Reflecting on Crucibles: Clarifying Values in Authentic Leaders

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Abstract
This qualitative study explores the role of crucibles, life-triggering moments, parents' life mottos and definitions of success, and holding values in the lives of authentic leaders. This research used the life-story approach to explore the experience of such concepts on authentic leaders. Self-identified leaders with more than five years of experience in a leadership position or in a role of managing and developing others were invited to this research. Qualified authentic leaders (between 65 to 80 in ALQ) were invited to a qualitative interview utilizing the life story approach to explore significant forming factors of their leadership qualities. An inductive coding method was used in analyzing the transcription of interviews. Significant themes and codes show that life-triggers, crucibles, parents' life mottos, their definition of success, and holding values play a significant role in authentic leadership development. Leadership scholars should emphasize the forming experiences of authentic leadership in their leadership development studies. In other words, the experienced dynamics of parents (life mottos and definitions of success), the experience of crucibles are suggested as antecedents of authentic leadership. The research shows that parents' dynamics, crucibles, and life-triggering moments resonate with Erikson's stages of development on authentic leadership development.

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study of authentic leaders is to see how crafting one's life story using crucibles contributes to the experiential learning that helps leaders to clarify their values (Michie & Gooty, 2005). According to Bennis' seminal work, experiencing crucibles help to form authentic leaders (Bennis, 2004). However, there has been a little systematic study of how these crucibles contribute to the leadership development process. An important question is how individuals use these crucibles to develop their authentic leadership.   The present research assumes that leaders are much more made than born (George et al., 2011). However, this begs the question of how they are made. How do the leaders' life experiences and learning from life experiences contribute to the authentic leadership process? In this present research, the focus is on a leader's internal processing, such as self-reflection on external events and other influences to arrive at a greater

understanding of the authentic leadership development process. The research question is how are crucibles and other life events (Bennis, 2004) processed by those engaged in authentic leadership? Furthermore, the present research asks what insights on authentic leadership are gained by opening the black box of the individual's internal processing through self-reflection and experiential learning.

For a leader to lead authentically, self-awareness needs to be predominant (Steiner, 2016). This element involves a fairly deep awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses, and triggers (Shannon et al., 2020). Furthermore, the authentic leader can interact with others who may have a completely different worldview or hold an opposing opinion on a controversial issue (Ladkin & Spiller, 2013). To engage mindfully with those with opposing views, the authentic leader may need to practice emotional regulation (Kotzé & Nel, 2015) and resiliency (Fernandez, 2016) to overcome any other's natural antipathy or negative view. The authentic leader can successfully resist seeing those who have opposing views as an opponent. Instead, they view them as a co-worker with divergent views who can improve problem-solving and collaboration by integrating differences and divergent opinions. This issue is one of the reasons authentic leaderships is closely associated with organizations that are successful in diversity, equity, and inclusion (Cottrill, Lopez, & Hoffman, 2014).

Those striving to lead authentically are willing to go a step further and reveal their views on controversial issues, letting go of the need to have everyone like or approve of them. This also means that leading authentically involves resiliency and emotional regulation (Peus et al., 2012) to work through the possible disruptions in the harmony and closeness of relations with co-workers when one engages authentically in controversy (Fernandez, 2016; Hashemi, 2019). This emotional regulation is associated with emotional intelligence and mindfulness (Kinsler, 2014).

However, there is an argument that the most important authentic leadership dimension and perhaps the hallmark of this leadership style is the moral dimension (Ladkin & Spiller, 2013). The present research frames authentic leadership as the next step from transformational leadership (Gardner et al., 2011). Authentic leadership picks up on the give and take among leaders and co-workers by making it more explicit that this involves revealing oneself more and involves sincere listening and engagement with co-workers and stakeholders who see things differently. While transformational leadership emphasizes the moral dimension and thus distinguishes itself from charismatic leadership (Tonkin, 2013), authentic leadership takes that moral dimension to the next level (Luthans, Norman, & Hughes, 2006). The moral dimension is based on the idea that authentic leaders make decisions congruent with their own moral principles (Mats, 2019). The moral choices that authentic leaders face have to do with engaging with their individual system of values that guide decision-making and action (Michie & Gooty, 2005). The moral dimension also extends to agreed-upon principles of conduct informed by cultural dimensions such as parental influence and the processing of life experiences (Sciarretta, 2014). This present research uses the life story methodology and the concept of crucibles to explore the moral dimensions of authentic leadership. The assumption underlying the research is that these individual moral values and codes of conduct are not fixed or immutable, they change over time, and this research argues that a driver of that change is the experiential learning that emerges from one's processing of life's experiences.

