

**Authentic leadership and strategy implementation - the mediating effect of
participative decision-making as a strategic practice.**

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ABSTRACT

Strategy implementation is one of the major unresolved and persistent challenges in strategy management. Research on how to effectively implement strategy is lacking creating a gap in practice and theory. Strategy implementation is a highly behavioural and socially interactive process. Leadership approaches and practices that prioritise interpersonal factors are thus imperative in enhancing strategy implementation. To this extent, the study investigated the influence of authentic leadership on strategy implementation and the mediating effect of participative decision-making. Grounded in strategy-as-practice theory, the research positions participative decision-making as a strategic practice enacted by authentic leaders to enhance strategy implementation.

A cross-sectional, quantitative research design was followed. Data was collected from private sector organisations in South Africa using an online survey. The study had 1291 usable responses. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), particularly PLS-SEM, was employed to test the hypothesised relationships and understand the mediation effects.

The study revealed that authentic leadership behaviours positively influence strategy implementation both directly and indirectly through participative decision-making, thus confirming partial mediation. Participative decision-making emerges as a key strategic practice that strongly predicts strategy implementation and acts as a mechanism for authentic leaders to enhance strategy implementation. Practically, the research underscores the need for organisations to cultivate authentic leadership behaviours and integrate participative decision-making practices in organisational frameworks and processes to encourage genuine employee involvement in decisions. Organisations should therefore not solely rely on their formal process, structures and systems to implement strategy. This study advances strategy-as-practice theory by highlighting the importance of authentic leadership behaviours in directly and indirectly affecting strategy implementation, and participative decision-making as a key strategic practice to enhance the implementation of strategy.

KEYWORDS

Strategy implementation, Participative decision-making, Strategy-as-Practice, Authentic leadership

DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

Nthabiseng Maseko

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1. INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.1. Defining the research problem

Organisations invest vast amounts of resources and effort in developing well-crafted strategies that promise to position an organisation for growth, competitive advantage, and sustainability (Zairbani & Jaya Prakash, 2025). For organisations to translate their vision into reality requires effective implementation of these formulated strategies. Strategy implementation, which describes the process of converting strategic plans into actions, is a central step in the strategy management process and mediates strategic planning and competitive advantage (Ateş et al., 2020). It is well reported that organisations that can effectively implement their strategies have a threefold likelihood of reporting higher than average growth and a twofold likelihood of reporting above-average profits (PwC Strategy, 2019). Successful strategy implementation is thus a key driver of competitiveness and a strategic differentiator between organisations realising increased organisational performance over others (Vigfússon et al., 2021; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021).

Yet, the harsh reality is that organisational strategic plans often fail, with strategy failure rates ranging between 60% and 90% (Olsen, 2022). Additionally, organisations report achieving only 60% of the expected value from their formulated strategies (Tawse & Tabesh, 2021). There is agreement amongst scholars that most strategy failures are due to ineffective implementation rather than the merits of the formulated strategy (Correani et al., 2020; Twum, 2021). Unfortunately, even the most well-crafted strategies, if poorly implemented, will fail to yield the intended business outcomes (Kaapanda, 2023). Research from Bridges Business Consultancy shows that the number of organisations that fail to successfully implement their strategies has since fallen from the 90% reported in their 2004 survey to 67% in their most recent survey in 2016 (Speculand, 2020). This represents a mere 23% improvement in over a decade.

It is evident that strategy implementation remains a significant challenge for organisations and can best be described as the “Achilles heel” of the strategy management process. Several scholars have also referred to it as a black box (Tawse & Tabesh, 2021), signalling that the process on translating strategic intent into actions

is not well understood. It is thus not surprising that researchers and practitioners continue to call for more studies on strategy implementation to bridge the gap between formulation and implementation (Vigfússon et al., 2021; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021; Ateş et al., 2020).

Poor strategy implementation impacts the organisation in several ways, including losses in market position, wasted organisational resources, loss in stakeholder trust and eroding employee morale (The Strategy Institute, 2025; Tawse et al., 2019). One of the most tangible losses of poor strategy implementation for organisations is financial loss. According to Doherty et al. (2023), poor strategy implementation can result in financial losses equating to up to 10% of an organisation's annual revenue. This reinforces the need for effective strategy implementation, not only to mitigate the financial losses but also to realise the intended benefits of increased growth, advantage over competitors and sustainable returns.

While many managers agree that implementation is complex, there is agreement amongst managers that it plays a more significant role than formulation in yielding the desired organisational results (Köseoglu et al., 2020). That does not mean that strategy formulation is not critical, because effectively implementing the wrong strategy is often just as detrimental to organisations.

Despite the well-recognised significance of effective strategy implementation and an awareness of high failure rates, limited academic research has focused on research to improve strategy implementation, with abundant research focused on strategy formulation (Seidl et al., 2024; Tawse et al., 2024; Köseoglu et al., 2020; de Oliveira et al., 2019). The volume of published academic articles on strategy implementation is far less than that on strategy formulation (Sull et al., 2015). Most of the research on strategy implementation has been produced by practitioners and consultants and is therefore lacking in theoretical grounding (de Oliveira et al., 2019). This leaves a critical gap between strategy formulation and implementation in both theory and practice. And while research in strategy implementation has increased over the last few years, the literature remains fragmented with managers and organisations still facing significant challenges in practice (Vigfússon et al., 2021).

Evidence of the scant literature in this field is apparent in the lack of an agreed-upon conceptual definition and model to measure the strategy implementation construct (Weiser et al., 2020; Friesl et al., 2021; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021; de Oliveira et al., 2019; Aladag et al., 2020). A study by de Oliveira et al. (2019) addressed this research gap by developing an operational and theoretical model for the strategy implementation construct, which comprises two parts: actions that need to be taken to implement the strategy, and the expected outcomes from the actions. The model comprises five success factors through which strategy implementation is operationalised: “unfolding/translation, coordination, communication, control and feedback and development of human resources (HR) policies and employee competencies” (de Oliveira et al., 2019, p.336). These success factors align with those identified by other strategy implementation researchers (Köseoglu et al., 2020; Aladag et al., 2020). Additionally, scholars have identified factors such as strategic commitment, consensus, leadership behaviour, alignment and employee involvement as critical enablers for successful strategy implementation (Tawse et al., 2024; Ateş et al., 2020; Köseoglu et al., 2020).

According to an early study by Ivančić (2013), strategy implementation can be grouped into two categories: structural and interpersonal factors. The structural factors relate to factors such as organisational structure and control processes. Interpersonal factors, on the other hand, relate to the people-centered factors like commitment, communication, coordination and consensus. Studies that have examined strategy implementation failures have found most implementation failures to be caused by a lack of employee alignment, communication, consensus, commitment and effective leadership (Radomska & Kozyra, 2020; Ateş et al., 2020; Köseoglu et al., 2020; Hrebiniak, 2006).

It is evident from these findings that implementation failures are mostly driven by people-centred factors. This suggests that to enhance strategy implementation, managers need to prioritise leadership capabilities and practices that will enhance interpersonal factors and direct efforts towards effective implementation. Implementation of strategy is a highly behavioural and socially interactive process, in as much as it is operational (Tawse et al., 2019). Organisations can thus no longer ignore the emotional and psychological forces that enable or otherwise hinder successful strategy implementation (Tawse et al., 2019).

The reality is that strategy implementation is enacted through people, which deems interpersonal factors central to the implementation process (Aladag et al., 2020). This highlights the need to gain a better understanding of the human side of the strategy implementation process. Leadership approaches and practices that prioritise interpersonal factors are thus pivotal in enhancing strategy implementation. Leaders are responsible for bridging the gap between strategic planning and implementation through the shaping of strategy and active participation in its implementation (Tawse et al., 2019). There is therefore a strong case to examine the role of leadership in influencing strategy implementation (Ateş et al., 2020). Yet, research on how leadership behaviours influence strategy implementation, both directly and indirectly, remains under-explored (de Oliveira et al., 2019). To this degree, authentic leadership has emerged as a promising approach to foster interpersonal relations and enhance the enablers of effective strategy implementation (Musa et al., 2017; Allgood, 2015).

Authentic leadership has risen to prominence in the past few years due to its ability to influence several positive outcomes (Zhang et al., 2022; Gardner et al., 2024; Steffens et al., 2021; Seifu & Jalata, 2022). The leadership style has, however, not been immune to criticism as some scholars question its theoretical foundations and measurement tools (Helmuth et al., 2023; Gooty et al., 2024; Alvesson & Einola, 2022). Despite this, it has continued to gain prominence in the literature.

Rooted in self-awareness, balanced processing, relational transparency, and internalised moral compass (Gardner et al., 2021), authentic leaders are believed to foster positive emotions, hope and trust that influence followers' attitudes (Avolio et al., 2004). Authentic leadership has been linked to multiple organisational outcomes, including increased commitment, coordination, engagement and performance (Gardner et al., 2024; Seifu & Jalata, 2022; Zhang et al., 2022; Steffens et al., 2021). These outcomes have been described as critical for successful strategy implementation. Moreover, authentic leaders have been described as having the motivation and integrity to employ practices that will ensure effective strategy implementation (Gill et al., 2018). And yet, empirical and theoretical studies that examine the direct and indirect influence of authentic leadership on strategy implementation are limited, with very few empirical studies reported in the literature.

Strategy implementation is a highly challenging and emotionally taxing task that is often misunderstood by managers (Ateş et al., 2020; Tawse et al., 2019). Most organisations and managers lack the capabilities to successfully implement organisational strategies (Vigfússon et al., 2021). The most promising and underdeveloped area of strategy implementation is the practices that managers engage in to implement strategies (Friesl et al., 2021). These practices enable a shift from the traditional focus on organisational structures, processes and formal systems that support implementation to day-to-day interactions and actions taken by leaders (Weiser et al., 2020). These practices offer a mechanism through which leaders can influence strategy implementation. The trust, openness and balanced processing climate created by authentic leaders provide a foundation for participative decision-making practices to be adopted (Wang et al., 2022). Authentic leaders demonstrate their authenticity and consistency between their actions and words by taking actions that encourage employee involvement in decisions (Nqumba & Scheepers, 2023). Strategy implementation is expected to be influenced by decision-making practices, since people shape and are equally affected by strategic outcomes (Köseoglu et al., 2020).

Participative decision-making is described as the involvement of employees to contribute and influence decisions related to their work (Wang et al., 2022). It is a behavioural lever that has been shown to increase employee alignment, commitment and communication (Al-Hashimi et al., 2022), which are essential for effective strategy implementation. Participative decision-making can therefore be viewed as a mechanism through which authentic leaders successfully enhance strategy implementation. While research has positively linked participative decision-making to strategy implementation, the mediating role of participative decision-making in the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation is not known.

