

DECONSTRUCTING DIMENSIONS OF AUTHENTIC STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP OF STATE-OWNED ENTERPRISES IN MALAWI: A LITERATURE ANALYSIS

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Abstract: There is a paucity of research on authentic leadership (AL) of top-level executives, especially in state-owned enterprises (SOEs). The objective of this conceptual paper is to review the extant models of AL and propose a new and comprehensive framework of the dimensions of authentic strategic leadership (ASL) in leading SOEs in Malawi. A background literature review on authenticity and AL was conducted in several peer-reviewed journals to identify the conceptual foundation and nature of authenticity, AL, and dimensions, revealing different and interrelated aspects of AL in the existing models. Six key dimensions of ASL of SOEs in Malawi are connecting the authenticity of self and organization to strategic direction; building organizational, resilience, strategic authenticity, the iterative and authentic influence of internal and external stakeholders, and the collaborative and transparent drive of positive; change and producing direction, alignment, and commitment (DAC). A new framework of ASL is proposed to influence diverse stakeholders to achieve DAC in a SOE in Malawi. Researchers are implored to test and validate the conceptual framework of ASL to enhance its explanatory power.

Keywords: authentic dimensions of strategic leadership, strategic leadership, authentic leadership, state-owned enterprise, organizational authenticity, authenticity as capability.

JEL Classification: L2, L3.

1 Introduction

The depressing performance and lack of financial sustainability of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in many developing countries, including Malawi, are blamed on poor strategic leadership and incompetent board of directors. For example, Kaunda (2021) reveals that some of the board members and members of the top management team (TMT) of ESCOM, Malawi Communication Regulatory Authority, and Malawi Energy Regulatory Authority are at the forefront of abusing government ownership of SOEs for personal enrichment, undermining the delivery of the desired societal and public value in Malawi. The underperformance of SOEs is worrisome, primarily when the government uses these organizations to drive economic, social, and commercial objectives (Mbo and Adjasi, 2017). The problem of poor SOE performance is equally evident in countries such as Tanzania, South Africa, Namibia, and Emerging European countries, to mention a few. A recent International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2023) report reveals that 12 important nonfinancial SOEs in Tanzania pose fiscal risks and need close financial

monitoring. The report adds that Air Tanzania Company Limited and the Tanzania Railway Corporation are technically insolvent (IMF, 2023). Sithomola (2019) talks about “catastrophic leadership bankruptcy” in South Africa, which leads to the loss of confidence and trust in the capability of South African SOEs to effectively and efficiently provide services and sustain their operations without treasury bailouts. In Namibia, corruption, political interruption in recruiting top leadership, financial burden on the state, and procurement anomalies are underlying causes of the poor performance of many SOEs (Marenga, 2020).

The problem of poor SOE performance is evident not only on the African continent. After studying SOEs in Emerging Europe, Bower (2017) concluded that significant losses in the Bulgarian energy sector are recorded mainly due to the National Electricity Company and its structural tariff deficit. SOE losses are also reported in the Croatian transport sector, automotive companies in Slovenia, and the bad bank in Latvia (Bower, 2017), to mention a few. Commonly, there is growing frustration among the users of services provided by SOEs, significantly when unethical leaders in

the upper echelon derail these organizations (Camacho and Jenkins, 2022). The adage that fish starts rotting from the head calls for a new strategic leadership paradigm in SOEs, which hinges on diverse competencies, including executive authenticity in the upper echelon. There is a compelling need to appoint authentic strategic leadership with strong ethical values to oversee and address SOE challenges. Authentic strategic leadership focuses on people, values, and ethics first, with productivity and profits subsequently promoted by fostering an inclusive, positive, and welcoming environment where everyone feels heard.

Academics and practitioners yearn for authentic leadership to solve dysfunctional leadership in SOEs and the private sector. Building genuine relationships with employees by inspiring trust, influencing follower-work-related behaviors, and fostering a positive work environment are some of the positive effects an authentic leader brings to an organization. However, Ford and Harding (2011, p.464) lament that authentic leadership as a reflection of the “true self” is impossible as leaders are forced to “sacrifice their subjectivity to that of the organizational collective – privileging their collective or organizational self over their individual self.”

Välikangas and Tienari (2018, p.1) agree that “CEOs and Top Management Teams (TMT) cannot be authentic in the strict sense of the word – embracing who they ‘truly’ are – due to the many conflicting demands on their work and due to their public role, where expression of their inner-ness would be deemed inappropriate.” Chamorro-Premuzic (2020, p.1) is explicit that authenticity comes at a high price, which is paid not only by leaders but also by their followers (e.g., reduction in team engagement and tensions due to hurtful but true comments on team members' performance).

Despite these misgivings, proponents of authentic leadership are optimistic that authenticity exhibited by leaders in an organization is the path to organizational success and longevity (Gardner, et al., 2021). The relationship between authenticity and leadership is traceable to the 2000s when disillusionment with existing corporate and political leadership precipitated calls by academics, society, and practitioners for authentic leadership (Prakash, Bisla, and Rastogi, 2021). Authentic leadership emerged at the overlap of three domains, namely, ethics, leadership, and positive

psychology, to address the ethical crises in organizations (Iszatt-White, et al., 2021). Turning SOEs into efficient and self-sustaining organizations will require leadership changes to be part of the radical reforms in many countries (IMF, 2023). However, there are two critical issues for strategic leadership practitioners and researchers of authentic strategic leadership. First, there is a lacuna in the dynamic interplay of strategic leadership and authenticity in organizations such as an SOE and its outcomes at the micro-level (the individual stakeholder), meso-level (groups and organizations), and macro-level (institutions, culture, and society). Second, Ahmed (2023) asserts that authentic strategic leadership is a relatively new leadership model in the developing phase.

Consequently, there is a dearth of frameworks examining strategic leadership from the lens of authenticity (Samimi, Cortes, Anderson, and Herrmann, 2022). Authentic strategic leadership is under-researched, and strategic leaders of SOEs in many countries, including Malawi, need a model to guide them in practicing executive authenticity, especially in politicized SOEs. Helmuth, Cole and Vendette (2023, p.2) implore “scholars to reconsider the blanket use of commonly accepted measures [of leadership] within the [specific] authentic leadership arena.”

In terms of the level and nature of leadership, this exploratory paper focuses on strategic leaders of SOEs who constitute the upper echelon. These leaders are powerful according to the upper echelon theory, the seminal work on strategic leadership (Hambrick and Mason, 2004). Strategic leadership theory focuses exclusively on the dominant coalition or top “executives who have overall responsibility for an organization, their characteristics, what they do, and how they affect organizational outcomes” (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 2009, p.4). Strategic leaders make strategic decisions that affect the whole organization and require significant resources to pursue the long-term direction of a firm (Samimi, et al., 2022).

Against this backdrop, the conceptual paper aims to review the existing models of authentic leaders and propose a new and comprehensive framework for authentic strategic leadership of SOEs in Malawi. This exploratory study is valuable for practitioners and scholars of strategic leadership in two key ways.

First, it emphasizes the interplay of authenticity with stakeholder-centricity and positive relational resources for the leadership of top executives in SOEs. Second, the paper unravels the dimensions of authenticity necessary for the authentic strategic leadership of SOEs in a politicized context. In pursuit of the above aim, the conceptual paper grapples with the key research question of what authentic strategic leadership dimensions can improve the operations of SOEs in Malawi. First, the paper explores the complexity of authenticity before delving into the ontology of strategic leadership. After that, five seminal and dominant authentic leadership models are critically analyzed. Lastly, themes and gaps identified in the existing authentic leadership models are discussed, culminating in a new and integrative framework of authentic strategic leadership of SOEs in Malawi. The paper concludes with implications and future research.

2 Complexity and meaning of authenticity

Authentic leadership is still elusive despite 15 years of growing research in different disciplines (e.g., philosophy, leadership, public relations, marketing, and psychology) (Helmuth, et al., 2023). The ontological roots of authenticity are traceable to the Ancient Greek philosopher Socrates, who coined the maxim “be true to thine self” (Gardner, et al., 2011). Authentic comes from the Greek word “authento,” which translates as “to have full power” (Trilling, 1972).