The question for consideration in this research is how authentic leaders engage in self-reflection on their experiences to uncover their oral principles. We suggest that authentic

leaders have to grapple with those seminal influences that were most impactful in the development of their moral code. A life story methodology can uncover what those elements are in ourselves and others (Pursak et al., 2012).

In particular, the literature suggests that the influence of the parents' worldviews (Ferguson et al., 2006) and the processing of challenging experiences in one's life (Shannon et al., 2020) are two sources of defining influences on one's moral values. The present research views these two elements as providing opportunities for the experiential learning that is so crucial to the leadership development process. In order to focus on the authentic style of leadership, we wanted to choose life story elements that were most likely going to have an influence on the moral development of the leader. Without a doubt, the influence of parents has a strong influence on the moral development of an adult. However, crucibles offer another opportunity for self-reflection and leadership development (Bennis & Thomas, 2007).

Crucibles can be seen as an opportunity ('oh, great another growth opportunity sights the authentic leader') can invite leaders into deeper self-reflection. These crucibles also provide an opportunity to question their assumptions, clarify their judgment, and engage in moral sensemaking (Shamir & Eilam, 2005). Parental images of success and the general impact of parent's general influence on one's leadership sensemaking. Parents' definition of success on one's leadership experience. Parent's life mottos and their impact on one's leadership experience. Self-reflection on one's life crucibles and examination of parental mottos of success can support authentic leaders to clarify their values.

Literature Review

Authentic leadership is increasingly being shown to have a positive impact on work engagement and other innovative work behaviors. (Putra et al., 2020; Goestjahjanti, et al., 2020). The concept of authentic leadership is about being true to one's values and transmitting and upholding those values to co-workers (Oh, Cho, & Lim, 2018). For a leader to align leadership decisions with moral values requires a deep understanding of one's moral values (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Such an understanding requires self-reflection and a deep dive examining the origin of these closely held values.

One's values are in part formed by being socialized in a cultural context. The greatest emissaries of the culture, the ones who have the most impact on one's moral development initially typically, begins with parental influence. The values that parents pass on to children are not authentically held by the individuals until they are tested in the cauldron of life, the crucibles that form not only one's values but in turn one's leadership approach according to the work of Bennis and Thomas (2007).

Bennis (2004) identifies the role of experiential learning in the authentic leadership development process. Experiential learning and how it helps form authentic leadership is an intriguing idea that needs greater specificity to be used in the development of authentic leadership. It is values that are at the center of authentic leadership (Ogunyemi & Ogunyemi, 2020). Trigger events and crucibles are considered essential building blocks in authentic leaders' development (Shannon et al., 2020).

Method

This paper uses the narrative method to study the antecedents of authentic leadership and explores the role of adversities, crucibles, parental life mottos, and definitions of success on

authentic leadership development. The life story approach is lessons from the experience that enable leaders to self-reflect on their life events and create learning experiences. This approach includes four subsets: self-knowledge, self-concept, clarity, and internalization (Boje, 2001; Turner & Mavin, 2008). The life story analysis invites leaders to be grounded and embrace self-observation, prevent fragmentation in biographical context (self-concept); and bring clarity by internalizing values and attending to the feelings through experience (Dawson, 2015; Kerns, 2018; Michaud, 2004; Steiner, 2016; Turner & Mavin, 2008). Leaders would discover themselves by revising, reviewing, and retelling their stories about themselves (Lieblich, 1998 as cited by Turner & Mavin, 2008; Lindsay, 2011; Steiner, 2016).

This study was part of a mixed-method project, including surveys and interviews intended to study the relationship between authentic leadership and emotional intelligence with the moderating impact of resilience. The interview portion of the study was 13 questions. This paper only focuses only on three significant questions. The three interview questions of this research cover the idea of personal forming experiences, from childhood memories and parents' life-mottos and their definitions of success to the life-triggering events and crucibles, on authentic leadership development (Bennis & Thomas, 2008; Ferguson et al., 2006; Keller, 2003; Whitehead, 2009).