Managers often highlight the lack of practical methods that leaders can adopt to implement strategy (Ivančić, 2013). Strategy-as-practice theory attempts to bridge this gap by focusing on the “doing of strategy” and offering micro-level practices that leaders can adopt to enact strategy (Seidl et al., 2024). This study draws on the strategy-as-practice theory and positions participative decision-making as a strategic practice enabled by authentic leaders, who act as strategy practitioners, to enhance strategy implementation. While strategy-as-practice literature studies have explored practices

such as strategic meetings, structure, negotiation and PowerPoint slides as key practices to implement strategy (Friesl et al., 2021; Kohtamäki et al., 2022; Jarzabkowski et al., 2022), it has not examined participative decision-making as a strategic practice that can act as a mechanism for leaders to enhance strategy implementation.

1.2. Research objectives

This study seeks to address the critical gap between strategy formulation and implementation by exploring how authentic leadership influences strategy implementation both directly and indirectly through participative decision-making. This understanding will assist organisations and managers in aligning their leadership behaviours and participative practices to improve strategy implementation. Leadership behaviours and practices that fail to foster commitment, alignment, communication and buy-in will continue to fail at implementing strategy and consequently fail to achieve superior business outcomes and advantage over competitors (Kaapanda, 2023). The research draws on authentic leadership theory and the strategy-as-practice perspective. Authentic leadership theory explains how authentic leaders' qualities foster engagement and trust (Gardner et al., 2021; Avolio et al., 2004), thus enabling strategy implementation. The strategy-as-practice perspective provides a lens for understanding how strategy is executed through practices enabled by leaders (Friesl et al., 2021). These theoretical underpinnings allow the researcher to integrate authentic leadership behaviours with strategic practices to enhance organisational strategy implementation.

The study is especially significant within the South African context, where hierarchical structures associated with high power distances (Harunavamwe & Palmer, 2020) and low trust levels (Posel, 2022) are prevalent. The country's post-apartheid reconstruction strongly emphasises inclusive and participatory practices in organisations (Bell & Reed, 2022), yet many organisations still operate in hierarchical structures that restrict employee participation in decision-making. According to Wang et al. (2022), the benefits of participative decision-making practices are greater in high power distance cultures where organisations are highly centralised, as is the case in South Africa (Valverde-Moreno, 2021; Harunavamwe & Palmer, 2020). This context, therefore, offers an opportunity to study how authentic leadership behaviours and participative practices, which closely align with Ubuntu leadership principles of interconnectedness and

collaboration (Nqumba & Scheepers, 2023; Chetty & Price, 2024), can enhance the implementation of strategy to drive organisational performance. Additionally, the study focuses only on private sector organisations as they operate in highly competitive markets where effective strategy implementation is crucial for organisational performance (Hrebiniak, 2006). Private sector leaders also have greater autonomy in driving decision-making and achieving strategic goals in comparison to public sector organisations (Duerrenberger & Warning, 2023)

Strategy implementation is influenced by external and internal factors. The external factors include influences outside the organisation's control, such as changes in macroeconomic conditions, politics and technology (Köseoglu et al., 2020). Contrarily, internal factors include, amongst others, leadership, employee involvement, communication and organisational processes (Katsikeas et al., 2020). This study focuses only on the internal factors, particularly leadership behaviours and participative practices that influence strategy implementation.

This study also assumes that leaders involved in strategy implementation are sincerely acting in the best interests of the organisation and are not influenced by other vested interests. As such, the study does not address any power and political agendas often present in organisations (Maes & van Hootegeem, 2022) that can hinder strategy implementation.

1.3. Business significance

This study is significant in business as effective strategy implementation continues to be a considerable obstacle for many organisations. Unfortunately, even the best formulated strategy offers little to no value without successful implementation (Ateş et al., 2020). This study will offer meaningful insights for leaders in practice on how they can adopt authentic leadership behaviours and participative decision-making practices to increase employee trust, commitment, buy-in and alignment to the organisational strategy. In so doing, organisations will enhance their strategy implementation, gain competitive advantage and realise the intended returns on their invested resources (Vigfússon et al., 2021). Organisations that invest resources and efforts towards the effective implementation of their strategies tend to grow faster and are more profitable than those that fail at strategy implementation (PwC Strategy, 2019).

1.4. Theoretical significance

This study contributes to strategy-as-practice literature by exploring the role of authentic leaders, as practitioners, in influencing strategy implementation directly and indirectly by enabling participative decision-making practices. It addresses a gap in the literature by exploring participative decision-making as a strategic practice that mediates the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation.

Ateş et al. (2020) note the need for more practical and psychologically grounded contributions to the strategy management theory, which will be achieved through this study. By drawing on the strategy-as-practice theory, the study contributes to the adaptive turn in strategy implementation research by providing insights into how strategy implementation can be enacted in practice through authentic leadership behaviours and participative decision-making practices. The adaptive turn refers to the shift in strategy implementation research that is more focused on how strategy gets implemented in practice (Tawse et al., 2024).

This study moves away from the typical practitioner and consultancy lens of strategy implementation by adopting a research perspective. It does this by responding to an invitation by de Oliveira et al. (2019) for researchers to adopt their strategy implementation measurement model, which serves as a baseline for studying the enablers and outcomes of strategy implementation. This will be achieved by exploring the influence of authentic leadership and participative decision-making on strategy implementation.

The study also offers a bridge between leadership theory and strategy-as-practice theory by positioning authentic leadership as an enabler of participative decision-making practices in organisations. The relationships, as combined and positioned in this study, have, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, not been previously studied in the existing literature, offering a unique contribution.

1.5. Research questions

Following the previous discussion, the central research question that the study aims to address is:

How does authentic leadership influence the implementation of strategy, and what mediating role does participative decision-making have in this relationship?

The sub-questions that support the main research question are stated as:

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation?

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between authentic leadership and participative decision-making?

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between participative decision-making and strategy implementation?

Research Question 4: Does participative decision-making mediate the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation?

The previous section of the report outlined the research problem, the purpose of this study and its relevance in practice and theory. The research questions that will be addressed in this study were also presented. The subsequent sections of the report are structured as follows: Chapter 2 is the literature review section, which defines the study constructs and presents the state of research and a critical review of the literature related to strategy implementation, strategy-as-practice theory, authentic leadership and participative decision-making. This is followed by Chapter 3, which presents the hypotheses that will be tested in the study. Chapter 4 carefully outlines the methodology that was adopted to support the study objectives and the data analysis process that was followed. Chapter 5 presents the results from the data analysis, followed by Chapter 6 which discusses the findings and compares the findings to existing literature. Chapter 7 concludes the report by presenting the main findings of the study and implications for business and theory. The limitations of the study are also discussed, followed by recommendations for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the state of existing literature and the theoretical foundations underpinning this study. The structure of the review starts with a presentation of strategy implementation literature and its transition over the years, followed by the construct definition, operationalisation and current empirical gaps. This is followed by a review of the strategy-as-practice theory that underpins this study. The researcher then examines authentic leadership and authentic leadership theory, and the debates around this construct. This is followed by a review of the participative decision-making literature, its definition and outcomes. The literature review then moves to discuss the literature related to the relationships explored in this study: authentic leadership and strategy implementation, authentic leadership and participative decision-making, participative decision-making and strategy implementation and participative decision-making as a mediator. The literature review positions the research in theory and justifies the need for further investigation into the relationships presented in this study.

2.2. Strategy Implementation

Strategy implementation is the primary mechanism for organisations to transition from strategic planning to achieving performance outcomes (Aladag et al., 2020). It is a key predictor of organisational performance and warrants increased focus and understanding (Al-Hashimi et al., 2022). Strategy implementation research has evolved significantly over the past four decades. Early strategy implementation scholars adopted a structural control view, which predominantly focused on conceptualising strategy implementation through the establishment of structures, controls, systems and incentives to implement strategy (Weiser et al., 2020). This structural control view was grounded in contingency theory, agency theory and organisational control theory (Weiser et al., 2020). And while this structural perspective provided insights into how the formal aspects influence strategy implementation, it overlooked the behavioural and social dynamics that are related to strategy implementation.

The adaptive turn, which emerged in later studies, addressed this gap by shifting the focus of research to how strategies are enacted in practice (Friesl et al., 2021). This approach provided an enhanced understanding of how strategies are practically implemented through tools, practices and interactions between actors (Weiser et al., 2020). The adaptive turn draws from theories in sensemaking, strategy-as-practice, and power and politics (Weiser et al., 2020; Jarzabkowski, 2004). This shift reframed strategy implementation as a highly behavioural, dynamic and socially interactive process (Tawse et al., 2019) rather than a linear step following from strategy formulation.

While the adaptive turn has been instrumental in offering an in-depth understanding of the behavioural and social dynamics of strategy implementation, it has been criticised for introducing fragmentation in the strategy implementation literature (Weiser et al., 2020; Friesl et al., 2021). As a result, research on strategy implementation spans across various fields of strategy and organisational literature (Friesl et al., 2021). Evidence of the fragmentation in the literature is in the lack of an agreed-upon definition and framework for strategy implementation (Tawse & Tabesh, 2021; Friesl et al., 2021; Weiser et al., 2020; de Oliveira et al., 2019; Aladag et al., 2020).

Several definitions of the strategy implementation construct are available in the literature (de Oliveira et al., 2019; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021). Some definitions adopt a managerial perspective by incorporating the role of management in pursuing strategic objectives (Holm et al., 2025), while other studies attempt to provide a more comprehensive view by describing it as the phase that follows from strategic decision approvals (Aladag et al., 2020). These definitions have been criticised for either being too expansive or not capturing the characterisation of the construct. This study aligns to the definition provided by de Oliveira et al. (2019), who define strategy implementation as “the process, and related procedures, of (i) informing – and of being informed by – managers and employees about company challenges as well as of (ii) translating the strategic plan (either explicitly stated or else just assumed by top level managers) into specific actions and (iii) establishing consistence among distributed company efforts and among respective resource-allocation decisions, in search of coherent movement for alignment between organisational effort and strategic intention in pursuit of corporate objectives”(p.341).

The understanding of strategy implementation is critical in the shaping of competitive organisations and realising the intended benefits outlined during strategy definition (Tawse & Tabesh, 2021). Effective implementation of strategy arises from within the organisation and can become a strong source of competitive advantage for organisations (Tawse & Tabesh, 2021). Ateş et al. (2020) contest that while several organisations can formulate strategies, they frequently fail at translating their strategies into action, due to the highly challenging and complex nature of the implementation process, which is often misunderstood by managers. Studies have confirmed that organisations only realise 63% of their intended benefits (Tawse et al., 2019). Additionally, an alarming 66% of strategies are never implemented (Köseoglu et al., 2020). This supports the view that strategy implementation remains a major unresolved and persistent challenge in strategy management.

Poor strategy implementation not only leads to a failure in realising the benefits of the current strategy but also impacts the quality of future strategies, leading to a cycle of poor performance (Crittenden & Crittenden, 2008). Tawse et al. (2019) highlight that “in contrast to strategy formulation, strategy implementation takes more cognitive effort and is more emotionally draining and psychologically taxing” (p. 3). Implementation is hard work and lacks instant gratification as opposed to formulation, which is more abstract and associated with positive emotions (Tawse et al., 2019). Strategy failures also lead to reduced employee morale, frustration and a cynical culture that reduces commitment and employee motivation (Brundin et al., 2022).

