuals to guide people in an organized effort (Chester, 1938). Barnard emphasized the need for future leaders to be competent in the business's practical elements and at the same time remain thoughtful and introspective in their pursuit of moral excellence (Covelli & Mason, 2017; Schwab & Wolf, 1975). In his study on creative and innovative leadership, Khalili (2017) applied authentic leadership theory to explain the essence of effective leadership and the impact of change-oriented leaders on organizational processes. The researcher argued that business organizations that capitalize on behaviors that enhance individual creativity and innovation can survive the global competitive business environment. The concept of authenticity as a critical driver of ethical behavior in the post-Enron era has invoked a resurging interest in authentic leadership, with scholars contending that there is more to this theory than just self-awareness, hence the need to explore it further (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Avolio and Gardner (2005) postulated that there is consensus among scholars and practitioners that a more authentic leadership

approach is necessary in difficult and turbulent times to achieve desired organizational outcomes.

Costas and Taheri (2012) and Ribeiro et al. (2019) postulated that authentic leadership originated from transformational leadership and is a root construct underlying other positive leadership forms: servant, charismatic, and ethical. Although some similarities exist among these leadership theories, the researchers highlighted several differences and argued that authentic leaders convey values and principles that advance open and genuine interactions between leaders and followers in the organization.

Walumbwa et al. (2008) contended that the construct of authenticity and its philosophical meaning was first explored in the organizations in the 1960s to describe its leaders' conceptualization. The researchers posited that the growing interest in positive leadership forms, including authentic leadership, is an upswing in management malfeasance, corporate scandals, and other unethical practices facing private and public organizations. Additionally, research findings have established that an authentic leadership approach is practical for achieving positive organizational outcomes. Ilies et al. (2013) investigated the interconnection between authentic behaviors and emotional expressiveness to explain the influence of leaders' behavior to internalize ideals and values displayed authentically through their emotions on followers. This concept's relevance to the research study is that leaders can elect effective emotions to influence processes and achieve positive organizational outcomes by understanding the relationship between authentic behaviors and emotional expressiveness.

Characteristics of Technological Startups

Salamzadeh and Kesim (2017) viewed startups as new ventures in their early stage of formation, undertaken by entrepreneurs whose aim is to make a significant social or economic change in the society or their own lives by identifying opportunities and creating innovative ideas to solve a problem. Rompho (2018) defined a startup as a pursuit of an opportunity without currently controlled resources and an outcome of entrepreneurial activity. Contrary to large corporations with resource power, scale, and processes to operate efficiently, startups have meager resources but promising ideas, abilities, and aspirations of growth and survival. Humala (2015) contended that startups are essential for economic development in knowledge-based environments as they advance economic growth and job creation, even though they are distinct from large organizations in terms of their fragility and policy needs that make them special and unique. In a systematic review of phenomenological studies on entrepreneurs in various fields, Jahangir et al. (2018) claimed that startups and particularly technological ventures significantly contribute to social and economic development by creating individual and regional wealth, generating jobs, and intensifying technology diffusion. Additionally, the authors recommended using phenomenology to study entrepreneurial activities due to uncertainty and ambiguity in this field to gain comprehensive knowledge of entrepreneurs from the perspective of the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon.

Baldegger and Gast (2016) and Zaech and Baldegger (2017) noted that startups operate in a unique context characterized by a high risk of failure, complexity, and

external and internal uncertainty, unlike larger firms that have established structures, models, and possess a wealth of experience. The external uncertainty comprises the environmental conditions such as complex and dynamic market, while the internal uncertainty's basis is the lack of experience and company traditions. Additionally, startups operate on meager financial and human resources, resulting in flatter organizations with fewer echelons of the hierarchy.

The findings of an interpretive case study conducted by Salamzadeh and Kesim (2017) revealed that startups have unique characteristics categorized in terms of their stage of formation, industry or sector, organization type, asset structure, and growth orientation. Both finances and human resources also restrict startups' operations as they are mostly operated and financed by the founder-owners with limited access to external financing due to the difficulty in evaluating their viability and lack of managerial experience. The authors concluded that most startups fail within their first 10 years, and those that are lucky to survive remain small. Baldegger and Gast (2016) posited that in the context of new ventures, the leader plays a crucial role in determining the vision, direction, and culture of the business; hence the success of the business is conditional on the insights, leadership skills and competencies, and experience of the founder-CEO. Despite the vital role that founder-CEOs play, there is a paucity of research regarding their leadership behaviors' development path. The results of the study by Zaech and Baldegger (2017) demonstrated that leadership is highly relevant for the success of startups, and the leadership behavior of the founder-CEOs plays an essential role in

startups that operate on rudimentary structures, processes, and routines, to develop a vision, motivate, and guide all employees to achieve that vision.

Jones and Crompton (2009) posited that the success of new and smaller firms largely depends on the capabilities of founder-CEO to use their social skills to enhance social capital within the business as they are responsible for articulating the vision, driving innovation, and creating an environment of trust and respect to foster the achievement of organizational goals. Additionally, authentic leaders can create the appropriate conditions for elevated levels of trust while challenging employees to broaden their thinking and improve their decision-making and performance over time. In a qualitative study of women business owners, Sims and Morris (2018) demonstrated that authentic leadership is the cornerstone of servant leadership, leaders' behavior to act authentically, empower others, accept and direct, and work for the common good of others. Through this interrelatedness of being authentic and working in harmony with others, a leader can demonstrate love, compassion, and selflessness that gives intrinsic satisfaction and harmony with oneself and others. Moreover, founding a business is viewed as an act of authenticity and a means of aligning individual values and beliefs with actions.

Authentic Entrepreneurial Leadership

Zaech and Baldegger (2017) stipulated the importance of leadership within startups as new ventures operate in an exceptional environment characterized by external and internal uncertainty occasioned by complex markets and lack of leadership experience, respectively; complexity, and high-risk of failure. The authors argued that the

creation and development of a startup is inevitably linked with the founder-CEO and the business's management reflects the values and behaviors of the leader—Founder-CEOs who are not involved in the operation of the business risk failure. Further, the founder-CEO's leadership behavior is essential for young business ventures' success to articulate and implement the vision while ensuring that employees are well motivated to achieve the organizational goals. Despite the vital role of leaders in startups, only a few studies have produced consistent results of leadership roles in new ventures. Sims et al. (2017) argued that creating a successful new venture entails authenticity and a confluence of the founder's values and leadership skills to promote a positive ethical and psychological climate that enables the organization to achieve competitiveness in the global business environment. Founder-CEOs of small ventures have the unique opportunity to define their businesses according to their values and beliefs thus are more likely to be authentic leaders who influence their followers' attitudes and behaviors through key ethical and psychological processes.

Gatling et al. (2016), Hirst et al. (2016), and Walumbwa et al. (2008) described authentic leaders as performing a set of behaviors that foster a positive psychological and ethical climate in the leader-follower dyads to advance positive organizational outcomes such as job performance, job satisfaction, creativity, moral actions, empowerment, employee commitment, and perception of risk. Palmer (2009) viewed leadership as an essential driver of innovation, growth, and sustainability within the business world. Additionally, leadership is a critical function in a globalized economy characterized by innovative paradigms, rapidly changing technology, and environmental concerns

reshaping the business landscape. On the other hand, Todt et al. (2019) contended that leaders promote an environment of trust and psychological safety to enhance individuals' risk-taking propensity; hence leadership is not only essential for project success but also in the context of project setbacks to motivate innovators to move on following adverse situations and mitigate the erosion of innovative capacity across the organization.

The findings of a study by Mwangi and Ngugi (2014) on the influence of entrepreneurial orientation in micro and small enterprises in Kenya established that the innovativeness, leadership, and entrepreneurial skills of founder-CEOs play a significantly positive role in the success of the enterprises and growth of SMEs in Kenya by providing a foundation for long-term entrepreneurial decisions and actions. The authors viewed entrepreneurial orientation as a firm's strategy that comprises the specific entrepreneurial aspects of decision-making processes, systems, and practices and has three main dimensions: risk-taking, innovativeness, and proactiveness. Leaders of the organization align these dimensions with the firm's strategic orientation.

Fontana and Musa (2017) viewed entrepreneurial leadership as a form of leadership that exists at the fusion of entrepreneurial orientation, entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurial management, to create value out of heterogenous talent and occurs in opportunity-seeking settings to create wealth for stakeholders through direct participation and by innovatively harnessing resources in response to identified needs and opportunities. It is also a leadership style that offers leaders strategies to sustain competitive advantage and foster leader behaviors that enhance adaptation and innovation. The authors identified four main dimensions of entrepreneurial leadership:

strategic, communication, personal, and motivation. The strategic dimension is the ability to comprehensively establish the organization system to determine its current strategies and social and financial capital.

Issues of creativity, organizational fit, job fit, and discipline fall under the personal or organizational dimension, whereas the communication dimension relates to sharing the leader's vision throughout the organization. The motivation dimension appertains to actions that recognize and inspire personnel within the organization that make them feel. In concurrence, Dimitra (2018) contended that the global business environment poses new challenges that require founder-CEOs to constantly embrace change, solve real-life problems, and contend with environmental issues to survive. Accelerated globalization and digital transformation, scarcity of raw materials, climate change, and demographic changes are among the issues that entrepreneurs have to contend with, and this requires leaders who are adaptable, forward-thinking, and highly collaborative, with a deep sense of integrity aside from possessing greater personal and interpersonal skills that inspire and motivate employees to be innovative. On the other hand, Kempster and Cope (2010) argued that a distinct form of leader behaviors is essential to survive the increasingly volatile and competitive environment that firms are facing, hence the inclination to herald leadership capabilities as a major source of competitive advantage for both new and established business ventures. In their view, the previous study of entrepreneurial leadership was within the context of large organizations with less emphasis accorded to founder-driven organizations and startups, creating a knowledge gap of what constitutes effective leadership behaviors within startups.

Stewart et al. (2017) conducted multiple case studies of American Indian enterprises concluding that four principles reflect the consensus about authentic leaders: They are genuine in the way they relate with people; authentic; do not care for status, personal rewards, and honor in their role; and base their actions on personal beliefs and values. Further, authentic leaders have a clear sense of their convictions and values foundational in transforming others to become leaders and motivate, engage, develop satisfaction and commitment to work and the organization, and achieve organizational goals. Understanding the relationship between entrepreneurship and leadership helps nascent entrepreneurs develop leadership strategies to work in different environments to grow their businesses and create jobs.

In their qualitative research to explore the circumstances under which leadership emerges in new ventures, Baldegger and Gast (2016) argued that a qualitative approach is appropriate to explore founder-CEO's leadership behaviors as this is a relatively new phenomenon. Given the unique context these leaders are likely to operate in as new ventures tend to be different from small and large established firms. The researchers identified leadership as an essential determinant of success and failure in small and new ventures where the founder-CEO articulates direction, vision, and culture. Huxtable-Thomas et al. (2016) argued that effective leadership in new ventures could not be over-emphasized as it is one of the significant success factors in small firms, and lack of it can cause failure not only in the firms but the national economy. The findings in their qualitative multi-method study emphasized the importance of effective leadership and demonstrated the need to develop formal prior leadership training for potential

entrepreneurs before they can be leaders of their organizations. Further, the authors recommended the adaptation of a conceptual framework that effectively addresses leadership behaviors and emotions in future studies.

Baldegger and Gast (2016) and Leitch and Volery (2017) postulated that entrepreneurs are leaders who create value for various shareholders by marshaling resources to exploit identified opportunities. The researchers argued that despite being researched widely, many leadership concepts have not been examined in the context of entrepreneurship and small business ventures. New ventures operate in a unique context of uncertainty and complexity and open, dynamic, and unstructured environments, hence the need to understand the founder-CEOs' behavior from this context. There is still a paucity of research on founder-CEOs' leadership behaviors of small and new ventures and their impact on firm success. In their qualitative study to comprehensively understand how leadership emerges in new ventures, Baldegger and Gast identified the emergence and development of leadership in new ventures and termed it a continuous and dynamic process to provide alignment, direction, and commitment from the followers, to minimize failure.

Leitch and Volery (2017) employed both positivist and interpretive methodologies to examine the concept of leadership in startups, lamenting that although leadership is a major topic of research in management, many of its dimensions have not been applied in the area of small business enterprises and entrepreneurship. The researchers asserted that the launch of a business is an enacted phenomenon characterized by uncertainty, equivocality, and risk, that requires effective leadership behaviors as the

founder-CEO pivots towards the search for efficient structures, processes, and a business model that can address the numerous challenges of new ventures. Moreover, successful entrepreneurs espouse new form of entrepreneurial leadership abilities that are more efficient in adapting to emerging environmental situations and managing change, a source of competitive advantage for business ventures.

Nyberg and Sveningsson (2014) argued that there is a need to provide an alternative theoretical framing that offers a comprehensive understanding of entrepreneurs' leadership experiences through a critical and interpretive approach. Crawford et al. (2019) identified a suite of criticisms that limited the complete understanding of authentic leaders and rendered the concept theoretical rather than practical. To enhance the practicability of the theory, the authors proposed a more robust theory development of the authentic leadership process from an interpretive perspective as one of the recommendations, the other one being an amendment of the theoretical model of authentic leadership to include five inter-related dimensions: awareness, balanced processing of information, positive moral perspective, informal influence, and sincerity.

In concurrence, Iszatt-White et al. (2019) posited there is a growing body of research seeking to reconceptualize and develop authentic leadership theory to offer a more robust link between theory and practice and provide a deeper understanding of what it means to be an authentic leader. According to the authors, the concept of authentic leadership was proposed as an antecedent to the increasing unethical "meltdowns" that had resulted in the loss of faith in previous forms of leadership that lack the values-based

moral inclination and positive psychological underpinnings. Additionally, it is incumbent for corporate leaders to consistently enact their espoused values, principles, and morals and operate at a higher level of integrity to meet the organizational stakeholders' objectives. One way of influencing positive behaviors and ethical decision-making by leaders is developing authentic leader behaviors.

Dimensions of Authentic Leadership

Feng et al. (2018) and Gotsis and Grimani (2016) described authentic leadership as a developmental process that encompasses moral perspective and psychological capital to yield a positive organizational climate and positive behaviors among employees. Further, authentic leaders are genuine individuals who act per their deeply held values and guided by strong moral convictions in modeling those values and beliefs to their followers through four generally accepted constructs, empirically validated by Walumbwa et al. (2008): self-awareness, relational transparency, unbiased processing of information, and internalized moral perspective.