2.1 Authenticity as self-congruency

In social psychology, authenticity underlines self-congruence regarding the extent to which a particular behavior is consistent with deeply held values and other dispositions (Dammann, et al., 2021). The internal sense of true self and the external expression of it are two critical parts of individual self-authenticity.

2.2 Authenticity as a continuum and relational

Helmuth, et al. (2021, p.11) advise that “authenticity is not an either/or condition,” but rather, it is aspirational in the sense that leaders “can be more or less authentic at any point in time and across situations.” This viewpoint recognizes that authenticity is not a fixed state

but exists on a continuum of authenticity-inauthenticity.

In existential philosophy, authenticity unfolds in the social and relational context. In the words of Erickson (1995, p.121), authenticity is “being true to self” but also being true to “self-in-relationship” as well as to “self and world.” Although scholars consider authenticity as relational, there are instances when the primary focus is on individualism, self-congruence, or a subjective feeling. Authenticity in organizations is inadequate if the focus is only on individual self-authenticity. For example, team authenticity draws attention to the need to understand individual authenticity's external effects on others.

2.3 Authenticity as a social process

Dammann, et al. (2021, p.2) elaborate that authenticity is “the process of being in a congruous relationship with self, others, and relevant social norms.” Thus, authenticity is not limited to self-knowledge, discovering and accurately communicating one’s values as it also implies consistency in living out the social norms.

2.4 Authenticity as an organizational capability

Lastly, organizational authenticity refers to the degree to which an organization is true to itself, acts according to its values and purposes, and communicates honestly and transparently with stakeholders (Shen and Kim, 2012). Examining organizational authenticity includes consistency, truthfulness, and transparency (Shen and Kim, 2012). Truthfulness focuses on the organization’s true self and the extent of congruence with three aspects of the strategy statement (mission, vision, purpose, value, and character). Transparency entails being open and honest in sharing information with the public, accepting criticism and taking responsibility for behavior. Consistency occurs when the actions and behaviors of an organization agree with its values, beliefs, principles, and character. Scholars of strategic leadership need to delve into the multidimensional and multi-level nature of authenticity and the challenges of defining authenticity in relation to leadership outcomes, such as widespread agreement of direction, holistic alignment, and commitment evident in the organizational citizenship behaviors of followers.

2.5 Multidimensional and multi-level aspects of authenticity in leadership

Crawford, et al. (2020) state that authentic leadership is a multidimensional and multi-level construct. The most used definition of authentic leadership in literature is by Walumbwa, et al. (2008:94), who created four dimensions: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, relational transparency, and balanced processing. Walumbwa, et al. (2008:94) concisely defined authentic leadership as follows:

“a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities 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.”

Self-awareness is not an end but a process of developing insight into one's limitations, strengths, and weaknesses through constantly re-assessing one's self-concept via exposure to feedback from others and being conscious of one's impact on them.

Walumbwa, et al. (2008) illustrate that authenticity is not about moral neutrality or simply being true to the self you want to be, be it a good or bad, moral or immoral person. Self-regulation based on the moral campus is pivotal in self-based perspectives of authenticity. Internalized moral perspective is an internalized and integrated form of self-regulation, internal moral values and standards that guide one to make decisions despite external influences (e.g., groups, organizational, societal pressure). Balanced processing relates to the ability to be objective when considering all available information (e.g., take opinions, suggestions, and consideration of others end embrace disagreeing viewpoints) before reaching a decision (Walumbwa, et al., 2008).

Lastly, relational transparency entails presenting one's true self (as opposed to a fake or distorted self) to others and knowing the boundary between healthy sharing and unhealthy, mindless information dumping (Walumbwa, et al., 2008). Exhibiting authenticity and genuine feelings toward team members encourages interpersonal interaction and mutual trust in the organization.

Nikolić, Kvasic and Grbic (2020) elaborate on the multidimensional nature of authentic leadership in terms of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and developmental dimensions. The intrapersonal perspective upholds a leader-centric view and the intra-individual nature of authenticity without any overt attention from other people (e.g., self-knowledge and self-regulatory behaviors). The interpersonal dimension is outward-oriented, emphasizing that authentic leadership is a relational construct that emerges from the relationship between leader and followers. The multi-level nature of authenticity brings to the fore the relationship and cross-level implications between/among entities residing at different levels (e.g., individual, dyadic, team, and organization). Finally, there is a developmental perspective of authenticity as a process characterized by the ever-changing relationships between an individual, himself/herself, others, and social norms (Nikolić, et al., 2020).

2.6 Lack of definitional clarity: traits, style, antecedent, outcome, and moral

In the extant literature, there is a lack of clarity on the definition of authentic leadership. One can decipher five different aspects, namely, (1) traits, (2) style, (3) antecedents, (4) outcome, and (5) moral components of authentic leadership, which combine in various ways to define authentic leadership (Iszatt-White, et al., 2021). For example, traits and style are evident in the definition by Avolio and Gardner (2005, p.321), who suggest that “authentic leaders are those individuals who know who they are, what they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others' values, knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate.” Other definitions of authentic leadership depict leadership traits that impact organizational outcomes or follower development.

For example, Ilies, Morgeson and Nahrgang (2005, p.390) assert that authentic leaders are “deeply aware of their values and beliefs, self-confident, genuine, reliable and trustworthy, and focus on building followers' strengths, broadening their well-being.” This definition underscores traits of authentic leaders and the aspect of leader–follower development. Some definitions view authentic leadership by its outcomes

(e.g., followers' intrinsic motivation, trust, engagement, and organizational citizenship behaviors) but fail to explain the fundamental nature of the construct of authentic leadership (Crawford, et al., 2020). It is equally notable that some definitions pronounce the antecedents of authentic leadership (e.g., self-knowledge and self-consistency between espoused values, ethical reasoning, and actions).

Commonly, definitions of authentic leadership depict the common pitfall of considering context outside the tripod of leader, follower, and shared goals (Drath, et al., 2008). The fundamental ontology of leadership asserts: "In its simplest form [leadership] is a tripod – a leader or leaders, followers, and a common goal they want to achieve" (Bennis, 2007, p. 3). This is not a definition of leadership but something much more fundamental: It is an expression of commitment to the entities (leaders, followers, common goals) that are essential and indispensable to leadership and about which any theory of leadership must therefore speak" (Drath, et al., 2008:635).

As leadership differs in context, level, and scope of influence (e.g., tactical, supervisory, and strategic leaders), authentic leadership theory must reflect multi-level rather than erroneously suggest a one-size-fits-all approach (Kanyangale, 2022). Table 1 highlights some of the insightful pitfalls in the scholarship of authentic leadership.

2.7 DAC ontology of strategic leadership

The leadership ontology of direction, alignment, and commitment (DAC), which upholds that leadership

achieves three primary outcomes, resonates with strategic leadership (Drath, et al., 2008, p.636). First, direction as a leadership outcome is about the widespread agreement on an organization's overall collective aims, mission, and objectives. Second, alignment is another leadership outcome. Alignment refers to the organization and the coordination of knowledge and work in collective. Lastly, commitment is the feeling of obligation, emotional attachment, and willingness of the individual members to subsume their interests and benefit for the collective good (Drath, et al., 2008, p.636). Commitment is evident in various ways, which include undivided loyalty or extra effort and organizational citizenship behaviors to produce DAC. The DAC ontology of leadership provides insight into the desired outcome of strategic leaders in influencing multiple stakeholders in a dynamic organizational context. Strategic leadership involves leading downwards, upwards, and across the organization's boundary to create DAC (Kanyangale, 2017).

A report by PWC (2015) is explicit that strategic leaders in SOEs establish a clear purpose and mission, build relationships with citizens and other stakeholders, and create and maintain sound internal management for effective services and efficient processes. Strategic leaders also leverage external influence by co-creating value with other stakeholders, as depicted in Figure 1.

3 Methodology

Three key methodological issues require clarity in this conceptual paper. These are literature search and article selection, authentic leadership model selection, and dimensional focus and analysis.