While the criticality of implementation is recognised and acknowledged, academic research in this field is limited and underdeveloped (Tawse & Tabesh, 2021; Tawse et al., 2024). Majority of the published research on strategy implementation has been produced by practitioners and consultants, thus lacking in theoretical grounding (de Oliveira et al., 2019). Indication of the scant literature in this field is evident in the lack of an agreed-upon conceptual definition and model to measure the strategy implementation construct. Construct conceptualisation and operationalisation are crucial for the development of theory (Lambert & Newman, 2023; de Oliveira et al., 2019).

De Oliveira et al. (2019) addressed this research gap by developing an operational and theoretical model for the strategy implementation construct, which comprises two parts: actions that need to be taken to implement the strategy, and the results from the actions. The model comprises five key elements of the strategy implementation construct: “unfolding, coordination, communication, control and feedback and development of human resources (HR) policies and employee competencies” (de Oliveira et al., 2019, p.336). The model was empirically validated and satisfied the requirements related to content adequacy. The empirically assessed model enables the positioning of the strategy implementation construct in a conceptual framework to study its relations with different constructs. The discussion that follows defines each of the five dimensions of strategy implementation as described in the model. These dimensions are integrated to form the construct and hold no independent significance (de Oliveira et al., 2019). As such, this study conceptualises the strategy implementation construct as a unidimensional latent construct that captures an organisation’s overall implementation capability. It is, however, imperative to describe and understand the dimensions through which the strategy implementation construct is measured in this study to ensure construct clarity.

Unfolding, also known as strategy translation, refers to the translation of strategic objectives into clear, actionable actions to ensure alignment of efforts (de Oliveira et al., 2019). Strategy translation enables comprehension of the strategic goals, allocation of resources and definition of clear initiatives and actions to monitor the implementation process. A study by Chiwawa and Wissink (2024) reported clarity of strategic goals and objectives as one of the key components of effective strategy implementation in South African organisations. This finding supports an earlier study by Parnell (2010), which asserted that organisations that successfully translate their goals and provide clear actions and strategic objectives outperform organisations with unclear actions and strategic objectives.

Coordination involves the integrated effort of mid-to-senior level managers to mobilise resources to effectively implement strategic goals by promoting understanding, conflict resolution, commitment and collaboration (de Oliveira et al., 2019). Coordination drives alignment of strategic actions and has been supported by other researchers as a critical condition for strategy implementation effectiveness (Tawse et al., 2024; Tawse &

Tabesh, 2021). However, many organisations find coordination complex and particularly difficult to achieve (Trein et al., 2021). Leadership approach has been identified as a solution to achieving coordination (Pietraszewski, 2020) and successful implementation of strategy (Tawse & Tabesh, 2021).

Communication is integral to the implementation of strategy process (Zerfass et al., 2020). Effective communication enables the sharing of relevant information and promotes understanding amongst employees on how the strategy will be implemented. This includes communication details on strategy actions and initiatives, responsible persons and implementation timelines. Effective communication also fosters dialogue amongst teams involved in the strategy implementation process (de Oliveira et al., 2019) to ensure alignment of efforts between teams. Van Ruler (2020) describes two forms of communication: Top-down and two-way communication. Top-down communication is associated with information giving and is most effective when the implementation process involves extensive structural changes (Tawse & Tabesh, 2021). In contrast, two-way communication, which has been the emphasis of recent studies, focuses on interactive, dialogue and participative communication amongst leaders and followers across all levels of the organisation (Van Ruler, 2020; Weiser et al., 2020). The two-way communication approach is effective in promoting shared meaning to promote successful strategy implementation. A study by Köseoglu et al. (2020) examined hotel managers' perception of factors that are crucial for strategy formulation and implementation success. The study reported agreement amongst managers that communication and people are the cornerstones of effective strategy implementation success (Köseoglu et al., 2020).

Control and feedback involves measuring progress against strategic goals to ensure strategy implementation remains on track. This also includes monitoring of internal and external changes that require adjustment to actions or strategic objectives (Correani et al., 2020). Monitoring tools should be outcome and process-based, by focusing on the results that have been achieved and the process through which the results have been achieved (de Oliveira et al., 2019). The interactive control and feedback response is an essential part of adaptive strategy implementation, but has received limited attention in academic literature studies (Weiser et al., 2020).

Finally, the **development of HR policies and employee competencies** involves effort between individuals involved in strategy implementation and HR to promote policies that will support implementation and the development of appropriate capabilities. This includes an alignment of recruitment, training and development, performance measurement and rewards to the strategy implementation process. Empirical studies have shown how systems can either enable or hinder strategy implementation (Gonzalez-Benito et al., 2022). For example, if rewards are not aligned with implementation actions, implementation efforts falter.

Several studies in the literature have explored the causes of strategy implementation failures. An earlier empirical study by Hrebiniak (2006) listed, amongst others, a lack of guidelines, poor communication and unclear roles and responsibilities as hindrances to strategy implementation. More recent studies highlight a lack of employee alignment, consensus, commitment, low employee involvement, employee resistance and ineffective leadership as causes for strategy implementation failures (Radomska & Kozyra, 2020; Ateş et al., 2020; Köseoglu et al., 2020). It is evident from these findings that implementation failures are mostly driven by internal factors and, more specifically, people-centred factors. This suggests that to enhance strategy implementation, managers need to develop capabilities and practices that will enhance interpersonal factors and efforts towards effective implementation.

Successful implementation is driven by internal factors through leadership and participation of managers (Tawse et al., 2019). The implementation process is highly behavioural and socially interactive in as much as it is operational (Tawse et al., 2019). The reality is that strategy implementation is enacted through people, which places interpersonal factors at the centre of the implementation process (Aladag et al., 2020). Organisations can thus no longer ignore the emotional and psychological forces that enable or otherwise hinder successful strategy implementation (Tawse et al., 2019).

While factors related to structure and management systems and processes are undeniably critical for successful strategy implementation, implementation is executed by people, which introduces interpersonal and relational dynamics to the implementation process (Köseoglu et al., 2020; Aladag et al., 2020). Tawse and Tabesh (2021) constructed a model for strategy implementation effectiveness and highlighted

interpersonal managerial actions as critical enablers to drive commitment, alignment, coordination and competency, which are necessary conditions to achieve effective strategy implementation. These interpersonal managerial actions include trust-building leadership behaviours, communication and participation.

These leadership behaviours align with authentic leadership behaviours and participative decision-making practices. Strategy should not be viewed as an activity limited to only top executives but rather as an activity that can be performed by the whole organisation through the involvement of employees (Köseoglu et al., 2020). The most promising and underdeveloped area of strategy implementation is the practices that managers engage in to implement strategies (Friesl et al., 2021). The strategy-as-practice perspective provides a lens to study how strategy is implemented through specific practices, processes and actors (Seidl et al., 2024; Friesl et al., 2021). The next section focuses on strategy-as-practice theory, which provides a practical and accurate perspective of how strategic processes unfold in practice (Köseoglu et al., 2020). This perspective positions participative decision-making as a strategic practice that links authentic leadership behaviours to strategy implementation.

2.3. Strategy-as-Practice Theory

The strategy-as-practice perspective emerged in the early 2000s when research focus shifted from external factors to understanding the individuals implementing strategy and their interactions in strategy activities (Köseoglu et al., 2020). Strategy-as-practice theory was developed in response to strategy research that, for a long time, was devoid of human actions, interactions and motivation in the strategy process (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Prashantham & Healey, 2022). It emphasises the critical function of people in the strategy management process and offers a practice-theoretical approach to strategy (Jarzabkowski et al., 2024).

Strategy-as-practice, although distinct from, is built on the foundations of strategy process research with a particular focus on micro strategising (Prashantham & Healey, 2022), which involves an intense focus on specific actions, practices and interactions drawn upon by actors to fulfil an activity (Kohtamäki et al., 2022). Burgelman et al. (2018) contest that the boundary lines between strategy-as-practice and the strategy process are often blurred. Strategy-as-practice was proposed as a means to enrich and deepen

the understanding of social complexity and cause-and-effect relationships within the resource-based view and to clarify the evolving nature of dynamic capabilities theory (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009).

Strategy-as-practice research has grown significantly over the last twenty years. The research field has, however, received criticism for its large volume of diverse views of practice, which creates complexity and coherence concerns (Kohtamäki et al., 2022). While Kohtamäki et al. (2022) recognise the diversity in the field, they argue that diversity is a natural occurrence of management research and should be viewed as creating opportunities for future research through the connection of fragmented research. The scholars further invite researchers to instead be concerned with the additional insights and understanding that can be developed in the research field (Kohtamäki et al., 2022).

Early strategy-as-practice research centred strategy-as-practice around three concepts: praxis, practices and practitioners (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). Praxis pertains to a sequence of activities that links individual-level actions with the larger organisational system where the actions are carried out and have an impact; practitioners relate to individuals or groups of individuals who directly conduct the work of strategy or indirectly influence it; practices are the routines, tools and discourses by which strategic activities are enacted (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). This study aligns with the praxis and practitioners cluster of research due to its focus on specific leadership behaviours and practices through which strategy implementation is enhanced.

Strategy-as-practice is primarily focused on “the doing of strategy, who does it, what they do, how they do it, what they use, and what implications this has for shaping strategy” (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009, p.69). Despite advancements in the field, some ambiguity still exists in the literature on which activities are considered strategic and appropriate to be studied under the strategy-as-practice research domain (Seidl et al., 2024). Considering these concerns, Jarzabkowski et al. (2021) attempted to provide clarity by conceptualising strategic activities as activities that lead to outcomes that may be considered important. More recent refinement by Seidl et al. (2024) builds on this foundation by arguing that the linkage of strategic activities to consequentiality is restrictive to strategy-as-practice’s research agenda. Seidl et al. (2024) proposed three

additional views to the consequentiality view, which include the role-based view, pattern view and nominalist view.

The consequentiality view by Seidl et al. (2024) closely aligns with the definition by Jarzabkowski et al. (2021), which claims that strategic activities are those activities that lead to important outcomes, are enacted by implementers, labelled as strategic and follow a recurrent pattern. Recognising and labelling an activity as a strategic practice signifies its importance and leads to increased attention from top management, thereby increasing its legitimacy (Rouleau & Cloutier, 2022). These important outcomes may be at individual, organisational and even at industry level (Seidl et al., 2024). The impact that a strategic practice yields can be influenced by whether other practices are present or absent (Jarzabkowski et al., 2016). The consequentiality view also encompasses outcomes that practitioners may not be mindful of at the time of enacting the strategic activity (Seidl et al., 2024). The consequentially view supports studies that aim to examine the mechanism through which strategic practices bring about important outcomes (Seidl et al., 2024; Rouleau & Cloutier, 2022). From the consequentiality view, a broad spectrum of activities are positioned as strategic, because any activity that leads to an important organisational outcome or consequence qualifies as strategic.

Participative decision-making is positioned as an important strategic practice, under the consequentiality view, that leads to important organisational outcomes (effective strategy implementation) and is enacted by authentic leaders on a recurrent basis. While the impact of implementation practices such as strategic meetings, structure, negotiation, PowerPoint slides and resource matching has been studied as key practices to implement strategy (Friesl et al., 2021; Kohtamäki et al., 2022; Jarzabkowski et al., 2021), participative decision-making has not been studied as a strategic practice in the strategy implementation literature.