Ilies et al. (2013) argued that authentic leaders preserve high levels of consistency in their actions and genuineness in their emotional expression by aligning behaviors with values, ideals, and preferences. Besides, they posited that authentic leadership definition incorporates four dimensions: Self-awareness, authentic relational orientation, authentic behavior, and unbiased processing. Self-awareness and unbiased information processing are introspective, whereas authentic behavior and authentic relational orientation enhance the leader-follower dyads. The researchers described relational authenticity as the

leader's aspiration to forge honest relationships with followers through open disclosure of information and transparent decision-making.

In concurrence, Nasab and Afshari (2019) recognized positive psychology as the foundation of authentic leadership. They argued that leaders who espouse authentic behaviors foster the achievement of individual and organizational goals through the dimensions of self-awareness, unbiased processing of information, internalized moral perspective, and relational transparency. The findings of their study confirmed the positive effect of authentic leadership behaviors on employees' performance, supporting the results of previous studies such as: Joo and Jo (2017), Oh et al. (2018), and Ribeiro et al. (2019). In Nasab and Afshari's view, today's work environment requires effective leaders that can enhance organizational success in the face of unethical challenges.

Avolio and Gardner (2005) and Walumbwa et al. (2008) proposed and developed the concept of authentic leadership as a precursor to all forms of positive leadership to promote leader behaviors that foster positive psychological capabilities and a positive ethical environment on the leader-follower relationship to enhance self-development. The researchers identified four main dimensions of authentic leadership: Self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing of information, and internalized moral perspective, that enhance organizational outcomes such as job performance, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, innovation, perception of risk, and turnover intention.

Further, Walumbwa et al. (2008) argued that due to authentic leader behaviors' effectiveness in achieving positive organizational outcomes and promoting human

enterprises, organizational stakeholders are demanding more authentic leaders to foster higher integrity levels. Organizational leaders who understand their values, beliefs, strength, and weaknesses positively impact followers' performance. Badaracco (2014) posited that the formation of an authentic leader begins with a commitment to discover one's "True North," the foundation to one's deeply held values, and the wellspring of the ability to build trust, which is essential in creating entrepreneurial organizational cultures that empower employees to take the initiative to lead and not just follow the leader. Additionally, the researcher argued that today's corporate leaders are values-centered, purpose-driven, and less hierarchical; they operate more as servant leaders and less in their self-interest for the common good of society and the global world, openly and authentically rather than focusing on charisma and leadership style.

Self-Awareness

Miao et al. (2018) described self-awareness as one's articulation of his or her values, abilities, emotions, strength and weaknesses, and the impact these aspects have on others, whereas Nasab and Afshari (2019) and Walumbwa et al. (2008) described the concept as a leader's consciousness, his or her understanding of meanings elicited from phenomena and how the meaning-making process shapes his or her worldview and perception of others. Moreover, it is the reflective process of understanding one's true self, including thoughts, behaviors, and strengths and weaknesses, that shapes the leader's identity and values over time. According to Walumbwa et al., authentic leaders are individuals who view their leadership role as a critical component of their self-

concept, are self-expressive in their behavior, self-resolute, and self-concordant in their goals.

Liu et al. (2018) argued that self-awareness and self-regulation in employees lead to commitment and trust to the organization and also influences employees' behaviors, through the mechanism of personal identification; the tendency of an individual to alignment with one particular other person, usually the supervisor, which results in higher motivation and job commitment. Semedo et al. (2018) concurred with this assertion and added that self-awareness means that leaders are aware of followers' perception of them and hence, are constantly assessing themselves to display their best behavior.

Badaracco (2014) postulated that self-awareness is an essential element of being an authentic individual and leader. To gain self-awareness, its incumbent for a leader to discover their true self by understanding their life story, developing a continuous introspective process to reflect their goals and purpose in life, and getting regular feedback on their leadership from peers and followers.

Leavy (2016) posited that leaders who persistently and consciously search for greater self-awareness in their role are in a better position to question their ideas and belief system, which confers a deeper understanding of their identity, business, marketplace, and the global forces that could affect their objective of continuous growth and development. Further, the route to becoming an authentic leader has two goals: To consciously discover who you are and uncover your deepest values and, how to achieve your leadership voice and drive. The achievement of which keeps a leader grounded and able to resist the short-term societal pressures.

In a review of relevant literature, Nyberg and Sveningsson (2014) termed the concept of self-awareness as a misconception since it is challenging to construct a “true self” in a dynamic and socially varying work environment. In their criticism, the assumption that the self is robust and integrated within an individual and that people can reach a level of self-awareness through introspection is equivalent to enfranchising the individual self as a fixed entity, detached from the cultural and social contexts. Additionally, the organization’s complexities impede the possibility of maintaining a solid and consistent authentic leader behavior in relating with subordinates. The authors recommended an alternative theoretical framing from a more interpretative approach to understand authentic leaders’ experiences rather than the current positivist approach. Another criticism of self-awareness highlighted the ambiguity between self-awareness or individual authenticity, and authenticity as a relational concept, making it difficult to achieve genuine authenticity in an authentic leader due to the two levels (Crawford et al., 2019).

Internalized Moral Perspective

Several scholars have emphasized the significance of morality and ethics as a guiding principle for organizational leaders to help create authentic organizations, following the recent surge in malfeasance and corporate scandals that has forged pseudo-authenticity (Yadav & Dixit, 2017). Internalized moral perspective relates to a leader’s self-control and self-regulation, anchored on his or her values, aspirations, and moral standards versus societal or organizational expectations and decision-making, consistent with personal values (Crawford et al., 2019). Iszatt-White et al. (2019) posited that

internalized moral perspective and authentic leadership, in general, grew out of the need to influence ethical decision-making and moral behaviors of leaders in response to increased corporate scandals and malpractices.

Feng et al. (2018) described internalized moral perspective as authentic behavior founded on internal moral standards rather than leader behaviors based on external pressures. Authentic leaders focus on consistently acting per their deeply held beliefs and values, shepherded by sound moral precepts and without giving in to coercion or persuasion from societal pressures to act otherwise. Liu et al. (2018) referred to the concept of internalized moral perspective as a leader's capacity to possess some form of self-regulation. They argued that authentic leaders are shepherded by values that help them be effective and efficient for themselves and their followers to promote a positive work environment where employees perform their duties without fear of making mistakes.

In concurrence, Semedo et al. (2018) contended that authentic leaders base their strategic actions on high moral standards and ethical values, hence exhibiting behaviors consistent with those values. Ethical conduct standards guide an authentic leader and his or her actions are consistent with their core values and beliefs, rather than societal and other external pressures. Their study's findings suggested that authentic leadership helps build more robust leader-member exchanges, resulting in positive attitudes that enhance employees' creativity.

In contrast, Alvesson and Einola (2019) postulated that authenticity is a social phenomenon where leaders constantly struggle to uphold ethical and moral decisions,

making it a contested moral terrain that is complicated to navigate, thus unattainable. Leaders who claim to live and act authentically focus so much on themselves, which could be an invitation to narcissism and other pathologies. The researchers concluded that authentic leadership and its concepts are flawed because of the shaky theoretical foundation that fails to link the construct to practice and provide a logical whole. In concurrence with Alvesson and Einola (2019), Nyberg and Sveningsson (2014) viewed internalized moral perspective as a mean for suppression and domination, arguing that it is not possible to consistently express one's true self and act morally because of the dynamism of the social and cultural environments in which organizations operate.

Relational Transparency

Relational transparency has an outward focus and can reflect one's true self to others through honest and open sharing of information and communicating one's true thoughts and feelings (Oh et al., 2018). Nasab and Afshari (2019) and Semedo et al. (2018) referred to relational transparency as one of the fundamental characteristics of leadership in the global business world, manifested through honest sharing of thoughts, feelings, and information through interpersonal interactions between the leader and follower, while preserving some degree of dignity within the workplace so that followers can understand the leader's behavior, more so in making decisions. Feng et al. (2018) and Liu et al. (2018) viewed relational transparency as a conscious process of self-disclosure by a leader to exhibit one's true thoughts and feelings to followers to promote an environment of trust. Further, the leader's high moral values are internalized by

employees through interpersonal interactions, a process that enhances psychological safety and results in high motivation, good performance, and self-regulation.

According to Jiang and Men (2017) relational transparency fosters an environment of trust achieved through a leader's transparency in communicating organizational processes and goals, information sharing, self-disclosure, and self-expression. Transparent organizational communication, a process that builds trust and credibility in the leader-member dyad, involves deliberate information dissemination coupled with employee's active participation entirely and truthfully to hold organizational leaders accountable and enhance positive organizational outcomes. By communicating their ideas and beliefs openly and consistently, authentic leaders create an environment that fosters exchanging ideas and opinions to enhance creativity, employees' critical thinking, and problem-solving capabilities. Gill and Caza (2018) concurred with this assertion and added that an authentic leader is more likely to express his or her values with followers and encourage them to develop their capacities.

Balanced Processing of Information

Authentic leaders analyze all relevant information before making decisions to achieve fairness as perceived by employees (Feng et al., 2018). Crawford et al. (2019) and Ilies et al. (2013) described unbiased information processing as the leader's introspective ability to objectively analyze all available information before making decisions and the willingness to be more accepting of divergent views expressed by others. In concurrence, Nasab and Afshari (2019) and Semedo et al. (2018) added that balanced processing of information includes incorporating views and opinions of

followers in the decision-making process while challenging the existing situation to stimulate thinking. Through a balanced decision-making process, authentic leaders promote positive relationships between them and employees, enhancing creativity. Gill and Caza (2018) posited that balanced processing arises from self-awareness and makes followers perceive their leader as committed to them, thus deserving their reciprocal commitment. Further, seeking input from followers facilitates open leader-follower communication and knowledge sharing, contributing to positive social exchanges and enhancing interpersonal skills and job resourcefulness.

Authentic Leadership and Organizational Commitment

Hirst et al. (2016) contended that authentic leadership theory is the root construct of positive leadership and the most essential in building effective leader-follower relationships by enhancing employees' trust and corporate behavior. Besides, it helps develop moral values and helping behaviors in both the individuals and teams in a multi-level structure where it has a cascading effect and can quickly become part of the organization's culture. Their study's findings demonstrated that analyzing authentic leadership from a multi-level approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the cascading effect of authentic leaders' behavior in promoting individual and collective relational actions that support positive voluntary behavior of employees at individual and team levels.

Xu et al. (2017) posited that authentic leadership promotes employee trust, which motivates atypical thinking and boosts emotional safety to foster creativity, an essential building block for organizational innovation and, subsequently, growth and survival in

the competitive global business environment. The concept of authentic leadership has been explored in the fields of leadership, management, psychology, business ethics, human resources, and entrepreneurship to determine its impact on organizational outcomes such as: job satisfaction (Oh et al., 2018), turnover (Gatling et al., 2016), creativity and innovation (Khalili, 2017), perception of risk (Jones & Crompton, 2009); and, organizational commitment and job resourcefulness (Nasab & Afshari, 2019; Semedo et al., 2018).

The findings of a study by Nasab and Afshari (2019) concluded that authentic leaders positively affect employee performance by fostering transparency and open communication of organizational goals that motivate employees to put their effort hence improving organization performance. By developing high levels of trust, optimism, and hope among employees, authentic leaders enhance their individual performance and organizational outcomes (Azanza et al., 2018). Sims and Morris (2018), through their qualitative research via telephone interviews with 12 women founder-CEOs, established that authentic servant leaders empower and enhance the abilities of followers by working authentically, altruistically, and with humility. Further, they reflect their true intentions, commitments, and compassion towards less advantaged, adapt “others” perspective, exhibit empathy, and encourage followers to act towards the common good; attributes that are more reflective and integrative in women entrepreneurs. To this end, the researchers identified authenticity as the cornerstone of servant leadership since aligning one’s beliefs with actions is authentic.

Oh et al. (2018) and Walumbwa et al. (2008) asserted that although the concept of authenticity is not new, there has been a resurging interest in what constitutes authentic leadership within the management literature. The prevalent fraud and malfeasance by corporate leaders and breach of trust between leaders and stakeholders have obligated researchers to consider new leadership perspectives. Covelli and Mason (2017) postulated that authentic leadership is a multi-dimensional concept with numerous similarities with servant, ethical, charismatic, and spiritual leadership. Authentic leaders embody some characteristics, notably: “Understanding their purpose, establishing meaningful relationships, leading with their heart, exhibiting solid values, and demonstrating self-discipline” (p. 2). Further, authentic leaders do not operate a specific skill, style or trait; every leader has their own style, which fits into a specific context when combined with various behaviors and skills. Additionally, the authors argued that authentic leaders are necessary to make decisions in the current business environment prevalent with scandals and mistrust.

Walumbwa et al. (2008) argued that a plethora of research from social, cognitive, psychological, and organizational studies has indicated numerous personal benefits of authenticity, including higher psychological well-being and self-esteem, elevated levels of friendliness, and increased organizational performance. In concurrence, Ilies et al. (2013) asserted that authentic leaders have a more substantial influence on their followers to achieve the set objectives; thus, training leaders in authentic leadership is highly beneficial in enhancing higher performance at the individual and organizational levels.

The authors established that relational authenticity and emotional expressiveness are essential elements in the leadership influence process through their study on authenticity.

Todt et al. (2019) posited that although leadership is essential in innovative project success, leaders' role in project setbacks cannot be overemphasized due to their critical role in preventing the erosion of innovative capacity in the organization during adverse situations. Authentic leadership encompasses a set of behaviors and attitudes that strengthen innovator resilience potential (IRP), innovators' ability to recover from adverse situations such as project failure and return to performance levels before the setback. The authentic leadership dimensions correspond with the IRP attributes: self-efficacy, organization-based self-esteem, hope, risk propensity, and optimism. The relevance of this research to the research study is that innovative projects in startups sometimes fail. It is incumbent on the founder-CEO to terminate the project to avoid unnecessary additional expenses while still maintaining the innovators' high motivation to stay committed to their work.

Hoch et al. (2018) described the organizational commitment as an individual's ability to identify with and get involved with a particular organization. In an extant review of literature, the researchers found an association between organizational commitment and emerging forms of leadership, including authentic leadership. Authentic leaders emphasize positive moral perspectives, relational transparency, and individual employee development hence fostering employees' emotional attachment to the organization.