Table 1. Types of Criticisms of Authentic Leadership
(Source: Own elaboration)

Type of criticism	Author(s)
Lack of collectivism due to leader centricity, which focuses on the self and who the leader is	Algera and Lips-Wiersma (2012); Avolio, et al. (2004)
Adaptability is misconstrued as a deviation and lack of self-consistency between values, beliefs, and actions	Alvesson and Einola (2019)
Authentic followership is not examined as an independent construct but rather an extension of authentic leadership	Crawford, et al. (2020)
Authentic leadership and transformational leadership are closely related, hence construct redundancy	Crawford, et al. (2020)
Confounding the authenticity of action with the authenticity of a person exhibiting the act	Helmuth, et al. (2023:2)

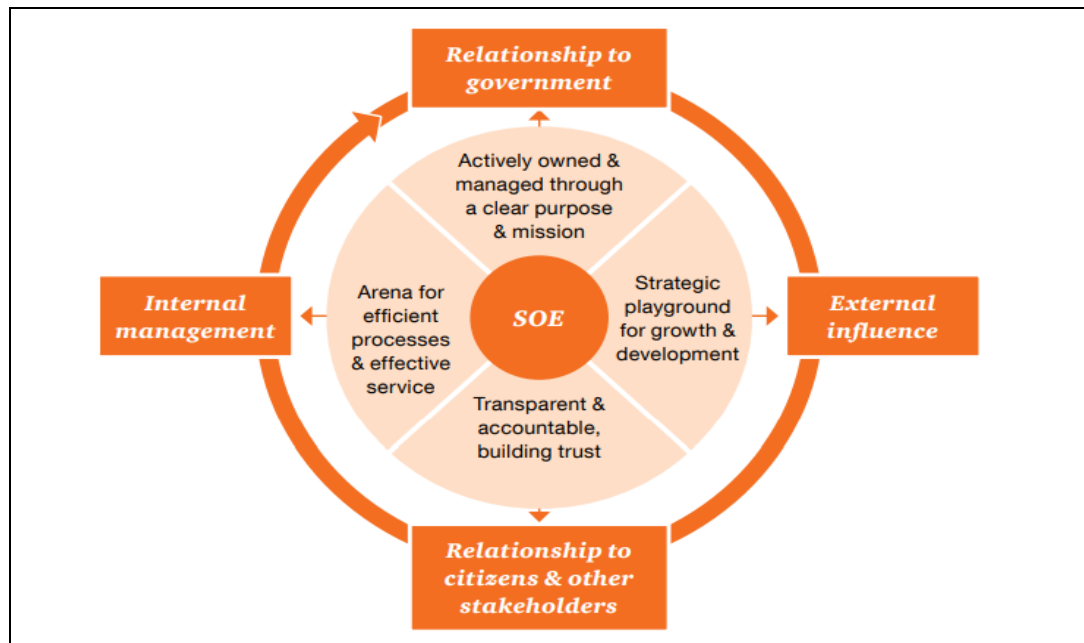


Figure 1. SOE of the future and new capabilities
(Source: PWC, 2015, p.7)

3.1 Literature search and article selection and model selection

First, the search for scholarly articles focused on electronic databases, including EBSCO Host, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Academic Search Complete, as these are relevant to leadership scholarship. In searching for articles, the keywords used were Malawi, state-owned enterprise, authentic leadership, authentic leadership models/framework, strategic leadership, and authentic strategic leadership.

The inclusion criteria hinged on (1) scholarly articles published in English; (2) a clear focus on authentic leadership and authentic leadership frameworks or models; and (3) articles not repeating another. The search identified a total of 70 articles. The author conducted a thorough and deep read of the abstracts of all 70 articles. The articles describing the value of authentic leaders and training programs were excluded as they did not dwell on a model or framework with interrelated dimensions. Articles focused on the measurement and instruments used to collect data on authentic leadership were also excluded. Twelve articles that discussed the model or framework of authentic leadership remained for the analysis.

Second, impact citation helped identify the most influential models in the 12 articles. Articles on authentic

leadership models with an impact citation of less than 3100, according to the work of Omeihe, et al. (2021), were excluded as they were considered less influential in shaping the thinking of scholars on authentic leadership. The models selected due to impact citation include a model by Luthans and Avolio (2003), a seminal work in the scholarship of authentic leadership, the models of authentic leadership by Avolio, et al. (2004), Gardner, et al. (2005), Ilies, et al. (2005), and Walumbwa, et al. (2008). Omeihe, et al. (2021) concur that these five models have the highest impact citation in authentic leadership.

Lastly, dimensional focus and analysis were about identifying and categorizing commonalities and gaps in the dimensions of existing authentic leadership for possible inclusion in the proposed framework. Constant comparison of each specified dimension with other dimensions in all the authentic leadership models was made to synthesize and classify similar dimensions to avoid overlaps and ensure that no dimension was classified into two groups. Some unique gaps were identified in the extant models concerning the SOE context in Malawi, as most of the authentic leadership models are generic. Consequently, some of the elements in the proposed framework are included to fill such gaps so that the framework can be holistic and context-specific.

4 Analysis of five seminal and dominant models of authentic leadership

Below is the critical analysis of the five selected authentic leadership models.

4.1 The Luthans and Avolio model (2003)

First, the seminal model of authentic leadership by Luthans and Avolio (2003) emphasizes the positive development of authentic leadership. Thus, psychological capital and a positive organizational context shape the self-development of authentic leadership. Psychological capital or capacity as an antecedent relates to confidence, hope, optimism, and psychological resilience. Self-awareness, together with self-regulation, constitutes the self-development of authentic leadership. Figure 2 depicts the model.

In this model, followers' processes are missing as the focus is on internal consistency or self-development supported by a positive organizational context. The model fails to differentiate the processes of followership and leadership. The model's positive psychological bias makes the relational context's tensions and complexities unclear when enacting authenticity by fallible humans.

4.2 The Avolio, et al. model (2004)

Second, Avolio, et al.'s (2004) model depicts a link between authentic leadership and employee attitudes and behaviors. The positive psychological traits of hope, trust, and optimism mediate the observed process of influencing authentic followers' attitudes and behaviors through authentic leadership. The model illuminates the attempt to bring positive emotions into authentic leadership theory. The model in Figure 3 is a response to researchers who emphasized the significance of positive emotions in the process of leadership.

The cardinal insight of this model is the two critical ways of the leaders' influence, namely, personal and social identification of followers. The major pitfall is framing the positive modeling relationship between leaders and followers as one-sided and not symbiotic to capture mutual influence. There is a need for authentic leadership to be reconceptualized as collaborative, which is neither attributed to the leader nor can the leader's actions alone lead to follower behaviors and attitudes in pursuit of positive outcomes.

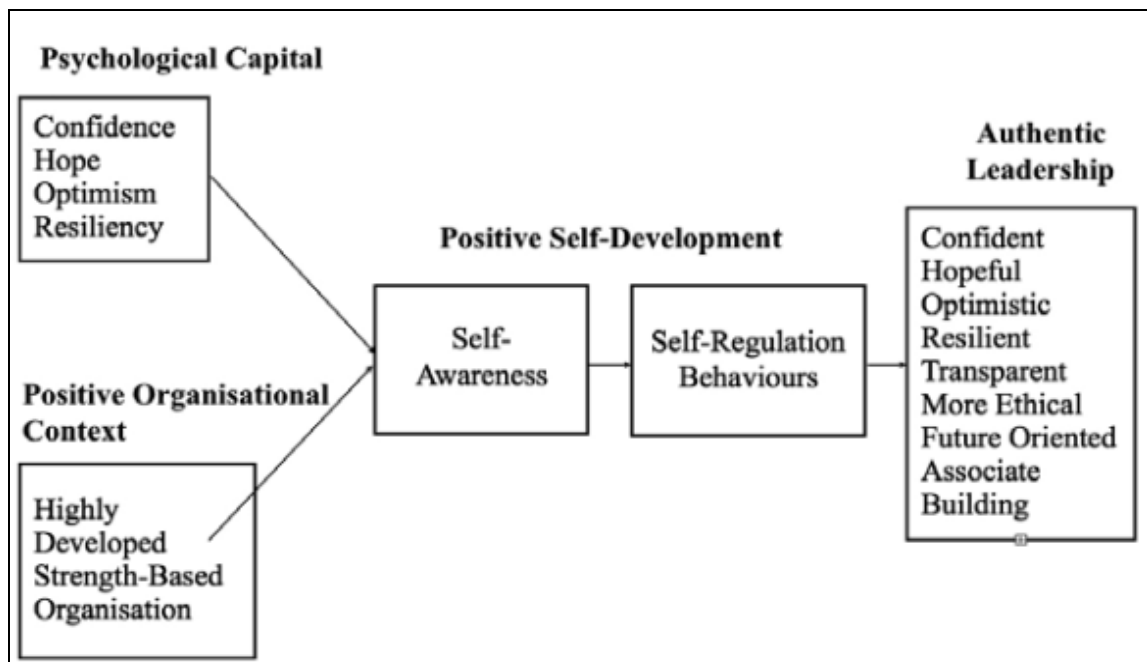


Figure 2. The model of authentic leadership development
(Source: Luthans and Avolio, 2003, p.251)