Authentic leadership behaviours create an enabling environment for participative decision-making practices to be enacted to facilitate successful strategy implementation. The next section discusses authentic leadership and authentic leadership theory.

2.4. Authentic leadership and authentic leadership theory

Authentic leadership emerged in the early years of the 21st century as a response to calls for more genuine, values-driven approaches to leadership (Crawford et al., 2020). This follows growing concerns and scandals over corruption and ethical failures among government and corporate leaders (Crawford et al., 2020; Iszatt-White & Kempster, 2019). Authentic leadership stems from positive psychology and aims to restore trust between leaders and followers through ethical and honest leadership behaviour (Wang et al., 2021; Gardner et al., 2021). It has been described as the foundation for other positive leadership approaches such as transformational leadership (Alvesson & Einola, 2022).

Authentic leadership describes the method of influence and how leaders relate with others in the work environment. These leaders are perceived as genuine, honest and ethical in their exchanges (Zeb et al., 2020). The leaders build trust with their followers through open communication and establishing a system of collaborative relationships, and soliciting different perspectives. Authentic leadership challenges traditional top-down leadership styles, where followers are forced to align with the leader's views. Instead, it focuses on empowerment and allowing followers to be authentic. This dynamic leadership allows leaders and followers to work towards the co-creation of a shared identity (Gill et al., 2018).

Early studies of authentic leadership described authentic leaders as those leaders who stay committed to their deeply entrenched values, emotions and identity and lead in alignment with these while also engaging others with transparency (Avolio et al., 2004). Advancing from this foundation, Walumbwa et al. (2008) provided a more operational definition by defining authentic leadership as “a pattern of leader behaviour that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalised moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development” (p.94). This definition has become the most widely accepted definition among scholars and has laid the foundation for authentic leadership theory.

Authentic leadership theory offers a structured theoretical framework to understand authentic leadership and how its characteristics manifest in organisational settings (Almutairi et al., 2025). The theory describes four key dimensions of authentic leadership: self-awareness, balanced processing, relational transparency and internalised moral perspective (Gardner et al., 2021; Walumbwa et al., 2008). While Walumbwa et al. (2008) conceptualised authentic leadership as a higher-order model, studies have shown that the four dimensions of authentic leadership also load under one factor, creating a single-factor model that surpasses the higher-order model (Grobler & Grobler, 2024; Scheepers & Storm, 2019). This study thus examines the effect of authentic leadership as a unidimensional (single-factor) construct. It is, however, imperative to describe and understand the four dimensions that together capture the core of authentic leadership.

Self-awareness relates to how well a leader understands their values, abilities, emotions and their impact on others around them.

Balanced processing is the ability to evaluate information objectively and seek opposing views and perspectives to promote unbiased decision-making and fairness.

Relational transparency relates to a leader's ability to display vulnerability and openly share their thoughts and emotions while also preserving their dignity in the work setting (Rego et al., 2022).

Lastly, **internal moral perspective** relates to a leader's ability to withstand external pressure and expectations and consistently act in alignment with deeply held values and ethical standards (Gardner et al., 2021; Crawford et al., 2020).

The fundamental principle of authentic leadership theory is that leaders who are highly self-aware, ethical and transparent foster positive emotions, optimism, hope and trust, which influences followers' attitudes and behaviours (Avolio et al., 2004). The positive organisational environment that is enabled by authentic leadership behaviours leads to several positive organisational outcomes (Grobler & Grobler, 2025; Seifu & Jalata, 2022; Steffens et al., 2021; Avolio et al., 2004). This study draws on authentic leadership theory to support the argument that authentic leadership behaviours directly influence

strategy implementation and create an enabling environment for participative decision-making practices to be enacted.

Authentic leadership has risen to prominence in the past few years due to its ability to influence positive organisational outcomes (Steffens et al., 2021; Seifu & Jalata, 2022). Empirical studies have reported the effects of authentic leadership on follower attitudes and behaviours. Authentic leadership has been reported to have positive effects on task engagement (Wirawan et al., 2020), job performance and satisfaction (Liu & Wong, 2023), empowerment (Zhang et al., 2022), commitment (Imam et al., 2020), discretionary effort (Avolio et al., 2004) and organisational citizenship behaviour (Ribeiro et al., 2022). Negative relationships of authentic leadership on stress, emotional exhaustion and turnover intention were also reported (Zhang et al., 2022). Authentic leadership has also been shown to be context-driven, with its effectiveness shaped by varying factors, including organisational climate, social and situational dynamics (Helmuth et al., 2023).

While authentic leadership theory has garnered widespread interest in leadership literature, it has not been without criticism. Authentic leadership has been described as a fashionable ideology with a false sense of organisational reality and unrealistic expectations of humankind (Alvesson & Einola, 2022; Alvesson & Einola, 2019). The scholars warn against the extreme positivity and positioning of authentic leadership theory and similar leadership theories, such as servant, ethical and transformational leadership, as magic bullets that lead to several positive outcomes (Alvesson & Einola, 2022; Alvesson & Einola, 2019). They further argue that the leadership theory lacks solid theoretical foundations and measurement tools (Einola & Alvesson, 2021). Additionally, it lacks insightful explanations of the leader-follower relationship and has merely excelled at offering hope and inspiration without solving complex organisational issues (Alvesson & Einola, 2019).

In response to the criticism, Gardner et al. (2021) argue that authenticity is not mutually exclusive, where leaders can be either authentic or not. Instead, they position authenticity as a developmental process where leaders and followers should aspire and grow towards self-awareness, moral consistency and transparency while remaining true to their core values and beliefs. Authentic leadership can be viewed from a development

lens where everyday leaders strive to remain committed to a set of values and principles as a means to navigate the temptations and challenges of organisational life (Gardner et al., 2021). As they achieve this, they inspire followers to display similar behaviours. This positioning aligns well with the view adopted in this study, where authentic leadership is viewed as a developmental and aspirational state instead of a personality that leaders either reflect or not. Real-life cases and evidence of leaders who have successfully demonstrated authentic leadership behaviours and subsequently inspired their followers to imitate similar behaviours are available in the literature (Gardner et al., 2021).

In responding to the criticism on measurement tools, Gardner et al. (2021) acknowledge that authentic leadership is difficult to measure, but it is not impossible. Some of the widely used tools, including the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ), while imperfect, are not fundamentally flawed.

Authentic leadership is a suitable leadership approach for this research study as it resonates with practitioners (Gardner et al., 2021) and complements the strategy-as-practice theory, which offers a practical perspective. Authentic leadership still plays a pivotal part in leadership theory, particularly when it is examined and understood from a practice perspective (Iszatt-White & Kempster, 2019).

Authentic leadership, which emphasises transparency and inclusive environments through balanced processing, creates an enabling environment for participative decision-making practices to be enacted to facilitate successful strategy implementation. The participative practices provide a mechanism through which authentic leaders' behaviours translate strategy into actions daily. The next section explores participative decision-making as a strategic practice.

2.5. Participative decision-making

Participative decision-making is the process of encouraging and involving employees in organisational decision-making (Wang et al., 2022). It includes the active seeking of employees' views and opinions, delegation of decision-making powers and urging of employees to actively take part in the decision-making process (Wang et al., 2022; Galeazzo et al., 2021). This includes the involvement of employees in problem-solving,

strategy development and decisions related to the implementation of solutions (Srinivasan, 2021).

The expectation from employees to contribute to decisions that directly impact their job functions has certainly increased over the years (Aramovich & Blankenship, 2020). In many organisations, employees play a forward-facing role and possess critical information and valuable insights that can be beneficial to the organisation's decision-making process (Wilkinson et al., 2020). Participative decision-making enables that much-required shift from the traditional command and control model, which is proving ineffective in modern organisations.

By involving employees in strategic decisions, leaders share their power and enable collective decision-making and problem-solving (Wang et al., 2022; Srinivasan, 2021). Participative practices involve employees across all levels of the organisation (Oketch & Ainembabazi, 2021) and are especially crucial in cultures and organisations with high power distances (Valverde-Moreno, 2021; Harunavamwe & Palmer, 2020) like South Africa. Cultural context is very important in participation studies. According to Hofstede (2001), 'One cannot write meaningfully about organisational participation without embedding it within a national cultural context' (p. 109).

Research on participative decision-making has gained significance in recent years, with researchers acknowledging its positive influence on organisational results. A study by Kwon and Kim (2025) reported a positive influence of participative decision-making on employees' cognitive ability, creativity and voice behaviour. Another study by Behraves et al. (2021) reported that participative decision-making exerted a positive impact on employee self-efficacy and hope, which subsequently resulted in increased job satisfaction and reduced job search behaviour. Participative decision-making has also been correlated to increased affective commitment, motivation, collaboration and empowerment (Coffeng et al., 2023; Ahn & Bessiere, 2022). Moreover, participative decision-making has been identified as a tactic to overcome change resistance and is essential for the successful implementation of strategy (Weiser et al., 2020).

Some of the biggest challenges of participative decision-making practices highlighted in the literature include time constraints (Srinivasan, 2021), lack of employee competence (Philip & Arrowsmith, 2021), conflict, lack of HR support and disingenuous practices

(Frega, 2021; Jang et al., 2023; Philip & Arrowsmith, 2021). Engaging multiple employees in decision-making can be time-consuming and slow down strategic decision-making in organisations (Srinivasan, 2021). Conflict can also arise when employees have conflicting interests (Altamimi et al., 2023). This can introduce inefficiencies, delay decision-making and impact performance, particularly for organisations in fast-paced industries. Other scholars disagree with this idea and argue that the benefit gained from employee involvement far outweighs the time spent involving employees (Søndergaard et al., 2021; Grasser et al., 2021).

Notably, the quality of the participative decision-making process relies on employees possessing the appropriate competencies and knowledge to contribute effectively (Behraves et al., 2021). Prioritising participative practices and disregarding employee capability to participate in decisions may dilute the quality of decisions. Moreover, a study by Philip and Arrowsmith (2021) found that the benefits of high employee involvement in small not-for-profit organisations, where there was a lack of HR policies to support employee participation, negatively impacted employee performance and wellbeing. This highlights the importance of integrating participative practices in the organisation's decision processes.

Participative practices that are perceived as disingenuous, where participation is symbolic, but inputs are ignored, can destroy trust and lead to negative employee attitudes (Frega, 2021; Jang et al., 2023). The success of participative decision-making thus relies on genuine, ethical leadership behaviours such as authentic leadership.

The previous sections laid the foundation for understanding strategy implementation, authentic leadership and authentic leadership theory, participative decision-making and strategy-as-practice as a theoretical perspective. The remainder of the literature review section examines how these constructs relate to shape strategy outcomes. Specifically, the direct influence of authentic leadership on strategy implementation and the indirect influence through participative decision-making as a mediating practice.