Interview Question

George, Mclean, and Craig (2010) assert that there are unique characteristics in authentic leaders formed through their life experience, and leaders' values suggest their level of authenticity. One of the essential premises in the life story approach is that the learned lessons are more important than the reliability of the report. Therefore, this research was not intended to take any measurements for fact-checking. The life story approach is not looking for the realistic image of a leader's life the message that the leader is carrying from that image is the primary focus of this study (Ladkin & Spiller, 2013).

Keller (2003) draws a line between parents' attachment styles and leadership approaches and contends that events and childhood memories play a significant role in forming leaders' values and authenticity. The significance of this paper is to study the role of life parental mottos and parents' definition of success on authentic leaders. Life mottos are messages from childhood that leaders are carrying through their lives (Ferguson et al., 2006; Popper & Amit, 2009), and through their reflection, they will realize how these mottos impact their approach. Another essential factor that Ferguson et al. (2006) suggest in parenting style is parents' definition of success. Therefore, the other significance of this paper is to explore the role of parents' definition of success on authentic leaders.

Another forming factor that plays a significant role in authentic leadership development is crucibles. Crucibles are defining moments that lead the individual to a meaningful definition of life (Bennis & Thomas, 2007). Shannon et al. (2020) asserted that crucibles play an essential role in authentic leaders' life experiences. This research explores the existence of life-triggering moments and the meaning creation behind them that leaders interpreted throughout their lives.

The third question of this research is regarding the holding values of authentic leaders. For Turner and Mavin (2008), values are "lasting beliefs that certain modes of conduct are more desirable than others" (p. 380). That is to say, values are a list of achievements, pursuits of power and success, gratification, and dominance (George et al., 2011; Turner & Mavin, 2008).

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This paper explores not only the relationship between values and authentic leadership, but also studies the notion of change in values among leaders. In other words, one of the essential antecedents of authentic leadership could be the experience of change in values, whether caused by a necessity or adversity (Peus et al., 2012).

Question 1: Looking back through your early-life experience, can you briefly explain:
   a. *Any Life Mottos that your parents frequently used in your life? What defining influences does it have in your current leadership experience?*
   b. *How did your parents define a successful person? From their point of view, what does an influential leader look like? Can you compare yourself with that image?*
      i) *In your opinion, who is a successful leader? Three characteristics*

Question 2: Do you recall any adversities/hardship/life-triggering moments that you think, have a significant impact on your life?
   a. *What was your learning from that experience?*
   b. *When was the very first moment that you were responsible for something?*

Question 3: As a leader, what would be your holding values? Can you list them in three items?
   a. *What experiences, if any, had formed such values? Did you face any changes in your values? Why?*
   b. *What do you tell your followers frequently?*

Participants

This study was part of a larger research undertaking, where 126 participants completed a survey on authentic leadership. At the end of the survey, all participants were invited to do a follow-up interview. 22 participants agreed to do the interview. For this present research, only ten of these volunteers were included as the criterion for inclusion was at least 65 out of a possible score of 80 on the ALQ (Hashemi, 2019). This was to ensure that we explored authentic leadership's antecedents in a sample of high authenticity leaders. These ten organizational and community self-identified leaders participated in an in-depth one-hour self-exploratory interview with 13 open-ended questions. Interviews were conducted online at their convenience. Participants had the age range of 36-72 with a mean of 49 years. Four leaders were female, and six were male, and the average number of years of experience in a leadership position was 12.1 years. Recruited leaders were from five industries: education (3), medical science (3), entertainment (2), military (1), information technology (1).

Table 1: **Demographics of Participants**

Category		# of participants
Age		**Mean = 49; range = 36-72**
Gender Identification	Male	6
	Female	4
Years of Experience; approximate mean = 12.1	5- 10	2
	10-15	2
	15-20	4
	20+	2
Field	Education	3
	Medical Science	3
	Entertainment	2
	Military	1
	IT	1

Coding

The results of interviews were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo software. NVivo provides a reliable set of controls in qualitative analysis and coding formats. We used two steps for the coding process. First, we reviewed the transcriptions, and themes and nodes were identified. These themes were repetitive patterns, surprising comments, essential concepts, significant actions, notable activities, distinguished feelings, recognized reflections, and thoughtful opinions that participants showed in answering questions. In the interview process, the interviewer used mirroring skills to create a reflection experience for participants. This idea was one of the fundamental approaches of life story analysis. The interviewer uses active listening skills and mirroring techniques to invite participants to get grounded and think about their responses. It is necessary to note that we all engaged in the inductive coding process. The inductive coding process consists of several steps of reading and interpretations. Through these steps, notes of significant patterns, interesting interpretations, and repetitive themes were exchanged between authors. For instance, when a participant indicates their concern over their purpose over actions and the importance of having direction in life in several questions, authors identify the pattern of purposefulness through the inductive coding process.