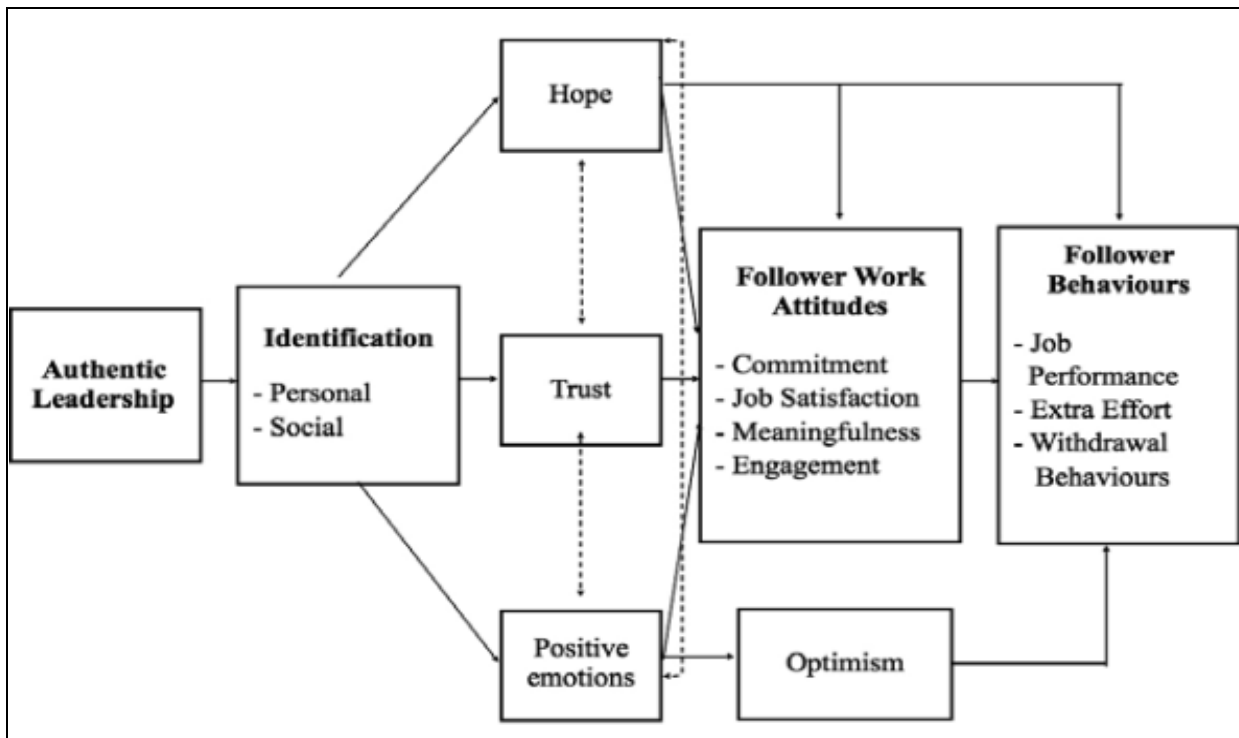


Figure 3. A model linking authentic leadership to followers' attitudes and behaviors
(Source: Avolio, et al., 2004, p.803)

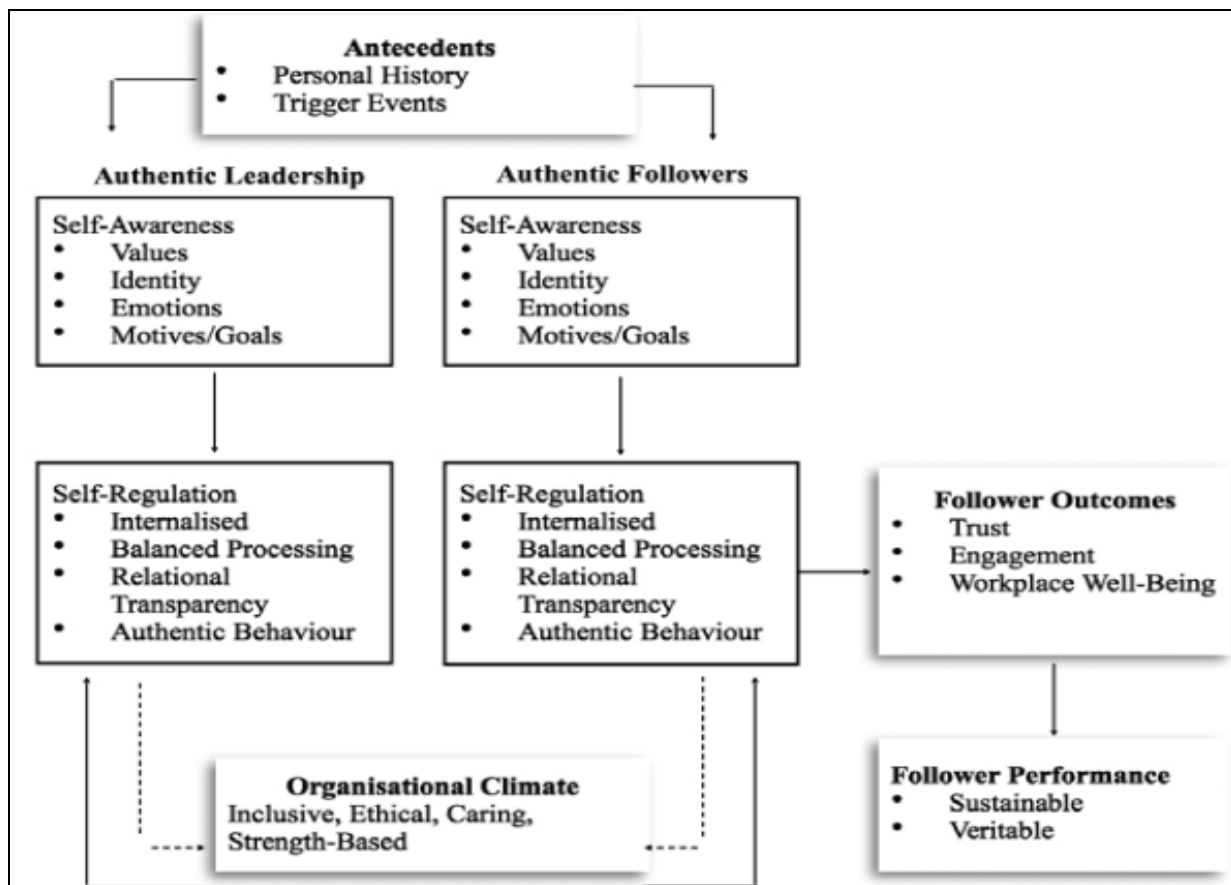


Figure 4. The model linking authentic leadership to followers' attitudes and behaviors
(Source: Gardner, et al., 2005, p.346)