2.6. Authentic leadership and Strategy implementation

While research in authentic leadership has increased, empirical and theoretical research is limited (Seifu & Jalata, 2022). Specifically, its influence on strategy implementation. Scholars have cautioned leaders against ignoring the emotional and psychological forces that influence successful strategy implementation (Tawse et al., 2019). This includes employee change resistance, which is argued to be a significant hindrance to the strategy implementation process (Köseoglu et al., 2020). Authentic leadership behaviours are well-positioned to not only overcome employee resistance but also enhance strategic alignment by allowing followers to maintain unique viewpoints while seeking mutuality to achieve shared identity (Gill et al., 2018).

Managers require robust social capital to positively influence followers. Managerial social capital is a dimension of dynamic managerial capabilities theory and relates to the “goodwill derived from relationships, both formal and informal, that managers have with others and can use to obtain resources and information” (Helfat & Martin, 2015, p. 1286). Authentic leaders are known for possessing sufficient social capital (Kida et al., 2021), which allows them to connect with and understand the perspectives of the people involved in implementation activities. Moreover, authentic leaders have the motivation, skill and integrity to employ behaviours and practices that will ensure effective implementation of strategy (Gill et al., 2018).

Authentic leadership behaviours of relational transparency, balanced processing, self-awareness and ethical decision-making are instrumental in effecting strategy implementation (Musa et al., 2017). The relational transparency of authentic leaders, where leaders show up as their true selves, display vulnerability and share information, promotes active dialogue (Rego et al., 2022). This is essential in strategy implementation as it creates shared meaning and promotes effective strategy translation. Transparent leaders clearly communicate the strategy objectives and the actions required to achieve the strategy objectives (Weiser et al., 2020; Van Ruler, 2020). Moreover, they promote two-way communication, which has been found to be a critical enabler of effective strategy implementation (Köseoglu et al., 2020). Two-way communication ensures dialogue and collaboration between the different departments

involved in strategy implementation and understanding of the resources required to implement strategy (de Oliveira et al., 2019).

Authentic leaders' ability to objectively analyse information and seek diverse perspectives improves not only the organisational decision-making process but also significantly influences the organisation's ability to quickly and effectively respond to internal and external environmental changes (Crawford et al., 2020). This balanced processing of information enables effective control and feedback, enabling successful implementation of strategy (de Oliveira et al., 2019). Additionally, balanced processing of information improves coordination among individuals, which is often difficult to achieve (Trein et al., 2021). Soliciting diverse views promotes engagement of individuals and increases commitment to the implementation of the strategy (Bell & Reed, 2022).

A study by Gill et al. (2018) found that authentic leadership significantly influences the development and alignment of HR policies and competencies to support strategy implementation. These leaders support strategy implementation by ensuring that there is alignment between the HR policies and employee competencies and commit to developing employees (Ribeiro et al., 2022).

Few researchers have studied the direct relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation. A study by Allgood (2015) reported a positive relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation. This study focused on how and why the four components of authentic leadership (self-awareness, balanced processing, internal moral perspective and relational transparency) lead to successful strategy execution and ultimately organisational performance. The study was a single case study methodology focused on a mid-western university, which limits the generalisability of the findings. Moreover, the study made use of self-reported data collection methods for the authentic leadership construct, which introduces bias and subjectivity into the study. Nonetheless, Allgood's (2015) results support the findings from a study conducted by Musa et al. (2017) that reported authentic leadership to have a positive and direct effect on strategy execution. The study, however, made use of the American Management Association (AMA) questionnaire to measure the strategy implementation construct. This measurement instrument lacks empirical validation and is most appropriately used as a practical tool by business consultants. A more recent

study by Seifu and Jalata (2022) reported that authentic leadership positively influenced the implementation success of planned organisational change, which is an aspect of strategy implementation (de Oliveira et al., 2019). Overall, there is evidence to suggest that there is a positive relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation.

- **Hypothesis 1:** There is a significant, positive relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation.

Further examination of this relationship is required using an empirically validated instrument to measure strategy implementation, as has been developed by de Oliveira et al. (2019). This will extend our understanding of how authentic leadership behaviours can enhance strategy implementation to improve organisational performance.

2.7. Authentic leadership and participative decision-making

Authentic leadership behaviours provide the relational and ethical climate that enables genuine participative decision-making practices. According to Wang et al. (2022), the decision to implement participative behaviours lies predominantly on the individual level. A study by Black (2020) reports a correlation between a leader's degree of self-awareness and their ability to employ participative behaviours. The researcher argues that authentic leaders, who have been described as having high levels of self-awareness, will promote employee involvement in decision-making processes. These leaders are aware of their own limitations and thus value the inputs of others, which fosters employee involvement. Wang et al. (2022) further argue that participative decision-making only takes place in environments where there is trust between the leader and the subordinate. This aligns with authentic leadership practices that promote follower trust through relational transparency (Gardner et al., 2021).

Moreover, authentic leaders through balanced processing of information and seeking diverse perspectives decentralise decision-making and enhance employees' willingness to share ideas and participate in the decision-making process (Oketch & Ainembabazi, 2021; Kumar et al., 2024). These leaders promote trust and create a psychologically safe environment, which enhances participation (Clark, 2020; Edmondson & Bransby, 2023).

A study by Ogu (2024) found that participative decision-making practices that were poorly managed and lacking in transparency led to negative outcomes such as stress and conflict. Authentic leadership through transparency and inclusive practices overcomes these limitations and maximises the benefits yielded from participative practices.

Empirical studies that examine the direct influence of authentic leadership practices on participative decision-making have been conducted, albeit limited. A study by Nqumba and Scheepers (2023) that examined the direct effect of authentic leadership on strategic corporate social responsibility (CSR) and indirect influence through participative decision-making in South African organisations reported a statistically significant relationship between authentic leadership and participative decision-making. Similarly, a study by Zhang et al. (2021) reported a positive relationship between authentic leadership and teachers' voice behaviours. However, this relationship was moderated by the teacher's level of interpersonal trust (Zhang et al., 2021), therefore suggesting that this relationship may be influenced by contextual factors.

The literature findings support the researcher's argument that authentic leaders, through their high levels of self-awareness, transparency and internal moral compass, enable participative practices and encourage employee involvement in decision-making. These leaders foster environments where individuals feel empowered to take part in decisions that influence their work.

- **Hypothesis 2:** There is a significant, positive relationship between authentic leadership and participative decision-making.

2.8. Participative decision-making and strategy implementation

Having established the role of authentic leadership in fostering participative decision-making practices, the discussion now moves to how participative decision-making practices facilitate successful strategy implementation, which is an important outcome under the consequentiality view of strategy-as-practice. Participative decision-making practices that empower employees and enable decision-making at the right levels of the organisation promote commitment and buy-in to facilitate effective implementation of strategy. By embedding these behavioural practices into daily operations, leaders

promote a relational and structural environment that enhances strategy implementation. Employees who feel like important stakeholders strive to improve their performance and align efforts towards goal achievement (Oketch & Ainembabazi, 2021). Participative decision-making promotes effective strategy implementation by positively affecting strategy translation, coordination, communication, control and feedback and commitment, which are foundational to strategy implementation success. Participative decision-making is a critical strategic practice to enhance the engagement of employees (Ogu, 2024).

Effective translation ensures alignment between strategic goals and operational efforts and has been described as one of the dimensions of effective strategy implementation. Strategy translation is enhanced when employees are involved in the interpretation and establishment of clear actions to meet the strategic objectives. This boosts employee motivation and persistence of behaviours (Oketch & Ainembabazi, 2021). Employees involved in decision-making are clear on the strategic objectives, align their efforts and are more likely to be accountable for their actions (Bell & Reed, 2022).

Coordination involves the integrated effort of mid-to-senior level managers to mobilise allocated resources to effectively implement strategic goals by promoting understanding, conflict resolution, engagement and commitment (de Oliveria et al., 2019). A study by Ogu (2024) found that employees involved in the decision-making process displayed a strong sense of commitment to organisational goals. This finding is further supported by Srinivasan (2021), who argues that participative decision-making positively influences employee commitment and supports conflict management. The coordination facilitated by improved commitment, engagement and alignment promotes effective strategy implementation.

Active dialogue and effective communication between actors are crucial enablers of strategy implementation (Ogu, 2024). Participative practices foster a two-way communication climate and improve employee voice behaviour (Wang et al., 2022). Kwon and Kim (2025) emphasise the importance of cognitive processes involved in the promotion of employee voice behaviour. Their study identifies cognitive flexibility as a mediator between participative decision-making practices and voice behaviour. According to Qing and JinHua (2023), employee voice behaviour is often expressed in

the form of increased ideas and information sharing in the organisation. The increased flow of information and reciprocal dialogue will drive effective communication and early resolution of implementation challenges.

Successful strategy implementation relies on effective control and feedback mechanisms. This includes internal and external environment analysis for changes that require adjustment to implementation actions or strategic objectives (de Oliveira et al., 2019). Participative decision-making enhances this strategy implementation enablers by promoting proactive organisations that are adaptable to changing external conditions (Valverde-Moreno, 2021). Participative practices allow faster identification of external and internal pressures and have been positively linked to organizational adaptability (Kwon & Kim, 2025).

The preceding discussion leads to the argument that participative decision-making practices will enhance strategy implementation. Al-Hashimi et al. (2022) studied the relationship between participative decision-making and the implementation of strategic decisions in public organisations and reported a positive relationship. The argument is further supported by Zhou et al. (2020), who suggest that companies seeking to successfully implement CSR strategies need to enhance their internal employee participation in decision-making and external supplier relationships. The available evidence supports the argument that participative decision-making is positively related to strategy implementation.

- **Hypothesis 3:** There is a significant, positive relationship between participative decision-making and strategy implementation.

2.9. Participative decision-making as a mediator

The mediating role of participative decision-making practices on the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation has not been studied. Authentic leadership through self-awareness, balanced processing, transparency and internal moral compass, enables participative decision-making practices. The practices promote effective strategy implementation by positively influencing strategy translation, communication, control and feedback, coordination, and HR practices. Nqumba and Scheepers (2023) provide empirical evidence that participative decision-making acts as

a mechanism through which authentic leaders influence CSR in the South African context. More recently, Jang et al. (2023) reported a partial mediating effect of participative practices on the relationship between authentic leadership and job satisfaction. The researcher, therefore, argues that participative decision-making, as a strategic practice, acts as a mechanism through which authentic leadership achieves effective strategy implementation.

- **Hypothesis 4:** Participative decision-making mediates the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation.

2.10. Literature review conclusion

To conclude, the literature review provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the study constructs and the hypothesised relationships between strategy implementation, authentic leadership and participative decision-making. Strategy implementation has been highlighted as a highly behavioural and interpersonal process that requires a different mindset from strategy formulation. Prior studies confirm that authentic leadership and participative decision-making have several positive organisational outcomes. Empirical studies examining the influence of authentic leadership on strategy implementation are very few, similar to the influence of participative decision-making on strategy implementation. This study views participative decision-making as a strategic practice, under the consequentiality view, that is enacted by authentic leaders, as practitioners, to achieve successful strategy implementation. This positioning focuses on who implements strategy and the micro practices and actions they enact in practice to implement strategy. The gaps highlighted in the literature review support the relevance of this study.