In the second step, significant nodes were inducted through the coding process using similar themes, root words, synonyms, or possible interviewees' articulation. The authors created a coding mind map that illustrates the spectrum of possible themes and words that participants might use. This coding manual and mind map were shared through the software among authors. Another source of coding, especially in addressing emotional and facial reactions (video camera observation) and nonverbal clues, was the interviewers' personal notes, which suggested meaningful insights. For instance, some participants showed significant emotional reactions after thinking about their crucibles and contemplating their personal values (Shamir & Eilam, 2005; Shannon et al., 2020).

Results

The results of the present research were analyzed using thematic analysis. In the following, in addition to the significant responses, we will discuss surprising themes, important concepts, and essential observations. In some questions, we share responses and exclude codes to show a better view of the coding process.

Question 1: Parents' Definition of Success

Asking the question about parents' dynamics and their definition of success created a self-reflective moment for leaders to see themselves through the journey of leadership development and make some comparisons and contrasts against their parental image (Ferguson et al., 2006). Authentic leaders, in this case, may be more open to realizing such images (self-awareness), accept the reality of themselves (relational transparency), and draw a line to their personal definition of success (balanced processing). Though in some cases, participants reported a deconstructive parental influence.

Participant 2 responses:

So, [...] influences on me as I've never felt I was good enough to be that engineer. He talked about, or he possessed that identity [that I will never be good enough]. And my mother, you know, when I got my job at UCLA, she said, what if they fired you. She couldn't imagine

me exceeding coming out of that family. They had never been to college, but they thought that they were smarter than everybody, especially me.

Table 2: **Comparison Between Personal and Parents' Definitions of Success**

Participant	Parent's Definition of Success	Personal Definition of Success	Characteristics of a Successful Leader	Do I see myself as a successful leader?
P1	They didn't see success in being rich or wealthy. Having self-satisfaction.	Being satisfied by what I'm doing and having an impact on others.	Being able to make decisions in critical situations, build a coherent team, strong effective communication.	Yes
P2	Being an engineer Providing stuff for the family.	Rebellious, activist, philosopher.	Ethical, leading like ensemble, "Power with"	Yes
P3	Being a doctor or lawyer	Self-righteous, focused, goal-oriented	Think more, know yourself, Awareness, being a philosopher.	Not yet
P4	Being independent, self-reliant, strong	Independent, responsible, decisive in decisions	Gentle, flexible, adaptable, purposeful, strong communication skills	Yes
P5	Organized, focused, considerate	Embracing different perspectives, focused, strong social skills	Organized, compassionate, discerning, servant leadership	Not yet
P6	Going to college, having an influence on others	Responsible, organized, happy,	Improve, helper, strategic decision-maker, Self-awareness, being mindful	Yes
P7	Good academic degree, good marriage, being religious	Persistent, focused, purposefulness	Persistent, serious, strategist	Not yet
P8	Financially stable, responsible	Focused, committed, inspired	Considerate, servant leader, inspiration to others	Yes
P9	Survival, being able to live and support the family	Finding own voice, focused, resilient	Authenticity, emotional intelligence, being special, connectedness, mindfulness	Yes
P10	Academic degree, fulltime job, married in time, making money	Academic degree, Job fulfillment, making money	Purposeful, advisable, Know the difference between management and leadership, Making money	Not yet

The general theme of responses (*Table 2*) shows that leaders either projected on their parents' definition of success or created a contrasting image. The divergence between parents' vision of success and personal characterization sometimes gets so extensive, suggesting that an opposite image is formed based on a leader's experience with his/her parents, and in fact, it has resulted in the leader's success.

Participant 6 addresses that her parent's perception about failure has changed her point of view regarding blind spots in her life:

It's okay to fail because that's how I grow, and not that I look forward to failing, but I look forward to finding out my blind spots. I look forward to finding out new things about myself, and I look forward to learning more about who I am, and I've done enough studying about leadership and growth and all that kind of stuff. Now that I have realized when I see something a little different about myself, I get curious about it.

When participants' responses were mirrored, they reflected upon what they heard, measured the learned lessons, and presented a balanced opinion regarding the impact of their parents' definition of success on their lives (balanced processing). That is to say, authentic leaders are prone to accept their past and manifest their learned lessons.