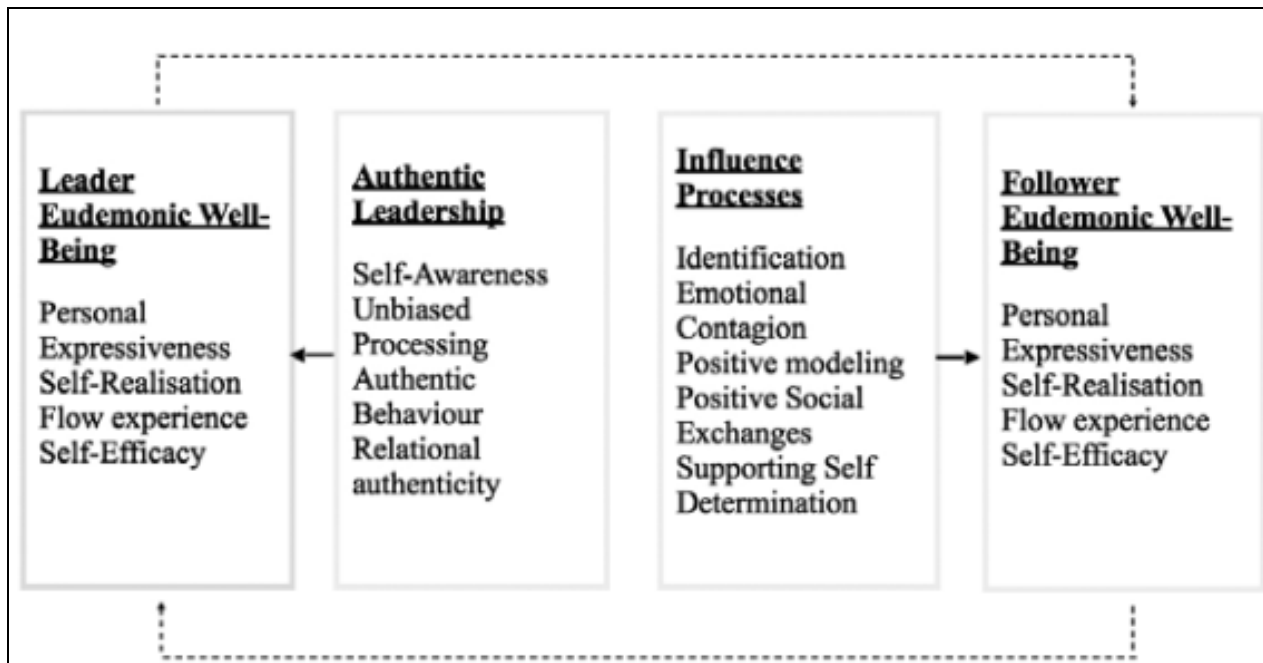


Figure 5. Authentic leadership influences leaders' and followers' well-being
(Source: Ilies, et al., 2005, p.377)

4.3 Gardner, et al. model (2005)

Third, Gardner, et al. (2005) seek to correct the shortcomings of previously developed conceptualizations that need to clearly distinguish between authentic leadership, psychological capital, and transformational leadership. The model focuses on creating authentic leaders and followers, resulting in lasting and sustainable follower performance. In this self-based model, the developmental process of authenticity is determined by self-awareness (e.g., values, identity, emotions, goals) and self-regulating behaviors (e.g., balanced processing, authentic behaviors, relational transparency) of leaders and followers. As shown in Figure 4, the development of authentic strategic leadership and authentic followers is also influenced by the personal history and life trigger events as antecedents of leaders and followers, as well as the supportive and ethical organizational climate.

This model clarifies the nature and role of context (e.g., inclusive, caring, strength-based), which shapes authentic leadership, follower outcomes, and sustainable performance. The model of authentic leadership by Gardner, et al. (2005) focuses on the dyadic and hierarchical influence and relationships only. It excludes multiple stakeholders' lateral influence to achieve collective and organizational-level outcomes.

4.4 The Ilies, et al. model (2005)

Fourth, there is a model of authentic leadership by Ilies, et al. (2005), which includes self-awareness, unbiased processing, authentic behavior, and authentic relational orientation. Ilies, et al. (2005)'s four-component model advocates multi-dimensions of authenticity initially proposed by Kernis (2003). The model focuses on the link between authentic leadership and the "eudemonic" well-being of leaders and followers. It also clarifies how authentic leadership influences followers' well-being through various mechanisms. Figure 5 shows the model.

The model provides insights into the various influence processes on the leader and follower, which result in well-being. However, this model fails to illuminate how the follower influences the well-being of a leader. The model also lacks clarity on how to directly address the asymmetries of power that enable leaders to impose their values on others.

4.5 Walumbwa, et al. (2008) four-dimensional phenomenon

Lastly, the dominant work of Walumbwa, et al. (2008) is prominent for encouraging a multidimensional na-

ture of authentic leadership, which underlines that authentic functioning embraces four elements: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, relational transparency, and balanced processing. Notably, there is a lack of clarity on how the identified four dimensions combine and result in the development of authentic leadership (Einola and Alvesson, 2021). Iszatt-White, Stead, and Elliott (2021:465) lament that “suggestions to shift from self-awareness and 'inner life' to more 'intersubjective, embodied relationships' as truer reflections of authenticity have not gained attention in the literature.” There is a call for researchers and scholars to reconceptualize the four dominant authentic leadership behaviors by Walumbwa, et al. (2008) to embrace both the self-based notion and relational and organizational aspects of authenticity.

5 Thematic results

This conceptual paper has delineated six themes from the five extant authentic leadership models. These themes are (1) connecting authenticity to self and organization to the strategic direction, (2) building organizational resilience, (3) strategic authenticity, (4) the iterative and authentic influence of internal and external stakeholders, (5) producing long-term DAC, and (6) collaborative and transparent drive of positive change to create an inclusive, caring, and ethical organizational context. Each of the themes is discussed below.

5.1 Collaborative and transparent drive of positive change

The theme of transparent behavior and leadership capable of delivering positive, ethical, and organizational change is evident in the model of authentic leadership by Luthans and Avolio (2003) and Gardner, et al. (2005). However, strategic leaders of most SOEs in Malawi operate in a politically and ethically compromised organizational context. Political patronage compromises ethical expectations of being professional, independent, and able to stay true to the organization's mission as an authentic strategic leader or authentic board member. In selecting the Chairperson and Board of Directors in Malawian SOEs, little regard is accorded to merit-based selection criteria, emphasizing the necessary knowledge, experience, integrity, and

corporate governance skills. This politically influenced practice results in an ingratiated Board and politicized governance culture, compromising ethical role modeling by the Board and ethical corporate decision making in the SOEs (Kaunda, 2021). Additionally, political interference in SOE operations is institutionalized, rationalized, and socialized to organizational members. Lastly, there is a weak, imbalanced, and less integrated SOE oversight by the Department of Statutory Corporations, which focuses much on financial performance and structural factors of the Board in SOEs (e.g., size, composition). Authentic strategic leadership and SOE board members are significantly challenged when their value system is undermined. They choose their ground and stay true to what they believe often at a significant cost (e.g., marginalized, facing conflict, or getting fired) because they are authentic. To ensure acceptable, feasible and realistic costs to the required positive change in an SOE, authentic strategic leadership adopts collaborative and transparent engagement of diverse stakeholders (e.g., government, politicians, employees) to build trust and optimism for collective action in creating a more inclusive, caring, and ethical organizational context. Authentic strategic leadership and followers desire a better self-image and align themselves with “true to themselves” organizations. Prakash, et al. (2021) shed light on the fact that transparency and positive leadership are core to authentic leadership, which emerged at the overlap of three domains, namely, ethics, leadership, and positive psychology, to address the ethical crises in organizations. Mchulu (2023) and the Ministry of Finance (2020) call for radical reforms in Malawian SOEs, including leadership, to shift from a politically and ethically compromised organizational context to a positive, ethical, productive, and caring environment for SOEs.

5.2 Connecting authenticity of self and organization to the strategic direction

Authentic strategic leadership reinforces the harmonious connection of the long-term direction (vision, purpose, core values) of SOE with the deeply held positive values and ethical standards acceptable by employees and external stakeholders of the organization. Authentic strategic leadership ensures that the organization is

guided by an ethical framework that supports its vision, mission, values, and culture, which is essential in preventing ethical dilemmas and conflicts. The theme of authenticity of self is evident in four of the five extant models of authentic leadership by Luthans and Avolio (2003), Ilies, et al. (2005), Gardner, et al. (2005), and Walumbwa, et al. (2008). In these models, the prevalent assertion is that understanding oneself is necessary to regulate oneself and lead others and the organization authentically. Authentic strategic leadership manifests and promotes three critical capabilities related to the strategic direction: (1) aligning and enacting core values and purpose, (2) promoting integrated ubuntu ethics, and (3) effectively navigating the politics of SOEs.