3. HYPOTHESES AND CONCEPTUAL MODEL

This chapter summarises the hypotheses that have been formulated based on the research questions and the review of the literature concluded in the preceding chapter.

3.1. Hypothesis 1: Authentic leadership and Strategy Implementation

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant, positive relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation.

Strategy implementation is a highly behavioural and socially interactive process (Tawse et al., 2019) that is enacted by human actors. Authentic leadership behaviours of relational transparency, self-awareness, balanced processing of information, and internal moral perspective foster positive emotions and build trust and shared understanding (Gardner et al., 2021; Avolio et al., 2004). These positive emotions overcome resistance to change and enable effective strategy implementation by promoting communication, strategy translation, control and feedback, coordination, and development of HR policies and competencies to support implementation (Köseoglu et al., 2020; de Oliveira et al., 2019). Few researchers have reported a positive correlation between authentic leadership and strategy implementation (Seifu & Jalata, 2022; Musa et al., 2017; Allgood, 2015).

3.2. Hypothesis 2: Authentic leadership and Participative decision-making

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant, positive relationship between authentic leadership and participative decision-making.

The implementation of participative decision-making practices relies predominantly on the leader (Wang et al., 2022). The ability to encourage participative decision-making practices has been linked to the leader's level of self-awareness (Black, 2020). Authentic leaders embody the level of self-awareness required to promote participative decision-making practices. Moreover, authentic leaders provide the relational and ethical climate that enables genuine participative decision-making practices. Through objective processing of information and relational transparency, authentic leaders foster trust (Gardner et al., 2021) and build psychological safety and encourage employee involvement in decisions (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023; Wang et al., 2022). Empirical

evidence suggests that authentic leadership strongly correlates with participative decision-making (Nqumba & Scheepers, 2023; Zhang et al., 2021).

3.3. Hypothesis 3: Participative decision-making and Strategy Implementation

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant, positive relationship between participative decision-making and strategy implementation.

Employees who are included in decisions feel like important stakeholders and align their efforts towards goal achievement (Oketch & Ainembabazi, 2021). Participative decision-making practices enhance two-way communication, information flow and buy-in to facilitate effective strategy implementation. The active encouragement and involvement of employees improves in decisions improves strategy implementation by positively affecting strategy translation, coordination, communication, control and feedback and commitment, which are foundational to strategy implementation success. Findings from Al-Hashimi et al. (2022) reveal a positive, direct correlation between participative decision-making and strategy implementation in public organisations.

3.4. Hypothesis 4: Mediating effect of participative decision-making

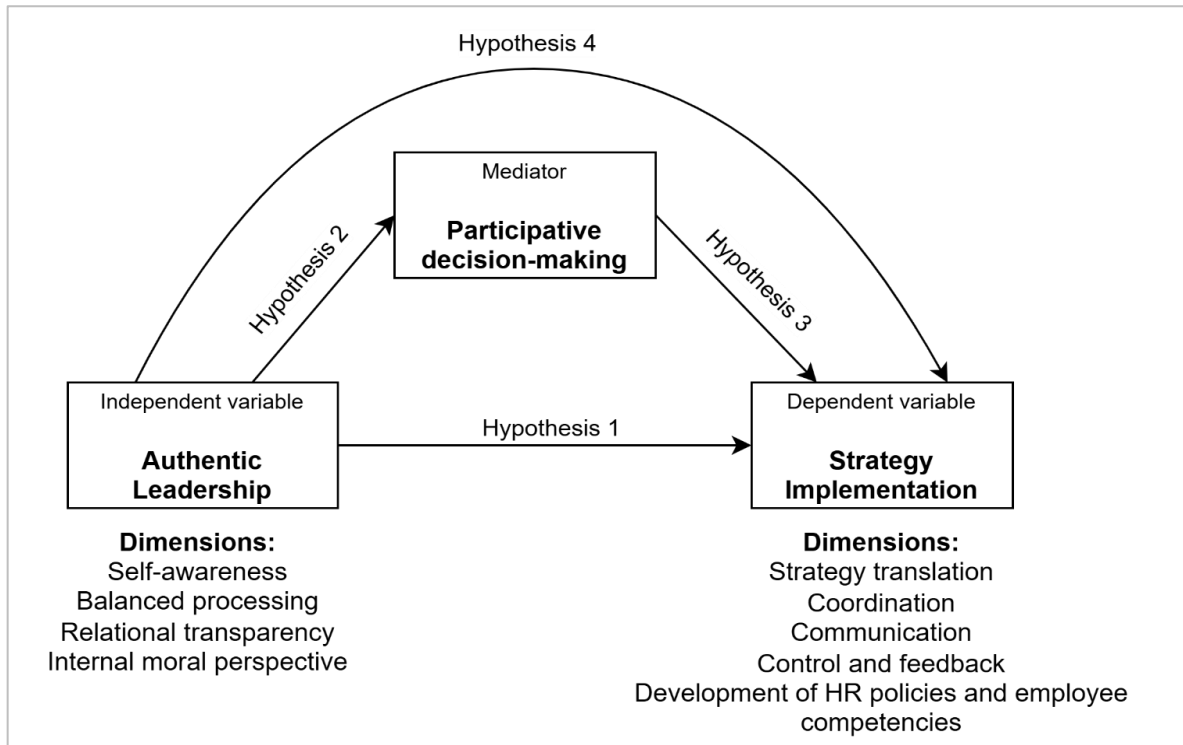
Hypothesis 4: Participative decision-making mediates the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation.

The researcher argues that authentic leaders, through self-awareness, balanced processing, relational transparency, and internalised moral compass, enable participative decision-making practices and inclusive environments. These participative practices promote effective strategy implementation by positively influencing strategy translation, coordination, communication, control and feedback and HR practices. Participative decision-making thus acts as a mechanism through which authentic leaders achieve successful strategy implementation. Previous scholars have highlighted the mediating effect of participative decision-making in influencing the relationship between authentic leadership and other organisational outcomes (Jang et al., 2023; Nqumba & Scheepers, 2023).

The conceptual model developed for this study is presented Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model Linking Authentic Leadership, Participative Decision-making and Strategy Implementation



The conceptual model reflects the subdimensions of authentic leadership and the strategy implementation to ensure construct clarity. This study, however, focuses on the overall influence of authentic leadership and strategy implementation as unidimensional constructs, rather than studying the influence of each subdimension.

Additionally, the study focused on the “results” part of the strategy implementation measurement scale developed by de Oliveira et al. (2019). The original measurement scale comprises two parts: actions that need to be taken to implement the strategy, and the results of strategy implementation. The actions were excluded as this study was focused on understanding the influence of authentic leadership and participative decision-making on strategy implementation outcomes.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

This section provides a detailed overview of the research methodology and design that was employed by the researcher to enable testing of the stated hypotheses. The research design and methodology were aligned with the objectives of the study. This is crucial for the development of a credible and valid research project (Bono & McNamara, 2011).

4.2. Research design

A study's research design can be either explorative, explanatory or descriptive (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The purpose of exploratory research is to discover novel knowledge on a particular subject matter (Saunders & Lewis, 2018; Casula et al., 2021). Descriptive research is more concerned with providing true depictions of occurrences, conditions, or persons, while explanatory research seeks to explain and provide reasons behind certain phenomena by investigating the relationships between key parameters (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The purpose of this study was both to provide true depictions of the data and explain the relationship between authentic leadership, participative decision-making and strategy implementation. This study was therefore descripto-explanatory, which combined descriptive with explanatory research. Descripto-explanatory research is closely associated with hypothesis testing (Casula et al., 2021) and supported the objectives of this study.

4.2.1. Research philosophy

The positivism philosophy, which is centred around the verification of theory (Park et al., 2020), was adopted for this study. The positivism approach views the social realities that are being studied as real to produce "law-like" generalisations (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The approach rejects hypothetical speculation and advocates for the advancement of knowledge through observation, experimentation and unbiased hypothesis testing as was required in this study (Janiszewski & van Osselaer, 2022). Moreover, positivism aligns with quantitative studies that seek to test hypotheses through statistical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The positivist philosophy was therefore the most logical and defensible approach for this study. The researcher

assumed an objective view and followed structured methods to facilitate knowledge based on empirical evidence.

4.2.2. Approach to theory development

A deductive approach was selected as the most appropriate choice for this study. Deduction is described as a 'top-down' approach where theory undergoes testing through the adoption of a research strategy tailored to perform the test (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The deductive approach enabled the researcher to develop hypotheses from existing theory, followed by data collection and analysis of the data to test existing literature (Janiszewski & van Osselaer, 2022).

4.2.3. Methodological choice

The mono-method quantitative methodological approach was employed. The mono-method, which makes use of a single data collection approach, supported the researchers' limited time to execute the study. Additionally, the quantitative research method led to the establishment of correlations between authentic leadership, participative decision-making and strategy implementation through statistical techniques (Ahmad et al., 2019). The quantitative method aligned with the researcher's positivist approach, which sought to be unbiased and objective. Moreover, the authentic leadership, strategy implementation and participative decision-making constructs investigated in this study are adequately researched constructs with validated theoretical scales, thus not requiring the completion of a qualitative study (Edmondson & Mcmanus, 2007).

4.2.4. Research Strategy

The study made use of data collected through self-administered online surveys by Master of Business Administration (MBA) students during their Strategic Implementation course at the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). The students made use of online surveys to collect data from individuals employed in qualifying private sector organisations in South Africa. Surveys have become adopted as the primary method for collecting structured responses in quantitative studies (Crane et al., 2018). The survey strategy used to collect data, aligned with the researcher's deductive approach. It also aligned with the positivist approach by removing any interaction with the participants,

therefore minimising the researcher's bias (Park et al., 2020). Moreover, the survey strategy presented several benefits, including data collection from a large, diverse sample (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), effortless completion, and anonymity, which encouraged honest responses (Jaeger & Cardello, 2022).

4.2.5. Time horizon

The study was cross-sectional in nature, as the data was collected in one period and thus presented a view of the subject at a certain point in time (Wang & Cheng, 2020). Contrary to longitudinal studies, which involve repeated observations of the same subject over time, cross-sectional studies involve observations at a single point (Wang & Cheng, 2020). Linnhoff et al. (2020) highlight the importance and effectiveness of longitudinal studies when examining complex business topics such as leadership and strategy implementation. However, due to the limited time and practical considerations, a cross-sectional study, which requires less time, was adopted. The cross-sectional study was sufficient to meet the objectives of the study, which examined the relationships between the three constructs: authentic leadership, participative decision-making and strategy implementation rather than changes of these relationships over time.

4.3. Population

A study population refers to a collective of members that a researcher aims to study (Babbie, 2021). The population for this study included all employees employed in various organisations in South Africa's private sector. Focus on private sector organisations is supported by evidence that they operate in highly competitive markets where effective strategy implementation is crucial for organisational performance (Hrebiniak, 2006). Unlike in the public sector, private sector leaders have greater autonomy in driving decision-making and achieving strategic goals (Duerrenberger & Warning, 2023).