Defining Influence and Life-motto on Leadership Experience

The significance of this paper regarding the parental influence on authentic leadership development is the impact of life mottos on participants' leadership experience. When leaders are invited to get focused and think about their memories and parental images, life mottos are the most important and significant memories they recollect. Furthermore, this question invited leaders to think about their own frequent sayings and compare how their leadership values are formed based on their parental life-mottos and their frequent sayings (self-awareness). These influences, as it might be expected, could lead in either positive or negative directions for participants.

Table 3: **Most Common Life Mottos and Learning Experiences**

	Life Motto	**Learning Experience**	**Associated Code**
P1	This world is the mountain, and our action the shout: the echo of the shouts comes to us. (Rumi Quote).	Do good and the universe will give you back. Always be in service of the community. This is basically why I went to medical school and even choose a specialty that wasn't based on money-making.	Moral Compass Purposefulness Altruism
P2	Release yourself. Leave a place better than you found it.	If I go in the wilderness, I would make sure I pack out everything I brought in. It gives me the chance to be rebellious, activist, and curious.	Adventurous Creativity Honesty Curiosity
P3	You don't start a fight. You finish it. Just always do your best.	I see the world through combat. There are winners and loser I teach engagement to others. I teach them no matter you fail, it is important to keep it up.	Courage Righteousness Honesty Purposefulness
P4	Do the best. You snooze, you lose.	I don't remember ever sleeping past 8:30 in the morning when I was a teenager because she never let us. I always kept pushing myself. I've controlled myself a lot.	Perseverance Consistency Purposefulness
P5	Be a hard worker. Be great as you can.	I've raised myself to be strong and be great as I can. As an African-American young girl that was my motivation and still is.	Perseverance Honesty Meaningfulness
P6	Yeah, you could do anything you put your mind to. We love you.	I have done anything I wanted to. I can do anything, and I'll always be loved.	Courage Purposefulness Decisiveness
P7	Because they had a religious background, it was important for him to make money by solvent.	Despite religiosity that though I respect them, I don't follow, I've always made money by a solvent.	Honesty Moral Compass Purposefulness

P8	No matter what you do, believe in God first. Telling me that I never finish anything I'm always daydreaming. Lock your door because somebody is going to try to take your stuff.	I distanced myself from religiosity. Because those my values used to be very conservative very protective people, you know, be generous to the people that you know.	Religiosity Purposefulness Cautiousness Perseverance
P9	Thy Own self be true.	That's been a guiding light for me. Throughout my life. I think. So, I really appreciate the loyalty and the love from my mom and dad.	Moral Compass Honesty Self-Awareness
P10	If we were not present, no one will feed you. Nowhere is like your parent home, even if you are in the king's castle.	Being attached to every place that I go. I will enable others to be dependent on me.	Attachment Meaningfulness Protection

Participant 10 responds:

Their life motto was: If we were not present, no one would feed you. Therefore, I got attached to every place. Especially when I have a job, I would think that my job is the only place in the world that I can be and anywhere else will be worse. It is hard for me to detach from others. And for the second motto, I will enable others to be dependent on me. Or I will be so good that they will get to the point that none will feed them.

Table 3 shows responses to life-motto questions. The first column is the life motto that they remember, and the second column is the learned experience that they are carrying from that motto. When leaders were asked about their recalled life motto, most of them associated positive meanings out of the motto. However, this influence could be seen in both constructive and deconstructive ways. Two participants mentioned negative emotional connotations in their life mottos. In addition, two participants drew a line between parental religiosity and their life mottos. Most of the mottos indicated building confidence, moral values, or wisdom of life.

Question 2: Adversities, Hardship, and Life Triggering Moments

War, immigration, hardship on livelihood, and parents' divorce were significant adversities that leaders identified as forming factors on their leadership mindsets. The Afghanistan, Iran-Iraq, and Vietnam wars were among notable wars that participants mentioned their parents were impacted directly or indirectly and those incidents have formed values to their leadership experience.

Participant 1 responses:

My brother got wounded during the war. I was planning to study physics. Then after this tragedy, I decided to study medical science and devoted my life to others. Taking my brother's body in a very dangerous situation to the capital of Iran for being treated when I was only 17 was the first and biggest responsibility that I had.