Authentic Leadership and Work Engagement

Liu et al. (2018) defined work engagement as a multidimensional motivation concept that mirrors the concomitant investment of an employee's emotional, cognitive, and physical zeal in his or her work assignments. In an integrated review of literature, Oh et al. (2018) argued that employees are the most valuable asset of an organization and more so when engaged, as they make a meaningful contribution in the activities that lead to organizational performance. Additionally, in a rapidly changing business environment, it is imperative to create core values, the shared beliefs and cultures that improve the work environment and overall organizational competitiveness by aligning employees with the organization strategy, hence reducing followers' resistance to the organization's objectives. Core values are the mainspring of organization culture and guiding principles of employees, adapted and implemented through authentic leadership, to foster employees' work engagement and overall achievement of higher organizational outcomes. Effective leaders preserve organizational identity through core values and core authentic relationships with followers.

Consistent with the proposition of psychological empowerment, Joo and Jo (2017) emphasized authentic leaders' role in creating a conducive work climate for their employees to achieve desirable outcomes. Perceived authentic leadership enhances the leader-member dyad, fostering psychological empowerment in the followers that promotes innovation and creativity. Through self-awareness and self-regulated behaviors, authentic leaders inspire followers to achieve personal growth and self-development. Further, leaders foster emotional support, decision-making skills, and task challenges in

the followers through balanced processing of information that grants employees the opportunity to learn, expand their knowledge, and develop intuition. In contrast, Alvesson and Einola (2019) critically reviewed the concept of authenticity, arguing that combining authenticity and leadership in one concept is methodologically flawed and unattainable in business organizations as being authentic may cause personal vulnerabilities such as inflexibility and conservatism. The scholars critiqued the lack of substance and solid philosophical foundation in authentic leadership models and other positive leadership constructs. For instance, authentic leadership's definition includes cause and effect, and the constitutive dimensions of the concept do not form a solid theoretical construct and logical whole. Moreover, there is no empirical evidence to demonstrate the association between job-related outcomes and individual leader's authenticity.

In a quantitative study based on a questionnaire developed from similar studies, Delić et al. (2017) posited that transitional economies are changing from government-controlled to market-based economies, characterized by a shift of ownership from government to private enterprises that require a constant stream of knowledge to adapt to new market conditions and gain competitive advantage. Their study's findings confirmed that employees could learn both attitudes and behaviors from their authentic leader, thus fostering a learning organization. Further, authentic leaders motivate employees to acquire new skills and continuously look for improvement areas, enhancing learning in the organization and producing positive organizational outcomes and employee commitment. Schoemaker et al. (2018) concurred with this view, adding that in a highly

competitive business environment, entrepreneurs will be unrelentingly committed to achieving survival via growth and improvements of people and processes; and a mindset open to learning is crucial in sensing and seizing opportunities and threats.

Agote et al. (2016) argued that change in the organization is inevitable, and change recipients' reaction during the change period is a crucial determinant of success and failure in the implementation process. The researchers noted that through enacting the distinct behaviors that together constitute authentic leadership, a leader effectively communicates their emotions to the followers, which guides them during change and determines whether the change will be resisted or readily accepted and build some level of trust in the leader. In addition, the dimensions of authentic leadership behaviors eliminate negative emotions associated with the change process, such as anxiety, fear of the unknown, and general discomfort. Gill and Caza (2018) added that by soliciting information from various sources, employees perceive that their interests, concerns, and viewpoints are being considered, facilitating open leader-follower communication and sharing of information that will enhance job-related knowledge.

Authentic Leadership and Creativity and Innovation

Xu et al. (2017) asserted that creativity is a crucial tenet for organizational innovation to enhance adaptability to the constantly changing global business environment. Authentic leaders promote positive psychological environments through relational transparency construct to foster an environment of trust and employees' sense of identity, thus encouraging unconventional thinking and individual creativity. Further, the leaders articulate the vision, provide feedback, and clarify tasks to enhance

employees' creative capacity. Ribeiro et al. (2019) reported that authentic leaders' dimensions of self-awareness, relational transparency, and balanced information processing promote trust and higher exchanges with employees, enhancing their affective commitment. Subsequently, affective commitment mediates the association between perceived authentic leadership and employee creativity. In addition, authentic leaders advance integrity and honesty and discourage unethical practices within the organization through internalized moral perspective. These positive psychological exchanges enhance the leader-follower dyads, build stronger teams, and increase individual creativity.

Khalili (2017) postulated that effective leader behaviors play a vital role in creating a risk-tolerant environment where employees can generate and share novel ideas that enhance creativity and innovation that catapults an organization to a level of success. Besides, leaders significantly influence employees' creative and innovative behaviors through the traditional functions of a leader; articulating vision, communicating, coordinating, and motivating. Leaders who promote positive psychological capabilities and high ethical standards foster an environment of trust and confidence that enhances employees' creativity and innovation.

In a quantitative study of software innovators, Todt et al. (2019) asserted that authentic leaders possess essential attributes that form a basis for trusting interactions during project innovation and also espouse a set of relevant leadership behaviors that are necessary to support innovators in times of adversity, such as project terminations. They noted that while the literature on project management acknowledges the role of leadership in enhancing project success, there is a paucity of research in the role of

leadership in the context of project failure. The authors acknowledged that innovative projects are sometimes terminated; hence, it is essential to develop innovative resilience potential (IRP), which consists of attributes such as self-efficacy, outcome expectancy, hope, optimism, risk propensity, and organization-based self-esteem that help followers deal with adverse effects of project termination. These attributes also mirror the authentic leadership dimensions of self-awareness, relational transparency, unbiased information processing, and internalized moral perspective.

Authentic leaders demonstrate a sense of purpose, self-awareness, social awareness, consistently practice their values, and lead followers to achieve results; attributes that align with the two components of IRP: Hope and optimism. In turn, the positive influence processes have a domino effect on followers' well-being, which affects self-efficacy, self-esteem, and outcome expectancy, to foster further innovation (Todt et al., 2019). Mandhachitara and Allapach (2017) posited that managerial attitudes and behaviors of founder-CEOs of small businesses are vital in shaping the effectiveness of the organization, based on their beliefs and values. Although a leader's behavior that encourages creativity and innovation is crucial for the performance of small businesses, given that such leaders create a positive environment that enhances sharing of ideas among employees, thus encouraging growth, the findings of their study indicated that leadership alone is insufficient to explain the success of new ventures.

In a study on entrepreneurial leadership, Jones and Crompton (2009) applied authentic leadership theory to emphasize that employees' motivation is crucial for entrepreneurial success in newer and smaller firms. In their view, the dimensions inherent

in authentic leaders help employees develop their strengths and feelings of appreciation, thus enhancing creativity, innovation, risk-taking, and decision-making; and creates an ethical climate to operate a business for the benefit of all stakeholders. Besides, startups' success depends on the founder-CEO's ability to enact their social skills to enhance social capital within their firms.

Ilies et al. (2013) asserted that authentic leaders are consistent in their actions as they align their behaviors with their values, encouraging open and truthful relationships with their followers. Further, they disclose relevant information, ensure transparency in making decisions, and communicate clear expectations to their followers, promoting higher levels of leader-follower interactions and strong emotional connections, crucial for attaining a range of individual and organizational outcomes, including creativity. This literature's relevance to the research study is in the findings that demonstrated relational authenticity; a leader's desire to build open and honest relationships through transparent communication with followers is crucial in the leadership process. In contrast, Iszatt-White et al. (2019) criticized the concept of authenticity in leadership studies, terming it flawed as it fails to link theory and practice. The researchers argued that authentic leadership was developed as an antidote for other leadership forms that had failed to curb ethical malfeasance and fraud. However, authentic leadership theory fails to provide a proper understanding of what it means to be an authentic leader; hence, it cannot link theory and practice and is incapable of producing measurable organizational goals.

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter provided a critical analysis of the literature of current research studies, critiques, gaps, and recommendations for further study relevant to the research problem of authentic entrepreneurial leadership within startups. It also covered discussions of the research studies buttressing the problem statement and research question, current debates that advance authentic leadership, and those that have caused scathing criticism among scholars. Entrepreneurial leadership as a field is still in its infancy and lacks suitable tools to define and evaluate entrepreneurial leaders' behaviors and characteristics effectively. Moreover, previous research on entrepreneurial leadership focused on large and more established organizations, and the findings may not apply to small and emerging business ventures (Leitch & Volery, 2017). There is growing evidence in the field of leadership that an authentic approach to leadership is beneficial and effective to promote positive psychological climate and positive ethical environments to achieve organizational outcomes such as job performance, job satisfaction, employee commitment, creativity and innovation, perception of risk, and turnover (Costas & Taheri, 2012; Walumbwa et al., 2008).

Iszatt-White et al. (2019) emphasized the need to develop a more nuanced understanding of an authentic leadership approach grounded on a qualitative approach. The researchers argued there is a paucity of research on what constitutes authenticity, the association between theory and practice, and the construct of a suitable measure of the positive organizational outcomes that authentic leaders proffer. Thompson-Whiteside et al. (2017) conducted the only interpretative phenomenological approach that explored

authentic leadership development among nascent female entrepreneurs and their study had similarities with this research study in terms of research design, sampling strategy, and participants. The study's findings supported the conclusion that founder-CEOs communicate their abilities, strength, and weaknesses authentically to others; they also develop their own version of entrepreneurial behaviors to build trusted businesses. Martin et al. (2018) argued that psychological capital is an essential resource for founder-CEOs of small businesses to cope with entrepreneurial leadership challenges. IT startups experience a myriad of challenges, and exploring the experience of leaders through hermeneutic phenomenology, which is concerned with the lived human experience, provides a comprehensive understanding of effective leader behaviors. (Lavery, 2003). Research in leadership with an authentic approach is still scanty, and this research study may fill this gap by providing knowledge and a deeper understanding of authentic leadership behaviors of nascent entrepreneurs in the IT industry. Chapter 3 includes the rationale for qualitative, phenomenology, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Chapter 3: Research Method

There is a paucity of research studies on nascent entrepreneurs' leadership behaviors despite researchers identifying leadership as a critical success factor in the formative years of a business (Baldegger & Gast, 2016). The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to develop a more nuanced understanding of authentic leadership behavior from the perspective of nascent entrepreneurs. I collected data through online interviews with founder-CEOs of IT startups and analyzed the data to provide a comprehensive understanding of authentic leadership from the nascent entrepreneurs' context and perspective rather than describing their perceived behaviors. The participants were entrepreneurs aged 18 to 29 from the IT sector in Nairobi, Kenya, who have operated a business for at least 2 years. This chapter begins with the research question that guided the study, followed by a comprehensive discussion of the qualitative phenomenology design and rationale, the researcher's role, and issues of trustworthiness in the research study.

Research Design and Rationale

The overarching research question was: What are nascent entrepreneurs' lived experiences and understanding of authentic leadership? Authentic leadership is a set of leaders' behaviors that promotes an ethical climate to advance greater self-awareness, balanced processing of information, relational transparency, and internalized moral perspective in the leader and follower, fostering positive self-development (Walumbwa et al., 2008) and organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, job performance, empowerment, creativity, and overall profitability (Gatling et al., 2016). The ontological

position that guided this research study was that reality is relative and results from an individual's interpretation from his or her subjective perspective or worldview instead of a form of empirical sense-making. Qualitative methodology was suitable for this constructivist perspective to provide an in-depth understanding of nascent entrepreneurs' experiences in enacting leadership behaviors in their everyday lives and the meanings they make from these experiences (Burkholder et al., 2016; Maxwell, 2013).

Ravitch and Carl (2016) defined qualitative research as an inquiry into understanding individuals or groups in their natural settings in a way that elicits the meaning that people make out of their experience of specific phenomena. According to Creswell (2013), there are five main research designs or approaches to qualitative research: single or multiple case study, phenomenology, narrative, ethnography, and grounded theory research. The research design for this study was the interpretive framework of phenomenology, specifically, hermeneutic phenomenology, which supports the ontological perspective of the belief in the existence of multiple realities (Laverly, 2003; Moustakas, 1994). Van Manen (2016) described phenomenology as an attempt to understand the meaning of human experiences in everyday existence, while Moustakas (1994) and Van Manen described hermeneutic phenomenology as a method of reflecting on the human experience as lived in everyday life. Given the purpose of the research and to answer the research question, phenomenology was suitable to explore the leadership behaviors of nascent entrepreneurs.

Ethnography, a qualitative inquiry method that has roots in anthropology and sociology, is appropriate for research studies to interpret modalities of a cultural group in

relation to a phenomenon (Burkholder et al., 2016). Yin (2018) described a case study as an empirical inquiry method to investigate a phenomenon in depth and within its natural setting, particularly when the interconnection between the bounded unit and the phenomenon is not distinct. Besides the focus in an ethnography on culture, another distinction between case studies and ethnography is that case study researchers do not require long-term immersion in the target population to collect data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Both case study and ethnography methods were inappropriate for this research study, given the research purpose and problem.

Narrative analysis is suitable for obtaining a first-hand account of an individual's experience in story form to understand their experience concerning a phenomenon (Burkholder et al., 2016). Narrative analysis design was unsuitable for this study given that it does not generate shared meaning (Burkholder et al., 2016). Another qualitative design is grounded theory, an approach that researchers use to develop concepts, models, and emergent social phenomena theories from the data collected. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to develop a more nuanced understanding of authentic leadership behavior from the perspective of nascent entrepreneurs, not to develop a grounded theory, which made grounded theory unsuitable for this study (Ravitch & Carl).

Role of the Researcher

Burkholder et al. (2016) emphasized that the researcher's role in phenomenological research is to gather, organize, and analyze perceptions from individuals who have experienced a phenomenon. Ravitch and Carl (2016) stated that the

primary instrument of data collection is the researcher. My role as observer-participant entailed actively participating in the interview process and identifying, reviewing, and analyzing relevant documents without engaging in activities with participants. The role implied being present in the setting, making participants comfortable, conducting the interview, recording data, and taking notes to enhance the data's quality. I had no direct prior relationship with the participants, personally and professionally, and I was not in a position of power to unduly influence prospective participants' decision to participate voluntarily.

Burkholder et al. (2016) noted that cultivating a good rapport with potential participants and providing adequate information on the research aim, the potential risks and benefits, the number of questions participants will answer, and the interview duration enhance the interview process. Additionally, they argued that the researcher, as an observer-participant, should assure the participants of anonymity and confidentiality of the process to protect their privacy. The assurance of confidentiality and anonymity encouraged the participants to share their lived experiences candidly. I received, recorded, and analyzed the participants' data and safeguarded it from unauthorized access. I also wrote notes and memos during data collection and practiced reflexivity throughout the interview process. Ravitch and Carl (2016) argued that reflexivity, which refers to the constant assessment of one's identity, subjectivity, and positionality, is critical to understanding how personal biases, preferences, prejudices, and experiences can influence the construction and interpretation of meaning throughout the research

process. Burkholder et al. emphasized the importance of avoiding bias during both the data collection and analysis process, not to jeopardize participant responses' integrity.