5.2.1 Aligning and enacting core values and purpose

The issue of values and the interaction of authentic leadership and authentic followers' values are evident in the models by Gardner, et al. (2005) and Walumbwa, et al. (2008), who express this in terms of the internalized moral perspective of authentic leadership. The authentic strategic leadership of SOEs drives and reinforces the congruity of the values and purpose of an SOE with the organization's members. Core values drive individuals' authentic actions in the genuine expression of the SOE's beliefs and purpose rather than self-interests.

While core values define what an SOE believes and the behaviors it agrees to live by daily, purpose elaborates the fundamental reason for its existence. Values and purpose communicate what is essential to the SOEs, provide clarity and direction for decision making and behaviors of the people inside the organization, and signal to external stakeholders what is important. Second, authentic strategic leadership enables individual and collective values to forge a frame of reference and interpretive filter of essential issues and critical interdependencies across different levels and elements in the organizational architecture (e.g., shared values, staff, style, system, strategy, and structure). A value system actively around decision making builds a strategic leader's internal confidence, allowing stakeholders to develop their hope and trust in the leader. In this way, authentic strategic leaders are true to the self and

the values they hold dear and transmit them to their followers to create shared purpose and goals. Authentic leadership understands personal values and strives to act following those values (Ahmed, 2023). Leaders are scrutinized by others and defined by their values and character.

5.2.2 Promote integrated ubuntu ethics

The model of authentic leadership by Walumbwa, et al. (2008) conspicuously focuses on ethics and internal morality. As this is a self-based model of authentic leadership, it has an inwardly moral focus on the ethical self. In this way, the Walumbwa, et al. (2008) model leaves a gap in how authentic leadership and followers integrate their inner morality with outward ethical conduct and its impact on others and the organization. Ubuntu ethics fills this gap, especially with the view of authenticity as being genuine, original, and real as a human being. A person with ubuntu in the organizational community develops self-regarding behaviors (e.g., self-control, self-respect, employee citizenship behavior) and also other-regarding virtues (e.g., solidarity, interdependence, cooperation) (Imafidon, 2022). Individual-based ubuntu virtues build a virtuous individual who, apart from supporting others, lives as an exemplary person. Ubuntu's inclusive and communitarian virtue is encapsulated in the dictum "I am because we are" (Laloo, 2022). Authenticity in an organization emphasizes both individual and communitarian virtues. Authentic strategic leadership of SOEs needs to adopt and exploit an integrated system of ubuntu to enhance interdependence, consultation, and collective consensus in an SOE. As agents of ubuntu virtue, authentic strategic leaders of SOE role models and reinforce ubuntu values and ethics to send strong ethical cues and develop others. Lastly, effective, authentic strategic leadership cultivates and sustains bridging and bonding networks and relationships with myriad stakeholders inside and outside the SOEs. Creating a network of disparate stakeholders builds trust and reciprocity for consensual solutions (Laloo, 2022).

Additionally, building links with individuals who occupy very different social positions and formal or institutionalized power helps to influence powerful people and politicians in the ecosystem in favor of

SOEs (Titus and Hoole, 2021). Avoiding or minimizing the adverse effects of in-group, out-group, and exclusionary behaviors is critical for authentic strategic leadership, not undermining cohesion and social capital in an SOE. Stakeholder-centered authenticity is about “being true to self” and being true to others, as humans are interdependent, especially in a politicized setting (Ammann, et al., 2021).

5.2.3 Navigating the politics of SOE

There is silence in the extant models of authentic leadership regarding how authentic leaders navigate the politically exposed environment where the use of political skills (e.g., social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity) is critical to understanding others effectively and using such knowledge to influence stakeholders in pursuit of personal or organizational objectives. The lack of focus on navigating the politics of SOE is a critical gap in the scholarship of strategic leadership. Authentic strategic leaders who lack political skills may get derailed or not survive in politically exposed organizations such as SOEs in Malawi (Mchulu, 2023). Ammann, et al. (2021, p.2) are clear that the activities and process of being in a harmonious relationship with self, others, and relevant social norms are political. The intersection of government, the ruling political party, and organizational politics form a political arena for strategic leaders to navigate authentically or inauthentically. Ferris, et al. (2005) advise leaders that political skill constitutes four elements relevant to the organizational context.

First, the skill of social astuteness is about observing others and creating a close understanding of diverse social situations. Second, the skill of interpersonal influence denotes the ability of politically skilled individuals to exert significant influence within their social spheres. Third, networking ability is about creating, recreating, developing, and nurturing diverse, value-adding networks or contacts at work. Titus and Hoole (2021) assert that leadership, which develops and sustains bonding social capital (between “people like us” who are “in it together”) and bridging social capital beyond the current social circle or connections, is very important for the survival of SOEs. In this regard, political skills are also helpful for gaining social linking

capital to access influential people to support SOEs (Titus and Hoole 2021). In using networks with excessive levels of bonding and linking social capital to navigate political challenges and exploit opportunities for the SOE, it is salient that authentic strategic leadership is sensitive to the negative possibility of breeding bias, perpetuating political patronage and creating out-groups and exclusion among key internal and external stakeholders.

Lastly, apparent sincerity emphasizes substantial sincerity, genuineness, integrity, and authenticity. It was long ago when Erickson (1995) advised that authenticity is not just “being true to self” but also relationships with others in a social setting where people may have competing interests. A positive political approach by a strategic leader (e.g., persuasion, negotiation) embraces multiple views or options on critical issues that are helpful for strategic leaders and SOEs to accomplish organizational objectives and encourage teamwork. In a different vein, the rational approach by a strategic leader navigates the politics of SOEs by looking for and analyzing relevant information before deciding. It is insightful that authentic strategic leadership seeks synergistic outcomes from a genuine balance of political and rational approaches to deal with ambiguity and turbulence positively. Authentic strategic leadership in Malawian SOEs must avoid negative political skills, which use power and political advantage to gain or protect self-interest at the expense of organizational outcomes (Mchulu, 2023). At its worst, negative political skills manifest outright manipulation and sabotage for one's upward mobility, power, or success. More importantly, inauthentic leaders display an inflated sense of entitlement that may lead to abuses of power, focus on achieving their personal goals, and disregard others in pursuit of success (Ferris, et al., 2005). The inauthenticity of strategic leaders is also exhibited in various ways, such as willingness to disregard standards of morality and see value in behaviors that benefit the self at the expense of others. It also tolerates unethical pro-organizational behavior (Einola and Alvesson, 2021). Any framework of authentic strategic leadership in Malawian SOEs will be less meaningful if it ignores or downplays the influence of the political skill of the decision maker in shaping the adaptive behavior of employees and other key stakeholders in a politically exposed context.

Mindful of the risk of strategic and leader derailment arising from poor political skills, it is time that these skills are conceptually elaborated, recognized, and systematically developed in every authentic strategic leader as a critical competence to survive and thrive in the domain of SOEs.

5.3 Building organizational resilience

Authentic strategic leadership builds psychological capital (e.g., hope, trust, optimism) and develops the resilience capability of followers by using four types of sights and systemic adaptation for an SOE to bounce back or bounce forward from adversity. The theme of resilience is evident in the two authentic leadership models by Luthans and Avolio (2003) and Gardner, et al. (2005). The extant models uphold that restoring confidence, hope, optimism, and the ability to bounce back from catastrophic events is essential for resilience. Ahmed (2023) asserts that leader authenticity encourages extra-role behavior, which is pivotal for employees' resilience before, during, and after disruptive events. In SOEs, organizational resilience as a strategic capability comprises the “four” sights and systemic positive adaptation. These four sights are discussed below.