One of the important elements of authenticity is one's reaction against recalling crucibles. Authentic leaders can identify their crucibles, express their feelings at that moment (internalized moral perspective), and share their learning experience or the change in their values. Another notable quality of authentic leaders was their ability to self-reflect on their life stories and connect the causes and facts in a way to show how their leadership values were formed.

Table 4: **Significant Codes on Adversities and Associated Emotions**

Theme	# of occurrences
Life-triggering experience	15
Being responsible at an early age	15
Hardship in livelihood	15
War	13
Poverty	10
Divorce	7
Immigration	5
Fear	19
Anxiety	17
Anger	13
Depression	9
Loneliness	9
Sadness	9
Disappointment	8
Frustration	7
Shame	7
Guilt	4
Hope +	4

Participant 2 responses:

I left my dysfunctional family for the Vietnam war, and even though I was not in the combat division, I suffered a lot from war trauma. After this traumatic experience of childhood and war, I decided to build my own life and gain knowledge on my own.

Poverty, financial situation, and perception about money were other significant codes that participants pointed out as essential forming experiences for their leadership perception. Financial problems confronted some leaders in their childhood, and parents were not able to cover expenses. This memory had a lot of impacts on their lives. In addition, participants' perception about money, whether it is abundant or scarce, hard-to-achieve or easy-to-get, unworthy or essential, taboo or on-the-table, was rooted in their childhood memories.

Participant 6 responses:

Oh, as a child, we didn't have a nickel to rub between our fingers […] But I remember my dad. I remember a circumstance where one of the classes was having a sale or something. They were selling popsicles or something. I don't know what it was, but I asked Dad if he had a dollar, I could take to school to buy the shoelaces. I don't know what it was. And he opened his wallet, and he had one dollar in it, and he took it out, and he rubbed it, and he said: Yes, you can have it.

One of the participants mentioned the race and community issues as hardships in her livelihood. P5, a 43-year-old African-American female in the entertainment industry, highlighted her race as one of the potential hardships in her life: "Just Being African-American. I didn't have any disadvantages at all. But for me, as I'm living in the community that being African American is a disadvantage, I faced a lot of challenges."

Question 3: Holding Values

In order to identify participants' values, they were asked for their frequent sayings to followers. Frequent sayings are great reflections of individual values and personal mindsets. In addition, it shows the level of authenticity with followers. Following quotes are participants' frequent sayings that reflect their values. Each sentence has its value and is not necessarily coherent. *Table 5* shows a summary of significant codes of holding values.

Participant 1 responds:

When life hits you, be happy that it didn't knock you out! "Stick to sb's gun" is not correct. I don't believe in being persistent blindly. Do not compel the easygoing wrong task with the complicated, correct task. When I get to a goal, I will do whatever is in my hands to accomplish it. I'm greedier for honor than seeking wealth.

Participants 5 responses:

You can be a person who can face a lot of challenges. Don't be afraid of being yourself. It's okay to stand out and be yourself. You don't have to be a follower. Push the limits, do not hold anything back. When you are doing something, make sure you are all into it.

Participant 9 responds:

When all you've got to hammer, everything looks like a nail. I don't care what you think. I only care what you do because what you're doing will change your thinking. It's either what love causes walls to come down. Fear causes walls to go up. You know the old Enlightenment saying before enlightenment chop wood and carry water After enlightenment chop wood carries water.

Participant 2 responses:

So, the lemmings and lemmings are everywhere. And if you want to go out, you have to go outside the hierarchical boxes. To find people that you're calling authentic, and yeah, we're going to take some risks and do something.

Table 5: *Summary of Significant Codes on Holding Values*

Processed Category / Codes			# of occurrences
Holding Values		Honesty	9
		Responsibility	8
		Empowering others	7
		Respect	6
		Leading others	6
		Gaining power	5
		Resilience	4
		Independence	3
	Change in Values	Openness to change	7
		Purposefulness	6
		Perseverance	5
		Mindfulness	5
		Meaningfulness	5

One of the significant findings on holding values of authentic leaders is the relationship between Eriksonian stages of development and authentic leadership (Slater, 2013). The phrases and words that participants used to address their holding values, in addition to the changes and crucibles they reported showed a strong connection between authentic leadership values such as sensemaking and purposefulness with generativity and stagnation. Leaders who learn from their life stories and revisit their values are prone to lead authentically.