Prior to the interview process, the participants completed a consent form that contained information on the research aim, the procedure for conducting the research, the study's voluntary nature, duration of the interview and participation in the study, and anticipated risks and benefits of the study. Participation in the research study was voluntary and participants did not receive any compensation. Ravitch and Carl (2016) asserted that any incentive should not be excessive to avoid unduly influencing prospective participants' decision to participate in a research study voluntarily. In concurrence, Burkholder et al. (2016) proposed that the emphasis of a researcher should be on conducting ethical research, rather than compensating the participants for their time, by engaging in acts of reciprocity, such as assuring participants of respect, confidentiality, and anonymity, and providing opportunities for participants to reflect on their lived experiences.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The study population were nascent entrepreneurs in IT sector in Nairobi, Kenya. Nairobi is Kenya's capital city, a key partner in East Africa's technology ecosystem, and home to over 90% of IT startups in the country (Global Innovation Index Report, 2019). Mwangi and Ngugi (2014) noted that 67% of new ventures fail within the first year, and over 60% of the remaining ventures do not survive to their third anniversary, while the few that survive remain small. Several authors have emphasized the importance of

leadership in the business's formative years (Baldegger & Gast, 2016; Jones & Crompton, 2009; Zaech & Baldegger, 2017). I interviewed 10 founder-CEOs of IT startups and reached data saturation based on the constant comparative method. Rowlands et al. (2015) argued that although there is no ideal method to reach data saturation, research studies that entail the use of interviews should have a sample size of at least 20 and fulfill three main criteria: no new data seem to emerge regarding a category; the relationship between categories is clear, and the category is rich in terms of paradigm elements.

Marshall et al. (2013) posited that approximating sufficient sample results from saturation that occurs when a researcher gathers data to the point of diminishing returns, such that additional data does not yield new themes. According to Patton (2015), the sample size to achieve saturation in qualitative studies depends on the purpose of the inquiry, what will be beneficial, credible, and achievable within the available time and resources. Other factors that can affect saturation include the number of interviews conducted, sampling procedures, number of interviews per participant, and quality of the interviews.

I identified and recruited participants who were between 18 and 29 years old, had operated a business in the IT sector for at least 2 years, and were readily available to participate in the research study, using the purposeful convenience sampling technique (Burkholder et al., 2016). Suri (2011) postulated that there is a higher likelihood of reaching data saturation with a purposeful strategy. Ravitch and Carl (2016) asserted that adopting a snowball sampling approach is beneficial when the researcher knows one or a

few participants. I started by recruiting a few relevant participants and then asked them for the names of other potential participants, continuing this process where the initial participants helped identify other participants who met the study's criteria until I achieved data saturation.

Instrumentation

The most common data collection instruments in phenomenological research include interviews, observation, and written anecdotes (Vagle, 2018). Ravitch and Carl (2016) and Vagle (2018) argued that interviews are the primary data collection instruments in phenomenological research that researchers use to move from the natural conversation to the phenomenological space. Unstructured and semistructured interviews are at the core of in-depth qualitative research and take the form of an extended conversation between interviewee and researcher. The primary instruments I used to collect data in this research included interviews, field notes, and reflexivity, while secondary data came from archival documents and statistics from government agencies to provide demographics and help with the interpretation of findings.

I used semistructured interviews to gain an in-depth understanding of nascent entrepreneurs' lived experiences with regards to authentic leadership behaviors. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012) a research question is the conundrum that prompts interviewing. To answer the research question, I formulated the interview questions (see Appendix) with depth, detail, and vividness to capture the history, context, description, and nuanced responses regarding the phenomenon as recommended by Rubin and Rubin (2012). In the interview protocol, I incorporated the essential characteristics of a

qualitative interview, including the considerations that an interview is relational, subjective, nonevaluative, contextual, temporal, and person-centered, as recommended by Ravitch and Carl (2016). The interview questions were based on the four dimensions of authentic leadership theory: self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing of information, and internalized moral perspective, as propounded by Walumbwa et al. (2008).

As proposed by Vagle (2018), some tips on planning phenomenological interviews included re-orienting oneself by developing a concrete understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, engaging in some relaxing activities to enhance learning from research participants, and managing expectations of how the interview will transpire. Rubin and Rubin (2012) emphasized using main questions, follow-up questions, and probes to obtain rich data that will provide answers for the research question. I used this approach, beginning with the central questions, which are the various segments of the research question, to provide the interview scaffolding. The next step was follow-up questions that prompt the interviewee for further details and finally probes, questions, clarifications, comments, or gestures by the interviewer to help manage the conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

I recorded all the interviews using a digital audio recorder and a software program to provide transcription and analysis data. A digital recorder that downloads sound files into a computer is preferable as it allows for easy storage, playback, and backup copies. Additionally, I informed and reminded the participants of the interview recording before

interviewing as some interviewees are uncomfortable and hesitant with recordings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

According to Burkholder et al. (2016), the researcher's role during the interview is to listen carefully and thoughtfully to the participant as he or she shares experience as lived through, in everyday existence. I also took some notes during the interview, keeping it short to give the participants full attention and avoid causing distraction. Vagle (2018) argued that, to enhance the interview's quality, the researcher should redirect a participant toward the phenomenon when necessary and ask questions to interrogate their own assumptions about the phenomenon. Further, conducting multiple interviews with the same participants as follow-up interviews enriches the research's data and findings. I planned to conduct additional interviews with one or two of the more experienced participants to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. However, the comprehensive responses I received from the participants rendered it unnecessary to conduct additional interviews.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) contended that fieldnotes allow a researcher to scribble and record activities through various research stages and provide insights into the participants' role, contexts, and realities, and research setting over time. Further, fieldnotes are beneficial in facilitating self-reflection for the researcher to acknowledge and mitigate biases and prejudices that could influence research findings. I analyzed the notes promptly as recommended by Ravitch and Carl (2016) to avoid introducing thoughts that could bias the research.

To assist in the analysis and interpretation of findings, I reviewed already existing relevant and contextual data about the research phenomenon, which included statistics from government agencies, to provide essential information about the population in relation to the phenomenon. Ravitch and Carl (2016) noted that archival data is secondary and serves to supplement the data collected from study participants to enhance research validity. Government agencies produce and disseminate reputable statistical information to assist with policy-making and delivery of government service. The official documents from such agencies are adequate, reputable, and reliable for use by the general public and international community.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I identified and recruited entrepreneurs who met the study criteria and those I perceived to be effective leaders or managers of their businesses and asked them for referrals to help identify other entrepreneurs in the IT sector. Ravitch and Carl (2016) posited that the snowball sampling technique of recruiting one or a few relevant participants and using them to provide contacts of other potential participants helps to build the sample. Also, a researcher can recruit a chain of participants who would be good sources given the inquiry focus.

After recruitment, I obtained contact information of the participants who were willing to participate in the study to facilitate the dissemination of detailed information on the research's purpose and objective and for further communication during the study. The participants received detailed information of the study via e-mail, and participation in the study began with their signing a consent form to safeguard the participants against

any probable harm resulting from the research study (Babbie, 2017). The consent form provided information on what participation in the study entailed, assured participants of the confidentiality of their responses, and informed them of the study's voluntary nature. The participants could withdraw at any time or choose not to answer specific questions during the interview. I also informed the participants of the study's potential risks and benefits and the procedure for disseminating the study results (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). There was no compensation for participating in the study.

Smith et al. (2009) contended that an interview is an essential tool for researchers seeking to obtain a rich, detailed, first-hand account of study participants' lived experiences. To provide a deeper understanding of nascent entrepreneurs' lived experiences regarding authentic entrepreneurial leadership, I collected data using field notes and in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 10 founder-CEOs and achieved data saturation. I planned to provide a meeting venue for the interview that lasted about 1 hour, although the participants were free to choose any other suitable venue. I used a set of interview questions (see Appendix) to ensure that each research participant interview covered the same topic areas. Also, I provided the interview protocol synopsis to the participants at least a month in advance to give them ample time to understand and reflect on the questions to foster high-quality responses. I also adapted a flexible structure to allow probes and follow-up questions that encouraged interviewees to tell their stories in their own fashion (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). For transcription purposes, I recorded the interviews using a digital audio recorder.

The interview events' frequency was one interview per participant unless it was necessary to conduct a follow-up interview and a maximum of two interviews per day to facilitate accurate analysis and coding of the interview data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As per Iivari's (2018) recommendation, member checking was necessary for this research process to ensure data accuracy and enhance research credibility and validity. Member checking is the technique of re-constructing the research outcomes jointly with the participants by inviting them to provide their perspectives on the data and interpretation of the data, to ascertain the accuracy and capture their viewpoint (Iivari, 2018). This strategy also helped to obtain early feedback about the data and findings as they emerged (Burkholder et al., 2016). The participants provided referrals of potential nascent entrepreneurs to conduct additional recruitment if the initial recruitment did not yield enough participants to achieve data saturation.

I briefed the participants at the end of each interview process of my commitment to ensuring confidentiality in the research process and the possibility of returning for additional information, if necessary. Burkholder et al. (2016) argued that maintaining contact with the participants helps conduct the member checks and disseminate the study's findings. I maintained contact with the participants to disseminate a brief summary of each participant's interview data and to provide information about how to access the final research publication at the end of this research process. Additionally, I plan to hold the collected data for 5 years in a protected database, accessible by a password, to keep it safe.

Data Analysis Plan

Ravitch and Carl (2016) emphasized the need to transform the data from the interviews into text representing the spoken data through the transcription process to answer the research question. Data analysis involves reviewing collected data, identifying themes, and synthesizing the research findings (Burkholder et al., 2016). I commenced data analysis immediately after conducting the first interview. The data analysis process involved coding the data to identify themes and patterns, in line with Burkholder et al.'s argument that coding is the primary procedure for analyzing qualitative data to understand the individual experiences concerning a phenomenon.

Patton (2015) warned that each qualitative study is unique, requiring an equally unique analytical approach. Burkholder et al. (2016) posited that an interpretive phenomenology researcher's objective is to explore individual participants' perspectives to understand why they have such perspectives. To understand participants' experiences, I coded the data obtained from the transcription process using the three broad steps of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Burkholder et al., 2016). In open coding, I searched for emerging themes from across the participants, which form the categories. The next step involved discerning the interconnections through an iterative process of continually assessing the categories to combine them into one, subdivide, and create a new category. Selective coding involved a synthesis of the understanding derived from the previous phases to develop a cohesive statement of the study's findings and how they interact with the phenomenon.

Van Manen (2016) recommended three approaches to hermeneutic phenomenology thematic analysis: Wholistic, selective, and detailed. The wholistic approach involved analyzing text to decipher the full meaning by identifying phrases that capture the text's fundamental meaning as a whole. The selective approach entailed listening to the audio recordings and reading the text several times to identify phrases in the phenomenon or experience that "stand out", while the detailed approach was a line-by-line analysis of the text to identify any interrelation with the phenomenon or the description of the experience. This approach to data analysis is simple, and I adopted it in the research study, along with the three broad steps of coding recommended by Burkholder et al. (2016).

Rubin and Rubin (2012) posited that computer programs could help researchers undertake the various data analysis stages, ranging from organizing texts to coding. Manifold computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) packages are available, and I used NVivo to help manage, store, and organize the data (Saldana, 2016). I worked on small portions of data, notably, a single interview transcript and a day's field notes to conduct coding, and then exported the data to NVivo for further analysis.

The data analysis process aimed to develop similarities, common themes, and categories around a phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Analytical coding helped identify similarities or discrepant cases. Saldana (2016) recommended examining the content of the data to develop more trustworthy findings. I planned to include discrepant cases that disconfirm and discuss them with the principal study findings.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Ravitch and Carl (2016) defined credibility as the degree to which the study's findings are believable given the data presented. Some of the strategies that I adopted to ensure credibility in this phenomenological study include: data saturation, member-checking, as recommended by Iivari (2018), and reflexivity. According to Burkholder et al. (2016), reflexivity is the continuous process of documenting self-critical analyses of subjectivity, biases, and positionality using memos, fieldnotes, and journals to capture adjustments in the entire research process. Pool (2018) noted that reflexivity helps researchers acknowledge and mitigate biases and recognize the extent to which their past experience influences the present interpretation and successive meaning-making to enhance credibility.

Fusch and Ness (2015) and Marshall et al. (2013) argued that data saturation is a precursor to credibility in research studies and failure to reach saturation undermines the research quality. Additionally, estimating a sufficient sample will ensure saturation is reached and enhance the credibility of the study. I interviewed the research participants and ensured saturation, the point at which additional data does not yield any new information in terms of codes or themes (Saunders et al., 2018), and there is enough data to answer the research question (Suri, 2011).

Ravitch and Carl (2016) posited that member checking or participant validation is the most crucial validity measure to establish credibility. According to the authors, the process can help researchers in data analysis by inviting participants to critique the codes

and emerging theories and findings from the data. Burkholder et al. (2016) recommended member checking to capture the participants' most accurate thoughts with regards to the phenomenon and ensure an adequate representation of their realities. The process can also allow the researcher to gain further insights from the participants on the preliminary findings. I solicited feedback about the data and preliminary analysis of the participants' data as the findings emerged.

Transferability

Transferability refers to how a study can be applied to a broader context without losing richness. The process entails a detailed description of the study's context and assumptions to enable the study users to appropriately apply the findings of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used thick description as a strategy to achieve transferability by vividly describing the research setting and the participants in the fieldnotes and providing evidence to support research findings (Burkholder et al., 2016). I identified participants within the IT sector through snowball sampling as recommended by Ravitch and Carl.

Dependability

Burkholder et al. (2016) and Ravitch and Carl (2016) defined dependability as evidence of consistency in the data collection, analysis, and reporting methods, enhanced by collecting data that can answer the research question(s). Some of the proposed strategies to ensure dependability included audit trails and triangulation. I used audit trails to provide a detailed account of data collection, analysis, and interpretation during the research process from the memos, journals, and fieldnotes.

Confirmability

Qualitative researchers seek to have some degree of neutrality by acknowledging and exploring ways in which individual biases and subjectivity can influence data interpretation and try to mitigate the extent as much as possible through reflexivity processes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This validity criterion is necessary so that other informed researchers using the same data to conduct a study may arrive at the same conclusion (Burkholder et al., 2016). I adopted self-reflection, an essential process that promotes openness and receptivity to cultivate a more perceptive acknowledgment of the participants' lived experiences, as a strategy to achieve confirmability (Pool, 2018).