5.3.1 Integrating four sights

In the existing models of authentic leadership by Luthans and Avolio Model (2003) and Gardner, et al. (2005), authentic leadership is a process that rests on positive psychological capacities, self-awareness, and a highly developed organizational context (e.g., caring, ethical, reinforcing resilience). The VUCA context of SOEs demands foresight, insight, oversight, and hindsight to ensure the adaptive capacity to unexpected change or adversity, which is increasing (Duchek, 2020). The capabilities of foresight (anticipating problems) and hindsight (learning from the experience) are essential to building collective situational awareness. Still, they must be improved to identify and prioritize keystone vulnerabilities in the SOE system (Duchek, 2020). Anticipation entails observing internal and external developments, identifying critical developments and potential threats, and preparing for unexpected events. Authentic strategic leadership also relies on in-

sight (interpreting the situation and responding accordingly) and oversight (assessing the action taken) to implement coping skills. The synergy of the four types of sight helps strategic leaders and employees of an SOE build trust and hope in anticipatory capabilities, coping capabilities during disruptive events, and adaptive capacity after an event in an SOE. Goffee and Jones (2005) advise that “authentic chameleons” are authentic leaders with the capability of playing different roles that they believe are valuable and relevant while remaining true to their own identity and values (Goffee and Jones, 2005).

5.3.2 Systemic positive adaptation

The authentic leadership models by Luthans and Avolio (2003) and Gardner, et al. (2005) allude to resilience. However, a gap arises from a need for more clarity on how individuals and organizations manifest adaptive capacity. The capacity of individuals and the organization to reflect, learn, and change after an expected event is critical for adaptation (Duchek, 2020). Commonly, adaptation capabilities are part of reactive adjustments to ensure continuity. Algera and Lips-Wiersma (2012) warned leaders that adaptability may easily be misconstrued as a deviation and lack of self-consistency between values, beliefs, and actions by advocates of self-based models of authentic leadership. Authentic strategic leaders as individuals require adaptive capability not only as reactive effort but also as pro-active (ex-ante) action. Combining proactive action and adaptive capacity pronounces learning from past experiences to shape the future while developing the capacity of everyone in the team to avoid strategy drift. The adaptive capacity of people is enhanced if they feel safe speaking up, challenging their way of thinking and behaving, trying something and failing – without fear of being judged harshly. Psychological safety is pivotal to mobilizing collective knowledge and empowering colleagues to react, even when the path is unclear, and the journey might be messy (Duchek, 2020). Being open, accepting and learning from change and addressing the silo mentality to reduce the undesirable outcome of adversity in SOEs are critical to ensure continuity after unexpected disruption (Dammann, et al., 2021). When interdependent, leaders and followers step back together from events

and ponder persistently to create meaning to guide immediate and future behavior (Alvesson and Einola, 2019). Lastly, authentic strategic leaders must enhance visibility, availability, and transparency in decision making and empower people to make sense of and execute necessary changes to resources and activities in fostering individual and collective adaptation in reaction to unexpected change and adversity (Duchek, 2020).

5.4 Strategic authenticity

The dimensions of (a) self-awareness, (b) relational transparency, and (c) internal moral and balanced processing are evident in many of the models of AL. First, it is noteworthy that self-awareness is commonly evident in models by Walumbwa, et al. (2008), Gardner, et al. (2005), Ilies, et al. (2005), and Luthans and Avolio (2003).

Authentic strategic leaders of SOEs enact authenticity by looking at everything through the prism that pronounces accurate self-awareness, strategic openness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internal and social-moral perspectives when serving all stakeholders. Strategic authenticity depicts unique modifications of (a) self-awareness, (b) relational transparency, and (c) internal moral perspective in Walumbwa, et al.'s (2008) model, while balanced processing has retained its relevance to authentic strategic leaders in an SOE. First, self-awareness represents how accurately one sees one's values, aspirations, beliefs, and reactions. Internal self-awareness (how well you know yourself) and external self-awareness (how well you understand how others see you) are critical for an authentic strategic leader to lead self before leading others in SOEs. Accurate self-awareness of authentic strategic leaders in Malawian SOEs also emphasizes self-accountability and sustainability awareness shaped by strategic leaders' and organizations' firmly held beliefs and values. Self-accountability and financial sustainability are salient in the backdrop of increased unethical behaviors and poor financial performance of SOEs in Malawi. Commonly, Malawian SOEs face fiscal risks as they fail to meet debt and statutory obligations (e.g., remittance of dividends, tax, and pension). Self-accountability occurs when an organization or person is accountable to

him/herself without anyone else to observe, monitor, or hold them responsible. Second, relational transparency is modified to strategic openness and relational transparency to embrace vision-led and systemic openness to see the interconnectedness and interdependencies within and across the various subsystems which impact activities in Malawian SOEs (e.g., public procurement system, political system, public finance system, culture). Relational transparency has changed in two key ways: to embrace the strategic dimension and the relational work of strategic leadership. Mbo and Adjasi (2017) advise that the strategic element is about the capability to create an open, inclusive, and transparent way to develop and enact the strategy of an SOE.

Authentic strategic leaders promote the public sharing of information and feelings on strategic issues with the most significant impact on SOE performance in a way that leads followers and stakeholders to identify authenticity in their leaders and trust the organization. In Malawi, almost half of the SOEs repetitively fail to complete their annual financial statements, undermining strategic openness, organizational trust, and transparency (Ministry of Finance, 2020; Kaunda, 2021). They also face fiscal risks as they fail to meet debt and statutory obligations (e.g., remittance of dividends, tax, and pension) (Ministry of Finance, 2022). The relational aspect is about interactions with SOE stakeholders to enhance trust in the strategic relationship between the SOE, citizens, and government. The detached leadership style will not be successful in the twenty-first century because employees demand more personal relationships with their leaders before they give themselves entirely to their jobs and engage in organizational citizenship behavior. Transparency reinforced by accountability is helpful for strategic leaders to engage not only with internal stakeholders but also with external stakeholders of the SOE better and effectively (PWC, 2015).

Third, the model asserts that the moral dimension of authentic strategic leaders integrates the ability to be directed by internal moral standards employed to self-regulate one's behavior with the social aspect of leading the self and others in an SOE. In comparison, the internalized moral perspective concerns self-regulation and internal morality; social morality or norms

consider whether an action is right or wrong for the organizational community and other stakeholders. Lastly, authentic strategic leaders adopt a balanced approach which solicits opinions from subordinates, welcomes opposing viewpoints, and considers the value of these viewpoints fairly.

5.5 Iterative and authentic influence of significant stakeholders

The authentic strategic leader starts with building transparent relationships and then fostering trust and confidence in people to inspire them to work hard and collaboratively. These leaders weave a web of quality and mutual influence of different internal and external stakeholders of an SOE. The theme of relationships, interconnectedness, and positive modeling is recurrent in the models of authentic leadership by Avolio, et al. (2004), Ilies, et al. (2005), Gardner, et al. (2005), Walumbwa and et al. (2008). Goffee and Jones (2005) caution that authenticity is not an innate quality that a person is authentic or not. As authenticity exists on a continuum and is aspirational, it is insightful for authentic strategic leadership to uphold authenticity regarding what others see in you and transparency and consistency in building a web of genuine relationships and productive connections. A report on SOE of the future and new capabilities by PWC (2015) acknowledges the importance of the interplay of authenticity with stakeholder-centric and relational perspectives, emphasizing the collective wisdom and active contributions of internal and external influence. Patterns of leading-following relationships emerge from a co-constructed and iterative social influence between strategic leaders, followers, and key internal and external stakeholders (Titus and Hoole 2021). Authentic strategic leaders require the ambidexterity of behaving as an authentic leader and authentic follower, balancing the upper echelons demands of profitability and sustainability, interests of internal and external stakeholders, and internal and external politics, all of which are essential for the survival and success of the SOEs.

Authentic stakeholder relationships are crucial as an SOE faces the challenge of living up to higher public expectations while remaining under increased pressure from politicians, media, citizens, and civil society organizations to add value to society through efficient

processes and effective service (Ministry of Finance, 2022). Transparency and mutuality of influence and impact are central to authentic engagement with and of stakeholders.

Strategic leaders and SOEs are accountable to a larger group of stakeholders, often having to inspire confidence and please as many people as possible while achieving results. Reciprocal influence opens the door to understanding and managing diversity positively across hierarchy and organizational boundaries. Unlike one-sided authenticity, stakeholders' relational and iterative mutual influence in SOEs accelerates two-way trust, which is critical to achieving DAC.

5.6 Positive long-term direction: DAC

Authentic strategic leaders manifest a pattern of authentic actions, activities, and behaviors to pursue long-term DAC shaped by the focus on three key elements: broad agreement of long-term direction and strategic orientation, building organizational trust, and stakeholder centrality.