4.4. Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis for this study was individual employees' responses. This unit of analysis was fitting given that the study aimed to gather views and perceptions of constructs that are experienced at the individual level, such as authentic leadership and participative decision-making (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

4.5. Sampling method and size

Sampling is the process followed by the researcher to select individuals from a target audience for in-depth analysis (Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020). Sampling is employed in circumstances where it is impractical to include the total population in the research (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The researcher can make use of either probability or non-probability sampling methods (Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020). The decision between probability and non-probability sampling methods relies on whether a full list of the members within a target population (referred to as the sampling frame) is attainable (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Given the lack of access to the sampling frame, non-probability sampling and specifically criterion sampling was used in the collection of the data used in this study.

Criterion sampling is a form of purposive sampling. It is used to select a research sample based on specific criteria pre-set before the data collection (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). The criteria set in this study include: the size and age of the organisation, geographical location of the organisations and whether they operate in the private sector, and the respondent's experience in strategy implementation. The organisation in which the individuals were employed had to employ at least 50 people, as medium to large organisations have more formalised structures (Saunders et al., 2020; Kakavelakis & Edwards, 2022), making them ideal for studying leadership, decision-making and strategy implementation dynamics. Furthermore, the organisations were required to have been in operation for more than three years, as they are more likely to have implemented strategic plans in comparison to younger organisations that may still be evolving. Strategy implementation processes are more advanced and stable in mature organisations (de Oliveira et al., 2019). The organisations had to be South African organisations operating in the private sector. Private sector organisations operate in highly competitive markets where effective strategy implementation is crucial. They also have greater autonomy in driving decision-making and achieving strategic goals (Hrebiniak, 2006; Duerrenberger & Warning, 2023). The South African context presented an interesting dynamic to the research. The benefits of participative decision-making practices are greater in high power distance cultures (Wang et al., 2022), as is the case in South Africa. This context, therefore, offered an opportunity to study how authentic leadership behaviours and participative practices, which closely align with Ubuntu leadership principles (Nqumba & Scheepers, 2023), could enhance the

implementation of strategy to drive organisational performance. Lastly, the participant's experience in implementing strategy was an important to ensure participants had actively been involved and contributed to strategy implementation to provide valuable insights.

The sample size of 1291 exceeds the minimum sample size of 200 required to conduct SEM and understand mediation effects (Hair et al., 2021). Large sample sizes increase confidence and generalisability of statistical results (Park et al., 2020).

4.6. Measurement instruments

The secondary data used in this study had been collected using structured survey questionnaires. The questionnaire used to collect the secondary data was supplied to the researcher. This data collection method aligned with the researcher's positivist philosophy and quantitative methodological approach. Existing validated scales were used to collect data for the measurement of each of the three research constructs: authentic leadership, participative decision-making and strategy implementation. Using existing measuring tools enhanced the reliability of the study as the scales had been thoroughly tested and validated (Janiszewski & van Osselaer, 2022). The measurement instruments adopted for each construct are discussed next.

Authentic Leadership:

The Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) scale, which contains 12 items, was used in this study (See Appendix A, Table A1). The ALQ scale to measure authentic leadership has gained widespread use by many researchers (Gardner et al., 2011). The four sub-dimensions (self-awareness, balanced processing of information, relational transparency, internalised moral perspective) of authentic leadership were measured on a five-point Likert scale, presented in Table 1. The Likert scale is a well-established tool and assumes an equal difference between each of the responses, which makes it suitable for statistical analysis (Creswell, 2014). The scale was selected as it had reported high Cronbach alphas with values ranging between 0.70 and 0.90 (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Participants were asked to rate their perception of their leader's display of authentic behaviours. For example, "my leader seeks feedback to improve interactions with others".

Table 1*Five-point Likert Scale Used to Measure Authentic Leadership*

1	Never
2	Sometimes
3	About half the time
4	Most of the time
5	Always

Participative Decision Making:

The adapted scale to measure participative decision-making is included in Table A2, Appendix A. The scale was originally developed by Kahnweiler and Thompson (2000) and measured participative decision-making on a five-point Likert scale. The adapted scale developed by Nqumba and Scheepers (2023) in their study on the mediation effect of participative decision-making on the relationship between authentic leadership and strategic CSR was used for the current study. The adapted scale was appropriate for this study as it had a high reported Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.82 (Nqumba & Scheepers, 2023). The five-point Likert scale used to measure participative decision-making is provided in Table 2.

Table 2*Five-point Likert Scale Used to Measure Participative Decision-making*

1	Never
2	Sometimes
3	About half the time
4	Most of the time
5	Always

Strategy implementation:

The strategy implementation construct was measured using the scale developed by de Oliveira et al. (2019), included in Table A3, Appendix A. The scale was selected as the most appropriate for this study as it had been empirically validated and reported

acceptable reliability and validity (de Oliveira et al., 2019). The scale was also suitable for this study as it addresses a gap in academic literature by providing a measurement scale that is theory-based rather than consultancy and practitioner-based, thus enabling theory development in the field of strategy implementation.

The original measurement scale comprises two parts: actions that need to be taken to implement the strategy, and the results from the actions. The authors recommend that studies that focus on the antecedents of strategy implementation use the actions part of the instrument, while studies that focus on the outcomes of strategy implementation use the results part of the instrument (de Oliveira et al., 2019). As a result, the study focused on the results part of the instrument, which measures the result of each of the five dimensions: “Unfolding (translating), Communication, Human resources policies and employee competences, Coordination, and Control and Feedback” (p.336).

To measure the strategy implementation construct, respondents were asked to rate their organisations along the five dimensions of strategy implementation using a five-point Likert scale as provided in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Five-point Likert Scale Used to Measure Strategy Implementation

1	Extremely dissatisfied
2	Somewhat dissatisfied
3	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
4	Moderately satisfied
5	Extremely satisfied

4.7. Data collection process

The data was collected by GIBS 2024 MBA students who made use of Qualtrics, an online platform, to host the survey questionnaire. Each MBA syndicate group was issued a separate link to the online questionnaire that was hosted by GIBS faculty for quality control. Each syndicate group identified a South African private sector organisation that met the criteria outlined previously in section 4.5. The link to the online questionnaire was distributed by the MBA students to individuals in the identified organisation that met

the qualifying criteria. Each syndicate group was issued with the collected data for their analysis to complete their Strategic Implementation syndicate assignment. The faculty combined the data collected from each syndicate group into a comprehensive data set. This raw data set was provided to the researcher for the purposes of this study.

Online platforms have proved efficient and successful for data gathering in academic research (Moises, 2020). A cover letter explaining the research project and its objectives was included. Additionally, the cover letter included statements confirming the voluntary participation of respondents, confidentiality and guarantee of anonymity. The names of the respondents were not requested. The initial section of the questionnaire contained screening questions aligned with the sample criteria to confirm the eligibility of participants. This section also included demographic questions, which were followed by the structured questions for authentic leadership, participative decision-making and strategy implementation.

4.8. Data analysis approach

Prior to commencing with data analysis, the researcher confirmed that the secondary raw data contained sufficient qualifying responses. The raw data contained 1594 captured responses, which were sufficient to conduct analysis and answer the research questions posed in the study. Quantitative data undergoes three steps during processing: data management (which includes data cleaning, coding and entry), data analysis and interpretation (Alem, 2020).

Data cleaning: The data cleaning step is critical for enhancing the data quality before analysis (Sharifnia et al., 2025). In cleaning and preparing the data for coding and entry, the researcher verified whether all the responses met the qualifying criteria. In this step, 279 responses that did not meet the qualifying criteria were deleted. This included responses from individuals in organisations not operating in South Africa's private sector, respondents from organisations employing less than 50 employees, respondents from organisations that have been in operation for less than three years and individuals with no experience in strategy implementation.

The data set contained 24 incomplete responses (missing data), which were also deleted from the dataset. In reviewing the patterns of the missing data, it was established

that there was no correlation between the missing values and any other observed or unobserved values, which meant the data were missing completely at random (Sharifnia et al., 2025). Given that the missing data was small in proportion to the sample size, case deletion, also known as listwise deletion, was deemed appropriate (Sharifnia et al., 2025). This includes deleting the rows with the missing values.

Data coding: Data cleaning was followed by data coding. The raw secondary data collected from the survey questionnaire contained a combination of categorical (nominal and ordinal) and numerical (interval and ratio) data as presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Data Type Included in the Survey Questionnaire

Type of data	Related questions in questionnaire used for data collection
Ratio	Q1 (Exact age on Demographic questions)
Nominal	Q2,4,6,10-14 (Demographic questions)
Ordinal	Q3,5,7-9 (Demographic questions)
Interval	Q15-80 (Likert scale for construct measurement scales)

The nominal, ordinal and interval data were coded by assigning numerical values, as numerical data underpins quantitative study designs (Castell & Bridier, 2021). The data was coded on Microsoft Excel prior to transferring the data to IBM® SPSS®. The survey items were then coded by correctly mapping the observed variables to the latent constructs (authentic leadership, participative decision-making and strategy Implementation). This step ensures alignment with the requirements of Confirmatory Composite Analysis (CCA), which is the systematic process of confirming measurement models in Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Model (PLS-SEM). A data book reflecting the assigned codes was created to manage the coding of the data. Refer to Appendix A for the measurement instrument codes.

Descriptives and Normality testing: The first step in the analysis process was to conduct descriptive statistics to gain a better understanding of the sample demographic distribution and respondents' background in strategy implementation. The descriptive statistics, which included the mean and standard deviation, were generated from the

demographic and background responses using IBM® SPSS® version 30. The construct level descriptives, which include the mean and standard deviation, were also conducted.

Following the descriptive statistics, the data was tested for normality. Normality testing is a prerequisite for most statistical tests to determine whether the data is suitable for parametric or non-parametric tests (Mishra et al., 2019; Razali & Wah, 2011). The Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests for normality were used. The Shapiro-Wilk test is described as the most robust normality test, but has been reported to be sensitive to small deviations in large sample sizes (Gosselin, 2024; Razali & Wah, 2011). The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is less robust, yet better suited for large sample sizes (Razali & Wah, 2011). The selected tests determine whether the deviations of the item distributions are significant (Gosselin, 2024). The null hypothesis (H0) for the normality tests states that the measured construct is normally distributed, while the alternative hypothesis (H1) states that the measured construct is not normally distributed. At a significance level of 95%, a p-value ≤ 0.05 rejects the null hypothesis, and a p-value > 0.05 accepts the null hypothesis. The results from the normality testing rejected the null hypothesis and revealed that the dataset is not normally distributed and thus not suitable for parametric statistical tests. This conclusion informed the tests that could be conducted on the data. The normality testing was followed by the data analysis step.

Data analysis: The SmartPLS software version 4.1.1.4 was used to conduct the SEM, which was selected as the most appropriate statistical test due to its capacity to manage observed and latent variables, and simultaneous analysis of direct and indirect effects in a single model, as is required in the current study (Ghasemy et al., 2020; Hair et al., 2021). More specifically, the researcher selected PLS-SEM over Covariance-based Structural Equation Model (CB-SEM), as it is a non-parametric statistical method that is not affected by the distribution of the data (Ghasemy et al., 2020). PLS-SEM best suits the data type and distribution of the data. In addition, the PLS-SEM approach offers greater flexibility in comparison to CB-SEM (Hair et al., 2020).