Ethical Procedures

Before the recruitment process, I sought and obtained approval (No. 06-22-20-0656931) from the Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) that guides students on procedural ethical considerations in research studies to ensure the protection of participants; and Kenya's National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (No. 661940) to gain access to the study participants. The purpose of the IRB review was to ensure that the researcher has the interest of participants in mind and does not in any way cause harm to research participants, a central ethical issue to safeguard participants. IRB also pointed out areas in the research study that required further consideration to safeguard against situations that could be harmful to the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I also undertook an online certification course with the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative to enhance my awareness of ethical issues to protect the study participants.

The first step in the recruitment process was identifying two nascent entrepreneurs who met the criteria and were willing to participate in the study. The participants then helped identify other participants who met the criteria and were willing to participate in the research voluntarily. The interested participants provided their demographics (i.e., age, gender, level of education, and number of years in business), and email and telephone contact information to enable the sending of additional information about the goal and purpose of research, and to seek informed consent for participation. Informed consent is the procedure of seeking to access settings and groups to which the researcher is an outsider to obtain documents or data that is usually not in the public domain and elicit information from research participants via interviews and fieldnotes (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). I interviewed 10 participants, nascent entrepreneurs from Kenya's IT sector, and achieved data saturation.

The IRB consent form sent to all the participants stipulated the study's voluntary nature. I did not coerce the participants to participate in the study against their wishes and allowed early withdrawals or refusal to participate even after signing the consent form. I stated this clearly in the consent form to allay any fears on the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Any participant withdrawing from the study would be replaced by another participant that meets the study's criteria from the pool.

I ensured the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants during and after the interview process. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), confidentiality entails protecting participants' privacy and the data related to them from unauthorized access. To achieve confidentiality and safeguard participants' identities, I used pseudonyms

throughout the research process. Anonymity entails the protection of participants such that nobody can identify individual participants with a particular piece of data or information (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Cloud computing can help in data management and ensure that it is only accessible by the researcher. I adapted this technology to store and control access to field notes, interview answers, audio recordings, and individuals' data. I did not know the participants personally; hence, the possibility of conflict of interest or unduly influencing participants did not arise in the research study. Participation in the study was voluntary with no incentives.

Summary

This chapter was a comprehensive discussion of the research design, instrumentation, participant recruitment, data collection and analysis, and validity and ethical issues involved in the research study. In the study, I adopted a hermeneutical phenomenological approach using semistructured interviews as the primary instrument for data collection to explore nascent entrepreneurs' experiences in enacting authentic leadership behaviors. The sample comprised founder-CEOs of technological startups who have operated a business for at least 2 years.

I conducted semistructured interviews of 10 participants and achieved data saturation. Additionally, I recorded and analyzed the interviews and field notes to lend insight into the data's broad patterns, categories, and themes. I implemented strategies such as; member-checking, reflexivity, audit trails, and saturation to enhance accuracy and trustworthiness. Ethical considerations included issues of confidentiality and

anonymity throughout the interview process to safeguard the participants against any harm.

Analyzing data in phenomenological research can take various approaches. I used the constant comparison method to analyze the first case in detail, moved to the second case and analyzed, then to the third case, and so on (Smith et al., 2009). Data analysis also involved using the hermeneutic circle, the notion that interpretation of a text is an ongoing process undertaken within the context in which the text was written. This means that data interpretation is a subjective but necessary process to fully understand the lived experiences (Van Manen, 2016). In Chapter 4, I provide a more detailed description of the emerging themes from the research and the interpretation of the findings in line with the interpretive phenomenological analysis approach.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to develop a more nuanced understanding of authentic leadership behavior from the perspective of nascent entrepreneurs. The overarching research question was: What are the nascent entrepreneurs' lived experiences and understanding of authentic leadership? This chapter begins with a description of the research setting, founder-CEOs' demographics, data collection and analysis, an overview of the study's findings, evidence of trustworthiness, and a summary. The aforementioned sections then lead to the conclusion and recommendations in Chapter 5.

Research Setting

During recruitment and data collection, the potential participants were on lockdown due to COVID-19 regulations in Kenya that lasted for over 3 months. For this reason, most of the participants had suffered financial loss and, in some instances, business closure and the emotional stress of having to lay off their employees. This situation made it impossible for some participants to commit time to participate in the research study, whereas others took longer to decide whether to participate. Other than the increased duration for data collection, the circumstances did not influence participants' responses and the overall analysis and interpretation of data. I conducted 10 semistructured online interviews using the videoconferencing software Zoom as the preferred communication platform, in line with COVID-19 regulations of social distancing. Three of the participants elected for video while the rest preferred audio only, with all the interviews recorded using a built-in recording feature and transcribed via

NVivo (Release 1.3(535)). All the participants had operated their startup for not less than 2 years, an important milestone for the business to be considered an ongoing concern.

Demographics

The demographic information that I collected from participants was age, gender, attained level of education, and years that a participant had operated a business. The participants in this research study were founder-CEOs of IT startups in Nairobi, Kenya, who had operated a business for at least 2 years. Kenya is among the countries in Africa that are experiencing a youth bulge. Kenyan youths ages 15-29 make up over 40% of the population and constitute a substantial number of unemployed. All participants were within the age range of 26-29, the maximum age limit in this research on nascent entrepreneurs' lived experiences between the age of 18-29. Seventy percent of the participants were male, and 30% female. Nine participants had a bachelor's degree as their highest education level, while one had a graduate degree. One of the criteria for participating in the research study was that potential participants must have operated a business for at least 2 years. In this study, 60% of the participants had operated a business for 2 years; 20% for 3-5 years; and another 20% for over 5 years. All participants had a basic understanding of authentic leadership's definition before the interview as defined in the interview protocol circulated beforehand to allow the participants to familiarize themselves with the interview questions. Table 1 shows the participants' demographics (i.e., age, gender, level of education, and the number of years in business).

Table 1*Demographics of Study Participants*

Participant	Age range	Gender	Years in business	Level of education
PT1	26-29	Male	>5	Graduate
PT2	26-29	Male	2	Bachelor
PT3	26-29	Male	2	Bachelor
PT4	26-29	Male	3	Bachelor
PT5	26-29	Female	3	Bachelor
PT6	26-29	Female	>5	Bachelor
PT7	26-29	Female	4	Bachelor
PT8	26-29	Male	2	Bachelor
PT9	26-29	Male	2	Bachelor
PT10	26-29	Male	2	Bachelor

Data Collection

I recruited and collected data from 10 founder-CEOs of IT startups in Nairobi, Kenya, who met the study criteria through snowball sampling. Although 14 founder-CEOs volunteered to participate, I reached data saturation after conducting 10 semistructured interviews online. Data collection instruments were researcher-designed semistructured interview questions and fieldnotes. I based the interview questions on the dimensions of authentic leadership framework: self-awareness, balanced processing of information, relational transparency, and internalized moral perspective and the three-factor model that articulates characteristics of authentic leadership as cognitive,

emotional, and behavioral traits built on the foundation of trust. Interview Questions 1–4 aimed to capture the nascent entrepreneurs’ overall leadership strategies and experiences. Questions 5–8 were derived from authentic leadership dimensions of self-awareness, balanced processing of information, internalized moral perspective, and relational transparency, as per Beddos-Jones and Swailes (2015) and Walumbwa et al. (2008), whereas the last question directly inquired about the lived experiences of the participants with regards to authentic leadership.

The interviews were conducted online and recorded using a digital audio recorder and a software program to provide transcription and analysis data. The interview frequency was once per participant, with each ranging from 30 minutes to over 1 hour to grant some of the participants ample time to share their leadership experiences adequately.

As planned in Chapter 3, I implemented the data collection plan as approved by IRB and submitted one request for a change to the IRB to capture the founder-CEOs’ lived experiences in the business’s formative years. I used NVivo to manage, store, and organize the data. From the interviews and the participatory process of member checking, no unusual cases emerged.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involves seeking consistent occurrences from the raw data to establish routines, rituals, and relationships (Saldana, 2016). After data collection, I transcribed the recorded interview into text, which generated a word-for-word rendition of the interview answers for each participant, followed by clean-up and organizing of the

data. Using data transcribed from 10 interviews, field notes, and reflective memos, I employed the constant comparison method to analyze data. The two main approaches that I adapted were (a) the three approaches of the hermeneutic phenomenology: wholistic, selective, and detailed (Van Manen, 2016); and (b) Burkholder et al.'s (2016) recommended approach of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. *Wholistic* coding involves examining the whole transcript, *selective* is examining the individual paragraphs or blocks of data, whereas *detailed* is a line-by-line examination of individual sentences or phrases to uncover meanings embodied in the lived experience represented in the text. Open coding entailed the identification of emerging themes from across participants' transcripts. Axial coding is an iterative process that entails identifying interconnections by assessing the categories to combine them into one, subdivide, and create new categories, and concluded with selective coding, the process of synthesizing the previous phases to develop a comprehensive statement of findings of the lived experiences. This final stage of analysis and coding aimed to provide a deeper understanding of founder-CEOs' experiences regarding authentic leadership.

The data analysis and coding process took 24 working days, and through the iterative and ongoing process of the hermeneutic circle, eight recurring themes that eight or more participants mentioned emerged. The themes were derived from in vivo coding, a technique of using participants' words to create data segments to enhance authenticity (per Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Table 2 is an illustration of the themes and the number of participants who mentioned each theme.

Table 2*Study Themes*

Theme	Participants
Unbiased information sharing	10
Relational openness and transparency	10
Values-centered leadership	10
People-oriented leadership	10
Learning culture	9
Futuristic mindset	8
Self-leadership	8
Purpose-driven leadership	8

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the overall impression of quality and the demonstration of rigor and robustness in a research study by ensuring the researcher's credibility, believability of research findings, and the research method's applicability (Rose & Johnson, 2020). To gain a deeper understanding of nascent entrepreneurs' lived experiences in relation to authentic leadership, I adapted the four criteria of establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Forero et al., 2018). According to Daniel (2018), achieving trustworthiness requires a researcher to illustrate that the research findings constitute participants' views.

Credibility

The purpose of this criterion was to establish confidence that the research findings are true, relevant, and congruent with the lived experiences of nascent entrepreneurs in

the IT sector (Daniel, 2018). I adopted three strategies to ensure credibility: member-checking, reflexivity, and data saturation. Member checking involved soliciting participants' feedback by sending main points and emergent themes to participants after the interview to critique and ensure the findings' accuracy (per Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The purpose of reflexivity, the idea that a researcher's biases can influence decisions throughout the research process, was to help in acknowledging my personal biases to mitigate them. Data saturation occurs at the point at which additional interview data analysis does not lead to the identification of any new themes, and there is enough data to answer the research question (Suri, 2011). I reached data saturation after 10 interviews. The credibility strategies were in line with the plans outlined in Chapter 3.

Transferability

Transferability is the extent to which the research findings can be replicated in another study with a similar setting (Burkholder et al., 2016). I used a rich description of the participants, the research setting, and lived experience of nascent entrepreneurs to achieve transferability, as recommended by Ravitch and Carl (2016). Another strategy to ensure transferability was purposeful sampling, a technique that focuses on selecting information-rich occurrences whose study will inform the understanding of the phenomenon. The use of purposive sampling ensured the optimization of data sources by selecting the most productive sample to answer the research question (per Suri, 2011). Through snowball sampling, I selected participants that provided rich and in-depth information about the meanings embodied in their lived experiences in enacting authentic leadership.

Dependability

This criterion entails developing a record of all decisions undertaken during the research process. To ensure dependability, I adapted the strategy of creating an audit trail. The audit trail involved developing a detailed record of the data collection and analysis procedures to demonstrate the thought processes and evidence that led to the research findings (per Daniel, 2018). I documented the process through field notes, journals, and memos as recommended by Ravitch and Carl (2016).

Confirmability

This is the extent to which other researchers can corroborate a study's results by arriving at the same findings when examining the same data (Burkholder et al., 2016). Abdalla et al. (2018) posited that confirmability involves ensuring neutrality by avoiding biases and subjectivity in interpreting the research outcomes. To achieve confirmability, I implemented self-reflection, an essential process that promotes openness and receptivity to cultivate a greater acknowledgment of founder-CEOs' lived experiences and the meanings they make from that experience. Self-reflexivity assured that the study's findings were based on the founder-CEOs' lived experiences and not my own knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon.

Study Results

The overarching research question that necessitated data collection was: What are nascent entrepreneurs' lived experiences and understanding of authentic leadership? The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to develop a more nuanced understanding of authentic leadership behavior from the perspective of nascent

entrepreneurs. The responses from the interview questions answered the research question directly and indirectly. For instance, the first question on what motivated the participants to start a business provided insights to the research question that participants are driven by their authentic self, through their passion and the need to offer solutions to societal problems, and it is that true nature that motivates them to continue innovating and thriving for success (Sims and Morris, 2018).

In the analysis of data transcribed from 10 interviews using the constant comparison method and the ongoing data interpretation process of hermeneutic circle, eight themes emerged. The final list comprises themes that at least eight participants supported as essential in enhancing venture outcomes. The final themes that emerged represent successful strategies that participants use in their organizations to achieve business success. These essential strategies align with the key dimensions of authentic leadership behaviors: Self-awareness, balanced processing of information, internalized moral perspective, and relational transparency (Walumbwa et al., 2008), and the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive traits that authentic leaders enact, built on a foundation of trust (Beddoes-Jones & Swailes, 2015). This section illustrates the participants' meanings and experiences to answer the research question and provide an in-depth understanding of authentic leadership. This section's organization comprises central themes that emerged from the data analysis to answer the research question.

Unbiased Information Sharing

The first theme that emerged from data analysis, coding, and interpretation of semistructured interviews was unbiased information sharing. All 10 participants

concluded that unbiased information sharing was a key leadership strategy that they use in their organizations to achieve positive outcomes. This entails sharing all relevant information to enhance decision-making at the various levels of the organization. Participant 3 stated that he ensures proper flow of information across all functions, achievable by sharing all relevant information with employees and clients, via the various communication media, and ensuring transparency in disseminating the information to help build trust with stakeholders. Moreover, aligning communication and transparency has been an essential part of his leadership behavior and a way of preserving the organizational values.