First, authentic strategic leaders emphasize long-term and strategic orientation to create broad agreement on the strategic direction, as well as strategic and relational resources necessary for various stakeholders to contribute to positive outcomes and the commitment of followers. Iterative and reciprocal feedback to strategic leaders and stakeholders from authentic interactions is crucial as it maintains and refines the strategic and long-term nature of being authentic and enhances the quality of stakeholders' mutual influence in shaping and pursuing the defined long-term direction of an SOE.

Second, authentic strategic leaders build organizational trust as a relational resource, which is critical for commitment to positive long-term direction. Effective, authentic strategic leaders seek to create and promote organizational citizenship behaviors of followers (e.g., extra-role performance behaviors to improve organizational functioning). In this regard, transparency and relational trust are useful for authentic strategic leaders to create an environment for organizational citizenship behavior or for employees to go above and beyond their formal job requirements to help their organization succeed and function effectively. Authentic strategic leaders promote stakeholders' iterative and authentic

influence because they fully understand that organizational goals are impossible to achieve without organizational trust characterized by mutual trust between management and employees (e.g., trust between supervisors and their subordinates, and trust to the organization as a whole). Trust nurtures a sense of mutual responsibility between leaders and followers to demonstrate authentic behaviors and activities, which is critical for authentic strategic leaders as they balance short- and long-term, relational and strategic outcomes in a collaborative manner in an SOE. Lastly, authentic strategic leaders reinforce stakeholder centrality (e.g., through the iterative and authentic influence of significant stakeholders, emphasis on mutually shared responsibility) in pursuit of the desired long-term direction of an organization. Iterative and reciprocal feedback to strategic leaders and stakeholders is cardinal to maintaining and refining the strategic authenticity and quality of stakeholders' mutual and genuine influence when pursuing success in an SOE.

An integrative framework of authentic strategic leadership is proposed, drawing from the discussion on the six themes that depict dimensions necessary to pursue leadership with executive authenticity in the upper echelon of SOEs. Figure 6 shows the proposed integrative framework of authentic strategic leaders of SOEs in Malawi. The constitutive elements of the proposed framework are derived from the themes and gaps identified in the extant five different models of authentic strategic leadership.

The proposed model acknowledges that authentic strategic leadership in SOE in Malawi encounters the challenge of achieving DAC in an ethically and politically compromised environment typified by political patronage and weak oversight, undermining inclusivity and ethical organization.

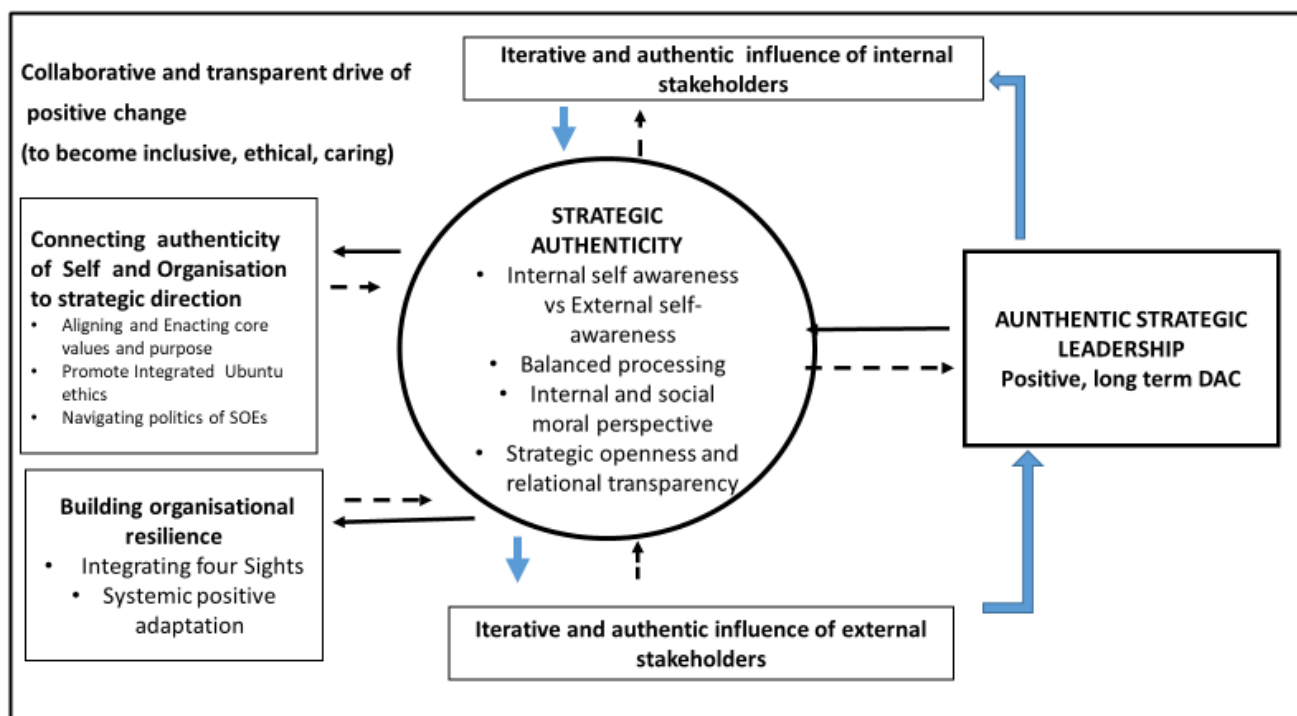


Figure 6. Integrative framework of authentic strategic leadership of SOEs in Malawi
(Source: Own elaboration)

Authentic strategic leadership is imperative to drive the required change in a collaborative and consultative approach involving diverse stakeholders to avoid the unacceptable cost to the leader and followers when creating a positive organizational context for an SOE

in Malawi. There is a broad need to cultivate a web of leadership and followership beliefs and practices that support and sustain DAC in SOEs in Malawi. An authentic strategic leader's practice of strategic authenticity entails engaging in the iterative and authentic

influence of internal and external stakeholders, leading to achieving positive and long-term DAC in a collaborative, transparent, caring, and positive manner in SOEs.

6 Implications and future research

This conceptual paper has theoretical, practical, and research implications. First, this paper has provided theoretical insights into the ontology of authentic strategic leadership as a multidimensional phenomenon and how to drive positive change that is inclusive, ethical, caring, and supportive of a positive organizational environment. The multifaceted nature of authentic strategic leadership calls for collaboration, stakeholder centrality, and organizational trust when engaging in the iterative and authentic influence of stakeholders by strategic leaders to pursue positive, long-term DAC in politically and ethically compromised SOEs without the undesirable cost of the change to the leader and followers.

Second, this paper has proposed a framework of authentic strategic leadership which is insightful to current and prospective strategic leaders of SOEs to lead themselves and others authentically. The present paper has implications for the practice of executive authenticity by those in the upper echelon as it emphasizes strategic authenticity informed and shaped by iterative authentic influence of internal stakeholders and transparent engagement of diverse stakeholders (e.g., government, politicians, employees) to build trust, resilience, and optimism for collective action in pursuing widely agreed long-term DAC. More importantly, the proposed framework of authentic strategic leadership serves as a guide for leadership development practitioners to design training which develop the competence of executive authenticity by ensuring a focus on authentic strategic leaders' long term and strategic orientation to relational resources and stakeholder-centric perspectives in a politicized environment of SOEs. A holistic and systemic approach that integrates leader-centric, interpersonal, and organizational-level dimensions of authenticity is also critical in developing the competence of executive authenticity of those in the upper echelon (CEO, TMT, Board).

However, authentic strategic leadership is likely to fail to entrench ethical and positive organizational context as the bedrock for improving the collective and consistent strategic performance of an SOE, if the strategic leadership of SOE is not depoliticized.

The limitation of this conceptual paper is its exclusive focus on executive authenticity at the strategic leadership level in SOEs. Future scholars need to also include the authenticity of followers of the strategic leaders and authentic followership as part of authentic strategic leadership. To enrich our understanding of authentic strategic leadership, it is imperative that scholars conduct empirical studies to operationalize and validate the identified dimensions and interrelationships in the proposed framework of authentic strategic leadership to enhance or revise its explanatory power.

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