Observations

Table 7 shows the leadership characteristics that participants mentioned during the interview. These characteristics are divided into two categories to identify how leaders use authentic leadership features. The second column of the table shows phrases and words that leaders used that could be categorized as authentic leadership elements. It is essential to note that researchers did not ask about authentic leadership in their lives individually, and they asked a general question regarding their life experiences. Thinking outside of the box and being rebellious, for instance, were among the unique features that the three leaders pointed out. P2 stated that authenticity would be gained by learning from stories: "So, the lemmings and lemmings are everywhere. And if you want to go out, you have to go outside the hierarchical boxes. To find people that you're calling authentic, and yeah, we're going to take some risks and do something."

Table 6: *Significant Codes in Leadership Experience and the Number of References*

Leadership Experience # of Occurrences		Authentic Leadership # of Occurrences	
Power over	3	Power with (rather than Power over)	4
Using force and power	4	Building a coherent team	7
Strong communication	6	Change of tactics	6
Activist	5	Learning from experience	7
Goal-oriented	6	The ability of Storytelling	3
"Working as you've been told"	7	Rebellious mindset	5
"Expecting from followers"	7	Philosopher	2
Being blunt	4	Doing the right thing	8
"There is always right and wrong"	7	Engaging follower	7
People following us.	3	Accepting the responsibility of actions	6
Clear job responsibility	6	Ethical values	9
Making decisions	4	Being value-driven	5
Improving social skills	4	Purposefulness	6
Servant leadership	4	Respect, Impact on others	7

Concluding from past	2	Learning from past	6
Strong commitment	3	Strong imagination	3
Providing and supporting others	5	Inspiring others	4
Following hierarchical structure	5	Using emotional intelligence	5

The comparison between the two columns in table 6 shows that authentic leaders who are invited get grounded and think about their life stories, values, crucibles, parent dynamics, and leadership qualities show signs of self-reflections, sensemaking, purposefulness, and resilience through their perceptions and thoughts.

Conclusion

Interviewing these authentic leaders revealed deep processing of life experience in a way that extracted meaning and influenced the refinement of their individual values. As we analyzed their reflections on their life experience and the crucibles of the participants, we noticed patterns that emerged. The life stage of the participants, using chronological age as a marker, exhibited some consistent patterns. One theme among those high authentic leaders was purposefulness. This was noted for the majority of those in the 45-65 age range, see *Table 7*. This corresponds to Erikson's stage of psychosocial development he called "Generativity vs Stagnation."

Erikson's theory describes how humans move through various, sequential stages from infancy to death. In each stage, humans grapple with a central, internal crisis or conflict that needs to be resolved (Erikson, 1950; Slater, 2003). The majority of participants in our sample in that age range, which is roughly equivalent to middle age in most cultures, processed their life experiences with a view to purposefulness. Other participants in our sample in that same age range, similarly, grappled with issues closely related to purposefulness, such as moral compass and meaningfulness. This pattern recognition is very exploratory, and no conclusions can be drawn with such a small sample. However, it could be confirmed in future research, but it does suggest that the theoretical contribution of this present research is that grappling with the content and processing of life experiences in the journey through authentic leadership gives insight that might be used to support authentic leaders in different ways depending on what stage of life they are in.

Table 7: **Erikson's Stages of Development & Authentic Leadership**

Participant #	Erikson's Stage of Development	Theme of Conversation
1	Generativity vs Stagnation	Purposefulness
2	Integrity vs Despair	Sensemaking
3	Intimacy vs Isolation	Creativity
4	Generativity vs Stagnation	Righteousness
5	Generativity vs Stagnation	Perseverance
6	Generativity vs Stagnation	Courage

7	Generativity vs Stagnation	Purposefulness
8	Generativity vs Stagnation	Purposefulness
9	Generativity vs Stagnation	Moral Compass
10	Generativity vs Stagnation	Meaningfulness

Mindfulness is a present element in the processing of life experiences. One of the significant outcomes of this paper is looking at the content of the processing of one's life experience using thoughtfulness, mindfulness, and self-reflection of ones' life story. When leaders are invited to get grounded, contemplate on their life journey, reflect upon their story, and observe how values and crucibles have formed their leadership qualities, they are closer to leading authentically. The results of the interview analysis are showing that authentic leaders are often open to such deep meaningful experiences where crucibles and life triggers are being processed, parental images and holding values are being self-reflected, and as a result, they may cultivate a deeper level of self-awareness. The empirical implication for future studies is to verify whether or not the interview process, the life story analysis, and asking such questions have a positive effect on leaders' value and authenticity.

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