All the participants mentioned that information is crucial for decision-making with Participants 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7 emphasizing that information flow should be clear enough to demonstrate the organization's hierarchy of work. Participants 9 and 10 concurred with this strategy, stating that they share as much information as possible on a need-to-know basis to create an organization's enabling culture. Participant 2 stated that transparent flow of information empowers employees to achieve their individual goals as they work toward the organizational goals. Besides sharing all relevant information with employees, he avoids overburdening them with irrelevant information. The participant also emphasized that establishing a transparent relationship helps communicate and disseminate information, even negative feedback.

Relational Openness and Transparency

The second emergent theme that resulted from data analysis and interpretation of semistructured interviews was open and transparent relationships. All the participants

responded that relationship openness and transparency were essential for achieving positive organizational outcomes, whereas Participant 6 mentioned that sharing information helps employees understand the vision and their contribution towards organizational goals and fosters teamwork. Participant 4 stated that creating open and transparent relationships in the organization helps disseminate information and communicate employees' job expectations.

Participant 2 stated that he considers a transparent relationship with employees as essential in clearly communicating the organization's vision and setting expectations. The transparent relationship also helps break down organizational goals to make them understandable and achievable, and lack of transparency in the leader and follower relationship causes mistrust and dysfunctional teams that make it challenging to achieve the business goals. Participant 9 mentioned that trust is the pillar and enabler of transparent relationships and consistently creating a culture of transparency in the organization can help build trust.

Participant 1 posited that transparency is crucial in all relationships, in communicating with the cofounder, team members, and clients. Further, he ensures transparency in the venture by building robust communication systems that enhance decision-making and information sharing. Additionally, the participant stated that transparency and honesty have helped build trust in their business relationships and propel the firm towards success.

Values-Centered Leadership

The third theme that emerged from the interview transcripts was values-centered leadership. All 10 participants viewed leadership that emphasizes positive morals as a critical strategy in achieving business success. The participants mentioned honesty, authenticity, and integrity as essential aspects of their leadership style and the reflection of personal values and beliefs in the business. Participant 10 stated that it is imperative to engage with stakeholders from inception and communicate the business's values. This approach also helps employees to work towards their goals with those values in mind. For the employees, the end justifies the means of achieving the organizational goals, which also boosts their morale.

Participant 9 mentioned that one of his core values is humility and the belief of “keeping feet on the ground” to balance all stakeholders' interests. Developing proper work ethics that includes time-keeping early on in his career has contributed to achieving business success. Additionally, his key leadership strategy includes continually creating value for others. Participant 6 stated that trust is essential in building lasting relationships with stakeholders. The participant emphasized that to achieve success, she practices honesty to earn shareholders' trust and some of the strategies she employs to maintain high moral values include: being true and consistent with who she is (authentic) and what values she stands for and observing integrity in her deeds and words. For instance, selling tried and tested solutions to a client as opposed to selling “fad.”

People-Oriented Leadership

The fourth theme that emerged from the interview analysis was people-oriented leadership. All the participants mentioned they are “other-people oriented” in their leadership and consider altruism, the greater good for the greatest number of people, an essential strategy to achieve business success and remain relevant in the industry. Participants 1 and 2 emphasized the need to prioritize employees over customers, arguing that contented employees will care for the customers and the business overall. Further, Participant 1 mentioned that he thrives to continually inspire employees to achieve their individual goals alongside the organization’s to maintain a high level of self-motivation. According to the participant, this strategy helps to build strong teams that can achieve positive venture outcomes. Participant 2 asserted that he is “big on people” and believes that employees are more committed to the organization and deliver higher-value when leaders provide for their welfare. Thus, he is committed to ensuring open communication with employees to encourage sharing and conflict resolution. Participant 6 shared a similar experience and emphasized the importance of “valuing” employees, empathizing, and celebrating with them and their families. Achievable this requires transparent communication and showing small gestures and acts of kindness. She stated that such actions make employees feel appreciated, which yields innovation. Involvement with the community by offering voluntary services such as clean-up and teaching basic entrepreneurial skills in the local vocational centers is another strategy that she adopts. Such activities have helped expand the venture’s marketspace and enhance its standing with the community.

Participant 8 stated that the IT business's nature requires the leader to work with divergent groups of people, providing solutions to their problems, and this warrants people skills. Additionally, developing a solid working relationship with stakeholders and creating a positive working environment for employees to learn and improve through coaching and mentorship is essential. The participant mentioned that exercising patience in all business undertakings is crucial, particularly in resolving misunderstandings when dealing with people. He also shared his strategy of developing a work culture that promotes shared responsibility with employees and clients.

Learning Culture

The fifth emergent theme was learning culture. Nine founder-CEOs interviewed responded they develop a learning culture in the organization as a critical leadership strategy to enhance adaptability. Participant 8 mentioned that leadership is a work in progress, a journey where one learns as they move along and sometimes make mistakes, which he considers learning lessons. Understanding team members' strengths and weaknesses and honing their skills through accelerator programs can help develop a learning organization and improve service delivery.

Participant 2 stated that he aims to develop a learning culture to help members enhance their skills. To achieve this, he works alongside employees to not only instruct but also learn. He emphasized that he is open to learning new aspects as it helps to be adaptive, innovative, and avoid common pitfalls in business. Participant 1 shared a similar view and emphasized that learning is a "two-way street" with no end and a strategy that he uses to better manage the business, particularly in new and turbulent

situations. In light of this appreciation for learning, he makes a deliberate effort to create an environment where the team members can learn from their own mistakes and each other's strengths and capabilities.

Participant 9 emphasized that he ensures organizational fit by having the right people in the team, continuously being challenged to develop a problem-solving culture. The participant adapts guidance and coaching to provide continuous learning for employees and create a learning organization that motivates employees. Motivated employees are more engaged and committed to their work, engendering positive organizational outcomes such as innovation and creativity.

Futuristic Mindset

A futuristic mindset was the sixth emergent theme from the data analysis and interpretation of semistructured interviews with founder-CEOs of IT startups. Eight participants, who represent 80% of those who participated in the study, saw having a futuristic mindset as an essential strategy in achieving business success in the IT sector. In adapting a futuristic mindset, the participants mentioned that the IT sector is dynamic and constantly changing, hence the need to be adaptative. Participant 10 stated that leaders should anticipate changes in the environment that are likely to impact their business to keep abreast and remain relevant. He emphasized that leaders with a futuristic mindset help their ventures thrive and remain competitive and keep employees motivated and readily embrace change.

Participant 6 asserted that evolving leadership is an essential strategy for founder-CEOs since the IT sector is dynamic. She underscored the need for founder-CEOs to

“change with time” to remain competitive and survive in this otherwise volatile and uncertain industry. To elucidate how organizations can be adaptive, she mentioned that their organization had moved all clients and operations to an online platform to adhere to the COVID-19 regulations of social distancing, and this was already proving to be a successful move.

Self-Leadership

The seventh emergent theme from data analysis and interpretation of interview transcripts was self-leadership. Eight participants responded self-leadership is a crucial strategy that founder-CEOs enact in their ventures to achieve entrepreneurial success. Participants 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9 asserted that self-leadership begins with self-awareness and the ability to understand one’s strengths and weaknesses, hobbies, passion, and overall, a sense of personal identity. Participant 7 postulated that knowing oneself, strengths and weaknesses, and capabilities can help plan and manage tasks more effectively. For instance, knowing when to delegate tasks to employees who are competent at that task. Further, self-awareness facilitates a better understanding of employees’ abilities to enhance collaboration.

Participant 5 mentioned that self-awareness has helped evaluate her leadership journey and make adjustments accordingly. Self-awareness was necessary to help her manage various aspects of life, including her own emotions and relationships. The awareness of self has also enhanced team planning and resource allocation in the venture.

Participant 8 posited that successful leadership begins with self-leadership; to lead others successfully, one should lead oneself first. He stated that self-leadership had

qualified him to effectively understand his weaknesses, which directly impacts his relationship with others (relationship management), and willingly accepts failure as part of the process, enabling him to persist amid challenges. Self-leadership has also helped the participant to create the proper foundation for organizational leadership.

Purpose-Driven Leadership

The eighth emergent theme from data analysis and interpretation of semistructured interviews with founder-CEOs of IT startups was purpose-driven leadership. Eight participants mentioned that purpose-driven leadership is a crucial strategy in the IT sector. All eight participants mentioned that their motivation to start a business was derived from the need to provide solutions to societal problems, and they continue to be passionate about creating value through technology. Participant 9 mentioned that whenever possible, he leads the organization in engaging in community work to improve the livelihood of individuals in the communities. Participants 4 and 6 stated that they consider the larger community an integral part of their business, with participant 6 mentioning that she sponsors initiatives that support a social change to improve the quality of life of vulnerable people in the community.

Participant 8 mentioned he is motivated to achieve more than just profit. He emphasized that his primary purpose is to “share” with others by creating employment, growth, and improvement opportunities. Thus, he constantly reiterates to the employees the vision, the purpose, and the reason for which the organization exists. Being purpose-driven also motivates him to persist in the face of adversity and provides a coping

mechanism for dealing with difficult situations, such as, when a client or employee leaves the organization.

Five interview questions that participants answered derived from the key aspects of authentic leadership from the authentic leadership framework: Self-awareness, relational transparency, unbiased processing of information, and internalized moral Walumbwa perspective (et al., 2008) and the three-factor model that embodies cognitive, emotional, and behavioral traits built on the foundation of trust that authentic leaders adopt (Beddoes-Jones & Swailes, 2015). The eight emergent themes were the participants' lived experiences and authentic leadership understanding, which mirrors authentic leadership characteristics (Petersen & Youssef-Morgan, 2018). The key results revealed that participants adopted transparent communication, values-based leadership, people-oriented leadership, and business agility as strategies to achieve positive venture outcomes. The experiences that founder-CEOs in the IT sector in Kenya shared helped provide more clarity to the concept of authentic leadership behavior.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I presented the participants' demographics, research setting, data collection and analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and study results. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to develop a more nuanced understanding of authentic leadership behavior from the perspective of nascent entrepreneurs. The study findings derive from interview responses of 10 founder-CEOs in Kenya's IT sector, who shared their leadership experience to answer the research question about the nascent entrepreneurs' lived experiences and understanding of authentic leadership. The analysis

of results revealed strategies that participants adopt in their venture to achieve success. The responses to the interview questions aligned to the overarching research question were unbiased information sharing, values-based leadership, self-leadership, relational openness and transparency, people-oriented leadership, learning culture, purpose-driven leadership, and futuristic mindset. The key results revealed that the participants adopt transparent communication, values-based leadership, people-oriented leadership, and business agility as strategies to help them achieve positive venture outcomes. Chapter 5 will comprise the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and social change impact.

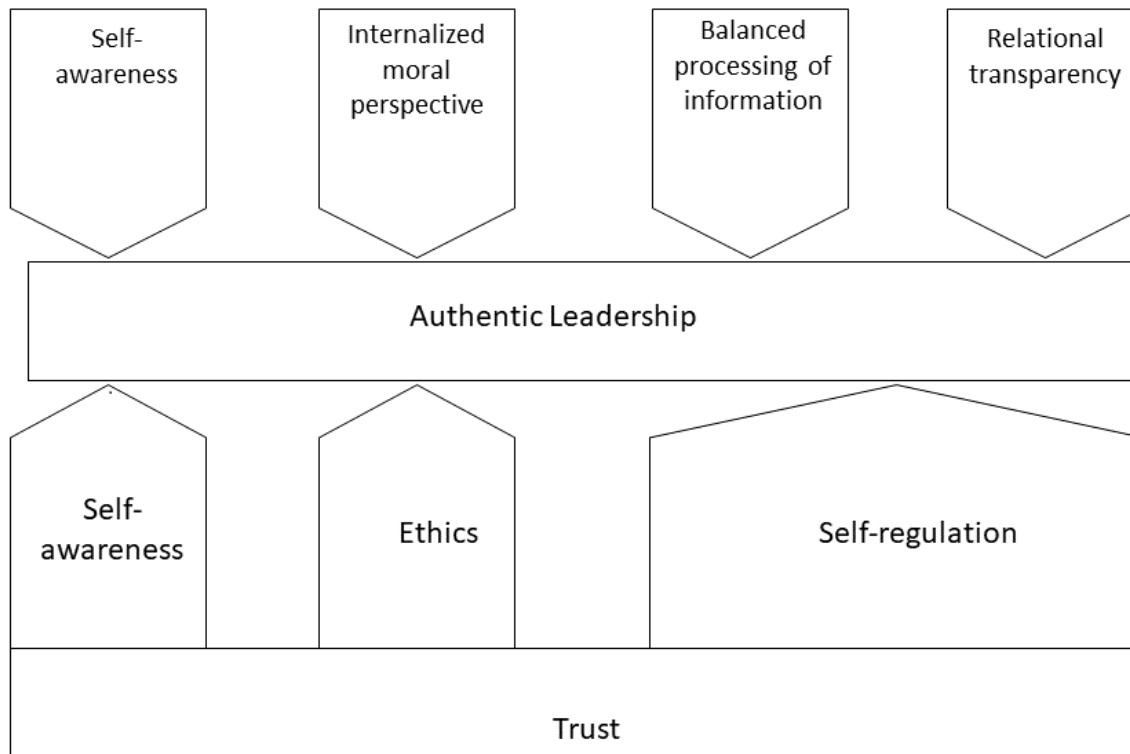
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to develop a more nuanced understanding of authentic leadership behavior from the perspective of nascent entrepreneurs. The overarching research question that necessitated the research study was: What are the nascent entrepreneurs' lived experiences and understanding of authentic leadership? Data collection was via in-depth semistructured interviews with founder-CEOs of IT startups in Kenya. The data analysis approach was hermeneutic phenomenological thematic analysis, the constant comparison method, and the hermeneutic circle's ongoing data interpretation process. The eight emergent themes included unbiased information sharing, values-based leadership, futuristic mindset, relational openness and transparency, learning culture, people-oriented leadership, self-leadership, and purpose-driven leadership. The study's key results represent the understanding and lived experiences of the participants, revealing that the participants adopt transparent communication, values-based leadership, people-oriented leadership, and business agility, in their ventures to achieve success. In this chapter, I present and discuss the findings' interpretation in relation to previous research studies and the conceptual frameworks, limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, implications for social change, and conclusion.

Interpretation of Findings

In this study, I interviewed 10 founder-CEOs of IT startups in Kenya to explore their lived experiences and understanding of authentic leadership. The basis of the interview protocol administered to the nascent entrepreneurs was the dimensions of

authentic leadership from the authentic leadership model by Walumbwa et al. (2008) and the three-factor model by Beddoes-Jones and Swailes (2015). The emergent themes from the analysis and interpretation of data collected from the semistructured interviews represent nascent entrepreneurs' lived experiences and leadership strategies they use in their ventures. The key themes were unbiased information sharing, values-based leadership, relational openness and transparency, people-oriented leadership, learning culture, self-leadership, futuristic mindset, and purpose-driven leadership. These themes align with authentic leadership dimensions: Balanced information processing, self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, and relational transparency; and the three key pillars of the three-factor model: self-awareness, self-regulation, and ethics that correlate with essential traits authentic leaders develop over time, founded on trust. The key study results, transparent communication, values-based leadership, people-oriented leadership, and business agility, summarized the founder-CEOs' understanding and lived experiences regarding authentic leadership, thus answering the research question. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptualization of authentic leadership and the three-factor model that guided the findings' interpretation.

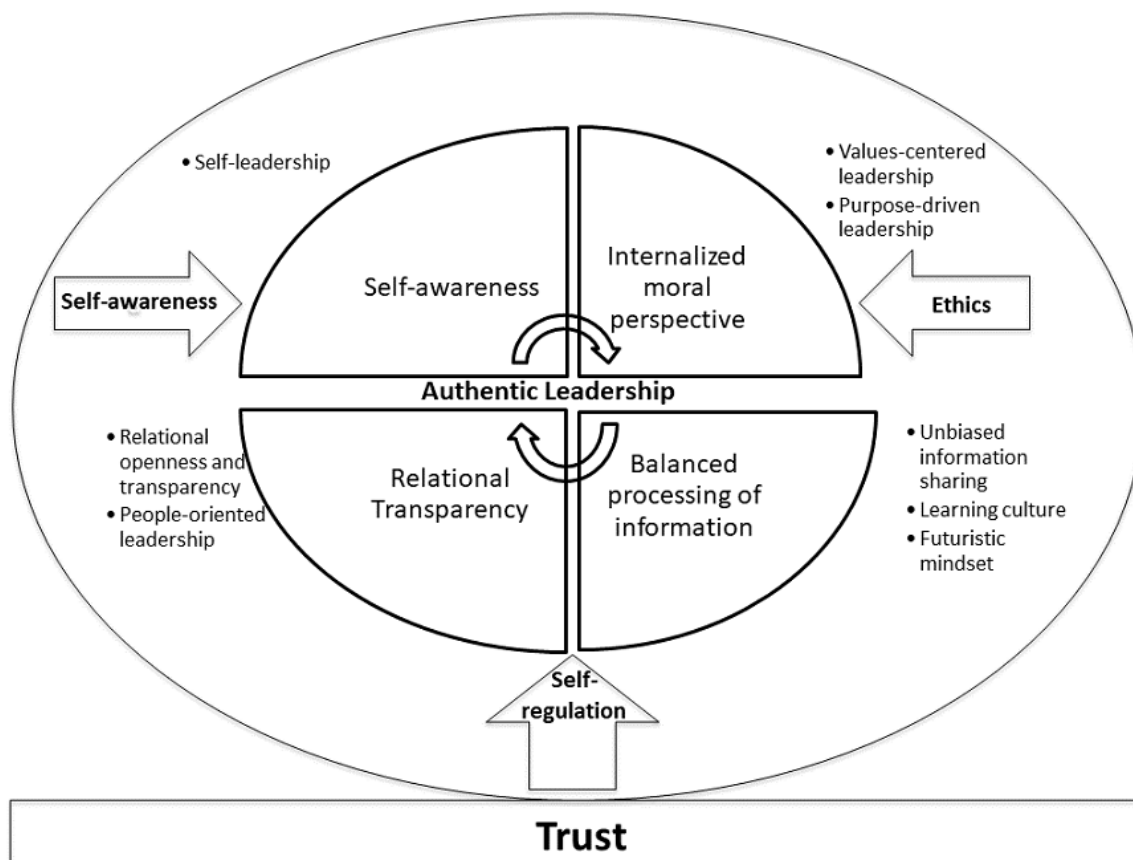
Figure 1*Authentic Leadership Model*

Note: This model shows the integration of authentic leadership model and the three-factor model that emphasizes trust as the foundation of authentic leadership. From "Authentic Leadership: Development and Validation of a Theory-based Measure," by F. Walumbwa, B. Avolio, W. Gardner, T. Wernsing, and S. Peterson, 2008, *Journal of Management*, 34(1), p.109 (<https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206307308913>). Copyright 2008 by Journal of Management.

In the following section, I highlight the research study findings from the emergent themes that resulted from the analysis and interpretation of data collected from the interviews with founder-CEOs of IT startups. I also interpret the findings in relation to the previous studies described in Chapter 2. Figure 2 illustrates the two conceptual frameworks as they relate to the emergent themes and study findings.

Figure 2

The Connection Between Authentic Leadership Model and Study Results



Note: A conceptualization of authentic leadership model and the three-factor model in relation to the study findings. Adapted from "Authentic Leadership: Development of a New Three Pillar Model," by F. Beddoes-Jones and S. Swailes, 2015, *Strategies HR*

Review, 14(3), p.96 (<https://doi.org/10.1108/SHR-04-2015-0032>). Copyright 2015 by Strategies HR Review.

Unbiased Information Sharing

Unbiased information sharing was the first theme that resulted from the analysis and interpretation of data collected through interviews with founder-CEOs of IT startups. Through this study, I established that all the participants consider unbiased information sharing an essential strategy to achieve positive organizational outcomes such as innovation, job satisfaction, and employee commitment. Unbiased information sharing is the process of carefully and objectively balancing all relevant information to arrive at a “fair” decision (Feng et al., 2018). This theme supported Agote et al.’s (2016) research findings that authentic leaders share information in their possession besides soliciting information from a vast pool before making decisions in their organizations, an act which employees and external shareholders perceive as fair, inclusive, and in consideration of their interests. Similarly, Gotsis and Grimani (2016) emphasized that authentic leaders understand that information is a valuable resource that supports organizational functions; thus, they openly share information to aid decision-making while accepting followers’ input and perspectives different from their position, and this fosters inclusivity in the organization.

This research finding supports Jones and Crompton’s (2009) argument that authentic leaders prioritize data analyses before making decisions to enhance the quality of the decision and improve the organization’s performance through fair information sharing. Additionally, the authors argued that sharing information creates an environment

that enhances trust, value-addition, problem-solving, and innovation, critical for entrepreneurial success. This study's findings also align with Gill and Caza (2018)'s argument that by seeking input from followers, authentic leaders meet followers' psychological needs and enhance positive responses.

Relational Openness and Transparency

The second theme from analysis and interpretation of data collected from founder-CEOs of IT startups was relational openness and transparency. In response to the interview question that sought to understand if the participants consider a transparent relationship as essential in achieving business success, all participants responded in the affirmative and shared their experiences. The study's findings revealed that participants from the IT sector in Kenya utilize this strategy to achieve positive venture outcomes. According to Feng et al. (2018), relational transparency is a conscious process of self-disclosure that involves expressing one's true self and authentic thoughts and feelings to followers to develop trust that enhances leader-follower dyads and organizational performance. By practicing relational transparency, nascent entrepreneurs promote open leader-follower sharing and communication of crucial information that advances job-relevant knowledge essential for gaining a competitive edge in dynamic environments (Gill & Caza, 2018).

In their study on authentic leadership and affective commitment, Semedo et al. (2016) emphasized that authentic leaders promote a positive social climate and interpersonal relationships with followers, thus helping them stay engaged and committed to their work. Such leaders strive for a genuine and open relationship with organizational

members, an orientation that enhances organizational outcomes such as employees' creativity, affective commitment, and organizational performance.

Values-Based Leadership

The third theme that emerged from the analysis and interpretation of data collected from founder-CEOs of IT startups was values-based leadership. Founder-CEOs of IT startups in Kenya act per their values and beliefs; they are self-regulated, anchored by their deep-rooted beliefs and values to make a difference by pursuing opportunities that provide solutions to societal problems. This theme supports the findings of several studies included in the literature review. Badaracco (2014) posited that effective leadership is increasingly revolving around the dimensions of moral courage, honesty, and a deep sense of personal identity (self-awareness). Leavy (2016) observed that a leader unsure of his fundamental values, purpose, and sense of self-leadership is in a precarious position to resist external pressures and more likely to compromise his or her values for short-term gains. This theme is consistent with Yadav and Dixit's (2017) findings on authentic leadership development. The authors argued that ethics and morality are increasingly becoming a guiding principle for leaders who need to assert themselves as honest and trustworthy due to the recent surge in corporate scandals and malfeasance.

Ribeiro et al. (2019) contended that authentic leaders convey principles and values that promote transparent interactions between leaders and followers in the organization. In their research study, Ilies et al. (2013) investigated the relationship between authentic leadership and emotional expressiveness—an individual's ability to

communicate their emotional state-emphasizing that an authentic leader's behavior can influence followers to internalize principles and values that they display. An in-depth understanding of the interconnection between authentic behaviors and emotional expressiveness can help leaders elect the most constructive emotions based on their internalized values and beliefs to influence positive outcomes.

In contrast, this study's findings contradicted the findings by Alvesson and Einola (2019). The authors argued that possessing high moral and ethical values is unattainable, and leaders who claim to act authentically could be inviting narcissism. Nyberg and Sveningsson (2014) shared this view and argued that organizations operate in a culturally dynamic environment; hence, leaders cannot act authentically and uphold morality consistently.

Novičević et al. (2006) found that aligning a leader's moral convictions with the organization's stipulated moral values promotes successful and authentic leadership. Similarly, Walumbwa et al. (2008) argued that organizational stakeholders now require leaders to be consistent in their espoused values and beliefs since an authentic individual makes an authentic leader. Walumbwa et al. also posited that internalized moral perspective conditions authentic leaders to act based on their values, strength, and beliefs, helping employees achieve a higher level of well-being that enhances organizational performance. Beddoes-Jones and Swailes' (2015) three-factor model outlines three traits—cognitive, emotional, and behavioral—that influence leaders' values and beliefs. The authors emphasized that failure in leadership results from a lack of one or more of the traits.

People-Oriented Leadership

The fourth theme that resulted from the analysis and interpretation of data collected via in-depth semistructured interviews with founder-CEOs of IT startups was people-oriented leadership. The founder-CEOs from IT startups in Kenya who participated in the study mentioned that they are people-oriented. This finding supported Oh et al.'s (2018) study findings where they proposed the people-oriented attribute as the fifth dimension of authentic leadership. The authors argued that authentic leaders focus on developing their interactive abilities and skills to improve their relationships with followers based on authenticity. They care deeply about their followers' welfare, value teamwork, and ensure that employees are motivated to enhance productivity and attain entrepreneurial success. The study's findings by Jones and Crompton (2009) established that authentic leaders recognize that employees are key stakeholders and emphasize involving them in developing new products and services; subsequently, such leaders encourage employees to develop their strengths through positive influence and role modeling, which fosters organizational commitment.

This finding was in line with Liu et al.'s (2018) findings that authentic leaders possess internalized values that guide their actions, promoting a positive work environment for followers. They also promote psychological safety, resulting in intrinsic motivation for followers advancing organizational outcomes such as innovation, efficiency, and enhanced job commitment. Delić et al. (2017) concurred with this finding that authentic leaders positively affect employees, encouraging them to improve continuously, acquire new skills and competencies, and adopt a learning culture. The

theme also supported Beddoes-Jones and Swailes's (2015) argument that authentic leaders value interactions with people and consider trust fundamental in enhancing relationships. They outlined three traits that help leaders build strong relationships with followers and other stakeholders: cognitive, behavioral, and emotional, all built on trust.

Learning Culture

The fifth theme that resulted from the analysis and interpretation of data collected from founder-CEOs of IT startups was learning culture. I found out that founder-CEOs of IT ventures in Kenya employ learning culture as a strategy to achieve success in their business. Learning entails viewing success and failures as the provenance of vital insight, embracing and encouraging employees to share feedback, and staying agile to quickly correct any eventualities that could cause failure (Schoemaker et al., 2018).

Yadav and Dixit (2017) defined learning as the ability to draw lessons from situations and experiences, which begins with self-awareness and develops further through interpersonal relationships. The authors posited that a leader high on learning agility can achieve success even in turbulent and dynamic environments and create the relevant condition for adopting and edifying the shared basic assumptions learned to new employees. As reviewed in Chapter 2, Delić et al.'s (2017) research confirmed that authentic leaders share crucial knowledge with employees, thus motivating them to improve on existing skills and acquire new skills and competencies.

Mododchik and Jardon (2015) contended that leaders of organizations that facilitate a learning culture are agile, innovative, and proactive in embracing continuous learning and improvement. Continuous learning is an essential element for organizational

agility and adaptability, giving ventures a competitive edge. Founder-CEOs of IT startups can adapt learning culture in response to challenges posed by globalization, technological changes, shifting customer needs, and the high degree of uncertainty in the IT sector.

Futuristic Mindset

The sixth theme that emerged from data analysis and interpretation of interviews with founder-CEOs of IT startups was a futuristic mindset. The nascent entrepreneurs in the IT sector in Kenya adopt a futuristic mindset to survive in the dynamic environment and achieve entrepreneurial success. IT ventures operate in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environment, and in order to successfully navigate such an environment, the leaders must (i) move fast in seizing opportunities to achieve competitive edge (ii) anticipate factors that could shape the future and build broad networks to help scan the environment (iii) challenge conventional methods and develop innovative ways that reflect future trends, and (iv) balance quality, rigor, speed, and agility in analyzing decisions, as recommended by Schoemaker et al. (2018).

Jones and Crompton (2009) posited that entrepreneurial leaders with futuristic mindsets are decisive, innovative, and risk-takers. New technologies and increased competition have engendered new forms of enterprises based on adaptability, and this calls for founder-CEOs to develop personal strategies with an ethical approach to deal with the changes in the business environment. In concurrence, Ugoani (2015) argued that firm survival and success depend on innovation, flexibility, adaptability, and continuous organizational change. Dimensions of authentic leadership such as self-awareness,

balanced information sharing, and relational transparency allow a leader to deal with the future effectively.

This study's findings supported those of Agote et al.'s (2016) study on positive emotions. The authors determined that authentic leaders influence positive emotions and followers' trust, fundamental in implementing change, as emotions are essential in adapting to new environments. This theme also supported Gill and Caza (2018) research that authentic leaders are change-oriented, adaptable, and possess several distinct behaviors that eliminate negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, and general discomfort, replacing them with a positive psychological environment, fostering creativity and innovation among followers.

Self-Leadership

The seventh theme resulted from the analysis and interpretation of data from interviews with founder-CEOs of IT ventures. I found that nascent entrepreneurs in the IT sector in Kenya adapt self-leadership to achieve positive venture outcomes. Self-leadership is an individual's understanding of their core values, self-identity, and emotions; and possession of the ability to successfully manage those aspects in interpersonal relationships (Bird et al., 2010). As stated in Chapter 2, the anchor for self-leadership is self-aware-understanding personal strengths and weaknesses, the multi-faceted nature of the self, and sense-making process -and self-regulation, controlling one's emotions, especially in relating with others (Liu et al., 2018). This finding supported Leavy (2016) argument that leaders who consciously search for greater self-awareness in the course of their careers are more capable of interrogating not only the

ideas of others but even their own treasured beliefs, and thus, their understanding of life, business, and global forces that could potentially impact them. On the other hand, the author argued that leaders who are unclear of their core values, strengths and weaknesses, and sense of personal leadership goal, have difficulties resisting short-term pressures to compromise their values.

This finding also supported Novićević et al. (2006) who stated that lack of awareness of one's emotional state makes that individual emotionally bankrupt hence subverting their self-confidence and self-esteem and engendering moral erosion. Further, individuals devoid of self-affection are inclined to be narcissistic or apathetic. Apart from being self-aware, authentic leaders enhance a more positive evaluation of followers by fostering positive cognitive and emotional development (Feng et al., 2018). The findings of this study are in line with Liu et al. (2018) research findings that self-awareness, a dimension of authentic leadership, can help leaders enhance high-quality relationships with employees through positive modeling, which further leads to organizational outcomes that result from follower's engagement, such as employee commitment, performance, and innovation. Badaracco (2014) postulated that today's effective leadership majorly revolves around the leader's moral courage, a deep sense of personal identity, and honesty, aspects that foster self-development and self-leadership.

Purpose-Driven Leadership

Purpose-driven leadership was the eighth theme that resulted from the analysis and interpretation of data collected from semistructured interviews with founder-CEOs of IT startups. I found that founder-CEOs of IT ventures in Kenya are purpose-driven in

leading their organizations to achieve entrepreneurial success. This eighth theme aligned with Badaracco's (2014) research finding that authentic leaders operate more in pursuit of the greater good for society and less in their interests and those of short-term stakeholders. The author argued that authentic leaders are motivated by the pursuit of good citizenship through providing solutions to society's needs and not just by profits. Further, although rules and processes are essential to them, they focus more on achieving alignment around the organization's mission and values and motivating employees to lead.

This finding also supports Schoemaker et al. (2018), who argued that entrepreneurial leaders aspire to make a difference globally. Purpose-driven leaders feel a sense of stewardship in turbulent times and relentlessly commit to keeping the organization afloat as they balance all stakeholders' interests. They are observant, open to information, and new insights from others to preserve the organization's viability during uncertainty.

Limitations of the Study

As stated in Chapter 1, the choice of qualitative method rather than quantitative means that this study's results are not generalizable. Qualitative studies' results cannot be generalized to a larger population (Burkholder et al., 2016). The use of multiple data sources, in-depth interviews that accorded the opportunity to collect rich contextual evidence and meanings from participants, document review (Suri, 2011), member-checking (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), and reflexivity as recommended by Abdalla et al. (2018) and Ravitch and Carl, helped to enhance study reliability, validity, and credibility.

The consideration of finances and time restrained the study to the stipulated sample size and geographical coverage. Nonetheless, the assumption is that the participants responded candidly to increase the study's reliability and credibility. Capturing personal identity and experience using identity memos, as recommended by Ravitch and Carl, helped to acknowledge and minimize researcher biases that could have arisen during data collection and analysis and affected the research findings' interpretation.

Recommendations

The recommendations for this study include recommendations for theory, practice, and future research. The theory and practice recommendations derive from the study's findings to provide nascent entrepreneurs with proven successful strategies adopted by founder-CEOs in the IT sector. Future research recommendations highlight gaps in research from the limitations in this study and literature reviewed in Chapter 2 to contribute to the body of knowledge and close the existing research gaps.

Recommendation for Practice

Startups, particularly new technology-based ventures, face complexities during this initial stage. Over 60% do not survive past the third year after inception, and one-third stagnate in that state of infancy (Mwangi & Ngugi, 2014). The results of this study demonstrated that transparent communication (Baldegger & Gast, 2016 and Nasab & Afshari, 2019), values-based leadership (Jones & Crompton, 2009), people-oriented leadership (Oh et al., 2018), and business agility (Schoemaker et al., 2018; Yadav & Dixit, 2017) are key strategies that participants use to achieve business success.

Based on Baldegger and Gast's recommendation, founder-CEOs could adopt behaviors such as self-awareness, self-management, relationship management, and self-efficacy that enhance interpersonal relationships particularly with employees, to survive the complex and uncertain environment in the global business world. According to Nasab and Afshari (2019) an open and transparent interaction between leaders and followers is fundamental in communicating thoughts, ideas, and information that engender positive venture outcomes such as creativity and innovation. Openness and transparency in the leader-follower dyad fosters an environment of trust that encourages employees' participation in exchanging ideas and opinions and helps leaders communicate organizational processes and goals effectively, and share information (Jiang & Men, 2017).

Future-orientation engenders behaviors such as risk-taking, innovation, adaptability, and agility, essential for nascent entrepreneurs to survive global challenges (Jones & Crompton, 2009). Based on this study's results, the recommendation for founder-CEOs of IT startups is to be future-oriented to fulfill the changing customer demands through innovation and achieve competitive advantage. Future orientation entails learning, which starts from within, through the concept of self-awareness, and extends outward through connectedness (Yadav & Dixit, 2017). Leaders should create learning organizations where employees continuously improve their competencies to achieve business agility by learning and adapting. A futuristic mindset could also enable leaders and followers to embrace change and stay ahead of the competition.

Authentic leaders have to consistently balance between their actions and deeply held beliefs and values, shepherded by sound moral precepts and without giving in to external pressures to act otherwise (Feng et al., 2018). Values-based leadership helps founder-CEOs balance various stakeholders' interests and achieve organizational outcomes, beneficial for all. The recommendation for founder-CEOs is to create an ethical environment based on Sims et al.'s (2017) view that creating a successful new venture entails authenticity and a confluence of values and leadership skills. Founder-CEOs of small ventures possess the unique opportunity to define their businesses according to their personal beliefs and values.

The last recommendation for practice is for founder-CEOs to build strong relationships with followers and other stakeholders by adopting behavioral, emotional, cognitive traits that foster trust (Beddoes-Jones & Swailes, 2015). A people-centered leadership strategy can positively influence employees to stay motivated and continuously improve their skills and competencies to enhance entrepreneurial success. This recommendation's basis is Delić et al.'s (2017) argument that followers tend to meet their part of the social exchange in achieving the organizational goals when the leader is competent and meets their needs.

Recommendation for Theory and Further Research

While research has supported authentic leadership's essentiality in enhancing positive venture outcomes, there is a paucity of research on authentic leadership's significance in founder-led ventures and startups. Although the technology sector represents many dynamic settings, it is imperative to explore authentic leadership across

other sectors of the economy to understand this positive form of leadership's impact on entrepreneurial success and venture outcomes. Exploring authentic leadership behaviors from founder-CEOs in sectors other than IT will allow for broader generalization.

Another recommendation is to explore authentic leadership behavior from the followers' perspective. Capturing the followers' lived experiences concerning authentic leadership behaviors and their impact on the leader-follower dyads may provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon from a different perspective. This recommendation's basis is the argument that leaders tend to exaggerate their capabilities (Gill & Caza, 2018). Due to the incongruence between the genders and leader role expectations, researchers could examine authentic leadership in the context of gender, as recommended by Yadav and Dixit (2017). The final recommendation is to conduct a similar study using a quantitative approach to measure the efficacy of authentic leadership behavior among nascent entrepreneurs and make the study generalizable to other sectors of the economy.

Implications

This study has practical implications for researchers as well as practitioners. Scholarly interest in positive and ethical leadership forms has increased manifold in response to the rising number of corporate scandals and malfeasance associated with leaders (Semedo et al., 2018). It is imperative to develop new theories that align a leader's deeply-held values and actions and emphasize their moral character.

Implications for Theory and Practice

This study provides practical implications that authentic leaders play a crucial role in improving organizational outcomes by promoting a positive ethical and psychological

climate that enhances employees' performance, as also discovered by Walumbwa et al. (2008). The study findings demonstrated that participants are people-oriented and transparent in relating with followers, an understanding that nascent entrepreneurs can adopt in their business ventures to enhance positive interactions with followers.

Leadership within startups is an essential element of success as it fosters creativity and innovation. Authentic leaders pursue genuine relationships with their followers, stimulating psychological safety and critical thinking among employees, enhancing individual performance. This study offers researchers practical contribution in its extension of Semedo et al. (2016) and Semedo et al. (2018) literature review and provides a more nuanced understanding of how authentic leaders influence individual employees' performance to produce positive organizational outcomes. The findings could contribute to the body of knowledge as research into entrepreneurial leadership within startups is scanty compared to other leadership fields, despite the widespread recognition of the need to understand effective entrepreneurial behaviors that enhance organizational outcomes.

Another practical implication is that this study's findings may help policymakers, scholarly communities, and practitioners develop policies and entrepreneurial leadership programs to improve individual and organizational performance. Researchers have demonstrated that authentic leadership behavior creates a favorable psychological climate and positive ethical environment that enhances organizational outcomes such as creativity, innovation, job commitment, job resourcefulness, and organizational commitment (Semedo et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2017).

One way to minimize new ventures' failure is to foster employees' creativity and innovation by creating psychological safety and an ethical environment. This study's results may contribute to developing and adapting authentic leadership theory to promote an ethical climate that fosters positive self-development among nascent entrepreneurs. By focusing on positive achievements, founder-CEOs of new ventures with authentic leadership behaviors promote trust, enhancing emotional safety and creativity among employees (Xu et al., 2017).

Research in leadership with an authentic approach is still scanty, and this research study may contribute to the body of knowledge and provide a deeper understanding of authentic leadership behaviors of nascent entrepreneurs in the IT industry. There is a scarcity of research studies on leadership strategies that nascent entrepreneurs use to succeed in their businesses (Harrison et al., 2016). This study's findings could contribute to theory in response to Semedo et al.'s (2018) recommendation to explore newer forms of leadership theories such as authentic leadership and Walumbwa et al. (2008) assertion that research studies on leadership with an authentic approach are still scarce despite the approach being beneficial in promoting a positive psychological and ethical climate to enhance organizational outcomes such as innovation and creativity. This study's results may be vital in developing creative and innovative leadership behaviors within new ventures, thus enhancing theory.

This study offers methodological implications as recommended by Jahangir et al. (2018) that due to entrepreneurship dynamism, it is essential to adopt qualitative methods, particularly phenomenology, to understand the meanings from the participants'

experiences. Studies on authentic entrepreneurial leadership are scanty, and the few qualitative studies mainly use sample data. Exploring nascent entrepreneurs' lived experiences through semistructured interviews offers an in-depth account of authentic leadership behavior from the meanings of their everyday existence rather than merely describing their perspective.

Implications for Social Change

This research's findings may influence positive social change by enhancing the understanding of leadership behaviors that founders of startups can adapt to manage their businesses and minimize failure. Identifying and understanding the necessary competencies could help nascent entrepreneurs manage their businesses to enhance growth and venture outcomes. To enhance entrepreneurial success, governments worldwide are developing intervention programs in light of entrepreneurship's potential benefits. The government's efforts to promote entrepreneurial activities and reduce trade barriers include strengthening enterprise management through training (The World Bank, 2014). Exploring startup founders' leadership behaviors may help the governments conduct effective interventions geared towards improving entrepreneurial leadership and business practices that enhance firms' outcomes, growth, and sustainability (Khalili, 2017). The outcomes of successful interventions could be positive social change to individual entrepreneurs, organizations, and the larger communities.

The formal sector cannot generate jobs for the vast number of youths joining the job market; hence, startups' growth and survival may benefit youths in gaining meaningful employment and reducing social problems in the communities engendered by

unemployment. Developing entrepreneurial skills enhances economic growth by creating jobs that help minimize lost revenue from indirect taxes - health costs due to drug abuse and inadequate health care and insecurity occasioned by crimes, especially in urban centers (Nafukho & Machuma, 2010). Reducing the unemployment rate could improve individuals' livelihood and boost local and national economies (Muchira, 2018).

Conclusions

Over 60% of startups do not survive beyond three years after inception due to improper leadership, among other factors (Mwangi & Ngugi, 2014), while the surviving ones do not expand but remain small (Salamzaden & Kesim, 2017). This study aimed to explore the lived experiences and understanding of nascent entrepreneurs regarding authentic leadership to help answer the research question. The participants' experiences highlighted key strategies to achieve positive organizational outcomes and entrepreneurial success, which align with authentic leadership dimensions. Like those of Walumbwa et al. (2008), the study's findings informed the research problem and the essentiality of authentic leadership behavior in IT startups in promoting a positive psychological and ethical environment that enhances its continuity and success. The study findings that transparent communication, values-based leadership, people-oriented leadership, and business agility are essential strategies for nascent entrepreneurs confirm prior research findings by Jones and Crompton (2009), Oh et al. (2018), and Ribeiro et al. (2019). Today's organizations require influential leaders who understand the rapidly changing global environment, complex customer requirements, and technological advancements to enable the organization to achieve a competitive edge. The early phase

of a startup is a critical phase to determine its capacity to survive and expand over time, hence the significance of leadership that fosters positive outcomes.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

1. What was your motivation to become an entrepreneur?
2. Describe your leadership experience.
3. Describe your everyday leadership behaviors that contribute to the success of the business.
4. Describe your key leadership strategies and how those strategies impact the business.
5. How would you define self-awareness? Does it affect your leadership experience?
6. Describe how your core values and morals impact your business.
7. Do you consider a transparent relationship with your subordinates as essential to your business? Please explain.
8. How would you describe the flow of information in your organization? Do you share all the information pertaining to business with employees?
9. What other aspects of your experience in enacting authentic leadership as a nascent entrepreneur would you like to share with me?

[Authentic leadership is a pattern of leaders' behavior that espouses positive psychological and ethical climate to advance greater self-awareness, balanced processing of information, relational transparency, and internalized moral perspective in the leader and follower, fostering positive self-development and organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, job performance, empowerment, creativity, and overall profitability.]