SEM is best suited for studies that make use of secondary data, have normality concerns and have multiple variables including indirect effects (Hair et al., 2019a), as is present in this study. SEM also accounts for measurement errors, which can impact the integrity of the study results (Hair et al., 2021). A similar study by Nqumba and Scheepers (2023)

that examined the mediation effect of participative decision-making on the relationship between authentic leadership and strategic CSR in South African private sector organisations made use of SEM, thus supporting the researcher's choice to use SEM.

PLS-SEM uses a non-parametric bootstrapping technique to estimate the path model by randomly generating subsamples from the original dataset. The bootstrapping process included 5000 resamples; this process provided a robust estimation of the indirect, mediating effects of participative decision-making on authentic leadership and strategy implementation (Hayes, 2018). A significance level of 95% was adopted for the hypothesis testing. Resultantly, the path coefficients in the structural model were considered significant if they reported a p-value less than 0.05.

The assumptions listed in Table 5 for the SEM analysis were tested prior to conducting the hypothesis testing. The results from the assumption testing are also presented in the table.

Table 5

Assumptions and Testing Outcome for SEM Analysis

Assumption	Requirement	Result
Adequate sample size	A minimum sample size of 200 is required to conduct SEM and mediation studies (Hair et al., 2021).	Passed
Linearity	The relationship between latent and observed constructs must be linear (Hair et al., 2021).	Passed
No multicollinearity	The variance inflation factor (VIF) should be less than 5.0 (less than 3.0 is more ideal) to ensure collinearity (Hair et al., 2019b).	Passed
Absence of univariate outliers	Standardised values (z-score) for univariate outliers should not exceed the threshold of 3.29 (Gaskin et al., 2025).	Passed

The results confirmed that none of the SEM assumptions were violated. The next step was to evaluate the measurement model to confirm the reliability and validity of the constructs using CCA, which is the first step in PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2020).

4.9. Measurement model assessment

PLS-SEM uses CCA to conduct measurement model confirmation as opposed to CFA, which is commonly used in CB-SEM (Hair et al., 2020). Earlier scholars incorrectly referred to measurement model confirmation conducted using PLS-SEM as CFA, which created confusion among scholars (Hair et al., 2020). This, in turn, led to the development of the CCA terminology to describe the measurement model confirmation process using PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2020). CFA and CCA are suitable for studies where researchers have a hypothesis about the structure of latent variables and want to confirm whether the data fit the specified model (Brown, 2015). This varies from Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), where the researcher first seeks to explore the underlying structure of the study variables (Goretzko et al., 2024). The single distinct difference between CFA and CCA is the application of the goodness-of-fit indices, which are an essential measure in CFA, yet not suitable for CCA (Hair et al., 2020).

The following steps outlined by Hair et al. (2020) were followed to conduct the CCA: indicator loadings measurement, internal consistency reliability assessments and validity assessments.

4.9.1. Indicator loadings

Indicator loadings determine the extent to which the measured variables or indicators strongly correlate with their associated latent construct (Hair et al. 2021). Standardised indicator loadings of at least 0.5 were deemed acceptable; indicator loadings less than 0.5 were deleted as recommended by Hair et al. 2014. Standardised indicator loadings higher than 0.708 were preferred (Hair et al., 2014; Cheung et al., 2024).

In this study, the researcher hypothesised based on theory and prior evidence in similar studies that the observed items measuring authentic leadership, strategy Implementation and participative decision-making would load onto a single latent construct. For example, Scheepers and Storm (2019) found that the four dimensions of authentic leadership (self-awareness, balanced processing, relational transparency, internal moral perspective) loaded under one factor and created a single-factor model that outperformed the higher-order model. Additionally, a recent study by Nqumba and Scheepers (2023) reported that all observed items measuring participative decision-

making loaded under the latent construct. Both these studies were conducted in the South African context, similar to the current study. Finally, de Oliveira et al. (2019) indicate that the five dimensions of strategy implementation described in their model are highly integrated and hold no independent significance. This supports the decision to conceptualise the construct as a unidimensional construct. The decision to model the constructs as unidimensional supports the objectives of the study, which seeks to understand the overall effect of authentic leadership and participative decision-making on strategy implementation rather than the influence and contribution of each dimension of the constructs.

4.9.2. Reliability

Reliability assesses the consistency of the measuring instrument and the outcomes (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). To assess internal consistency reliability, PLS-SEM studies commonly employ Cronbach's alpha coefficient and composite reliability (Hair et al., 2020). This is done because Cronbach's alpha coefficient often falls short of accurately reflecting true reliability (Hair et al., 2019a). Similarly, this study employed Cronbach's alpha coefficient and composite reliability to determine the reliability of the measuring scales. A result of 0.7 or greater was required to confirm internal consistency and good reliability of the measuring instrument (Hair et al., 2019a).

4.9.3. Validity

Validity is used to assess whether the measuring instrument is accurately measuring what it is meant to measure (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Different types of validity tests are described in the literature. PLS-SEM establishes construct validity by assessing convergent and discriminant validity (Sürücü & Maslakci, 2020).

Convergent validity

Convergent validity measures the degree to which items, measuring the same construct, are related (Ghasemy et al., 2020). To confirm convergent validity, the average explained variance (AVE) for each construct was expected to be greater than or equal to 0.5 (Hair et al., 2019a; Hair et al., 2020).

Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity measures the extent to which a construct is distinct from other constructs included in the model (Taherdoost, 2016; Hair et al., 2019a). This is to confirm that each construct measured a unique concept and there was no overlap with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In this study, it was used to measure the degree to which strategy implementation, authentic leadership and participative decision-making are distinct from each other.

To determine discriminant validity, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was applied by comparing the square root of each construct's average variance extracted (AVE) with the inter-construct correlations. To meet the conditions of discriminant validity, the diagonal values needed to be greater than the corresponding inter-construct correlations (Cheung et al., 2024). Additionally, the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) was used to evaluate common variance between the three constructs (Hair et al., 2019a; Hair et al., 2020). The HTMT has been described as the most reliable method in detecting discriminant validity issues (Ghasemy et al., 2020). To indicate discriminant validity, a ratio of below 0.9 for conceptually related constructs was required (Hair et al., 2019a; Hair et al., 2020). Table 6, presented below, summarises the measurement model assessments and criteria that were required for acceptance.

Table 6

Measurement Model Assessments and Criteria

Measurement model assessment	Criteria
Reliability	
Indicator loadings	Standardised indicator loadings should be no less than 0.5. Indicator loadings higher than 0.708 are preferred (Hair et al., 2014; Cheung et al., 2024).
Cronbach's alpha coefficient	A result of 0.7 or greater is required to confirm internal consistency and good reliability of the measuring instrument (Hair et al., 2019a; Hair et al., 2020).

Composite reliability	A result of 0.7 or greater is required to confirm internal consistency and good reliability of the measuring instrument (Hair et al., 2019a; Hair et al., 2020).
Validity	
Convergent validity	AVE for each construct should be greater than or equal to 0.5 (Hair et al., 2019a; Hair et al., 2020).
Discriminant validity	
Fornell-Larcker	The square root of each construct's AVE should be greater than the corresponding inter-construct correlations (Cheung et al., 2024).
Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio	A ratio of below 0.9 for conceptually related constructs must be achieved (Hair et al., 2019a; Hair et al., 2020).

4.10. Structural model assessment

Following the measurement model assessment was the evaluation of the structural model and testing of the hypotheses, which followed the below structural model assessment steps detailed by Hair et al. (2020).

1. Collinearity assessment was conducted using the variance VIF values to check for multicollinearity among the study predictors. The VIF for predictor constructs should be less than 5.0 (less than 3.0 is more ideal) to indicate the absence of problematic multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2019b) and support the reliability of the analysis.
2. Measured the Coefficient of Determination (R square) to establish the model's explanatory power (i.e., how well the model explains the outcomes). An R square of 0.75 indicates a substantial explanatory power, R square of 0.5 indicates moderate explanatory power, and an R square of 0.25 indicates a weak explanatory power (Hair et al., 2011).
3. Measured the predictive relevance (Q^2) to evaluate the predictive capability of the model. Q^2 values greater than 0 depict small predictive accuracy, values

greater than 0.25 depict medium predictive accuracy, and values greater than 0.50 depict large predictive accuracy (Hair et al., 2019b).

4. Estimated the path coefficients (β) using bootstrapping (5000 resamples) to determine the direction and strength of the relationships between Authentic leadership, participative decision-making and strategy implementation.
5. Tested for significance (p-value) by using the bootstrapping technique (5000 resamples). A p-value less than 0.05 indicated statistical significance, supporting the hypothesis.
6. Measured the effect size (f^2) using Cohen's f^2 to establish the impact size. An f^2 value of 0.15 reflects a small effect, an f^2 value of 0.25 reflects a medium effect, while an f^2 value of 0.35 reflects a large effect (Gignac & Szodorai, 2016).
7. The mediation analysis was conducted using the bootstrapping technique with 5000 resamples. This analysis focused on the significance of the indirect effects of authentic leadership on strategy implementation through participative decision-making. Mediation effects were confirmed when the p-value of the indirect path through participative decision-making was less than 0.05. Establishing whether the mediation was partial or full relied on whether the direct influence of authentic leadership on strategy implementation remained significant (i.e., p-value < 0.05). If both direct and indirect paths were significant, then partial mediation was concluded. If the direct path was not significant while the indirect path was significant, then full mediation was inferred and concluded (Sidhu et al., 2021).

4.11. Research ethics and data storage

The researcher ensured that the required consent and authorisation to carry out this study were obtained by seeking ethical clearance from the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) ethics committee. A permission letter from the GIBS faculty to use the secondary data was obtained. The data was solely used for the purposes stated in this research and was not distributed to further parties. All data was used in its aggregated form with no names reported. The researcher stored the data on Google Drive without any identifiers. The data will be stored on the GIBS Data Storage system, where it will remain accessible for a period of 10 years.

4.12. Limitations

The study has limitations, which are noted in this section. Due to time and practical considerations, a cross-sectional study was conducted. Cross-sectional studies are criticised for either over-or underrepresenting the relationships between variables and are also prone to information bias due to participants' inclination to give socially acceptable answers (Maier et al., 2023). Strong causal inferences can therefore not be established (Wang & Cheng, 2020; Bono & McNamara, 2011).

Secondly, the non-probability sampling technique used in this study poses a higher risk of sampling error (Stratton, 2023). The study's focus on South African private sector organisations limits the applicability of the results to public sector organisations and other geographical contexts. An additional limitation of this study is the use of secondary data collected by MBA students as the researcher had no control over the data collection process.

Lastly, the structural model did not include control variables, which limits the ability to partial out the true effects (Sturman et al., 2022) of authentic leadership behaviours and participative decision-making practices on strategy implementation from other factors. Scholars have cautioned against excessive use of demographic variables as control variables, especially if they lack a strong theoretical rationale, as they can distort true relationships (Hünermund & Louw, 2025; Sturman et al., 2022; Bernerth & Aguinis, 2016).

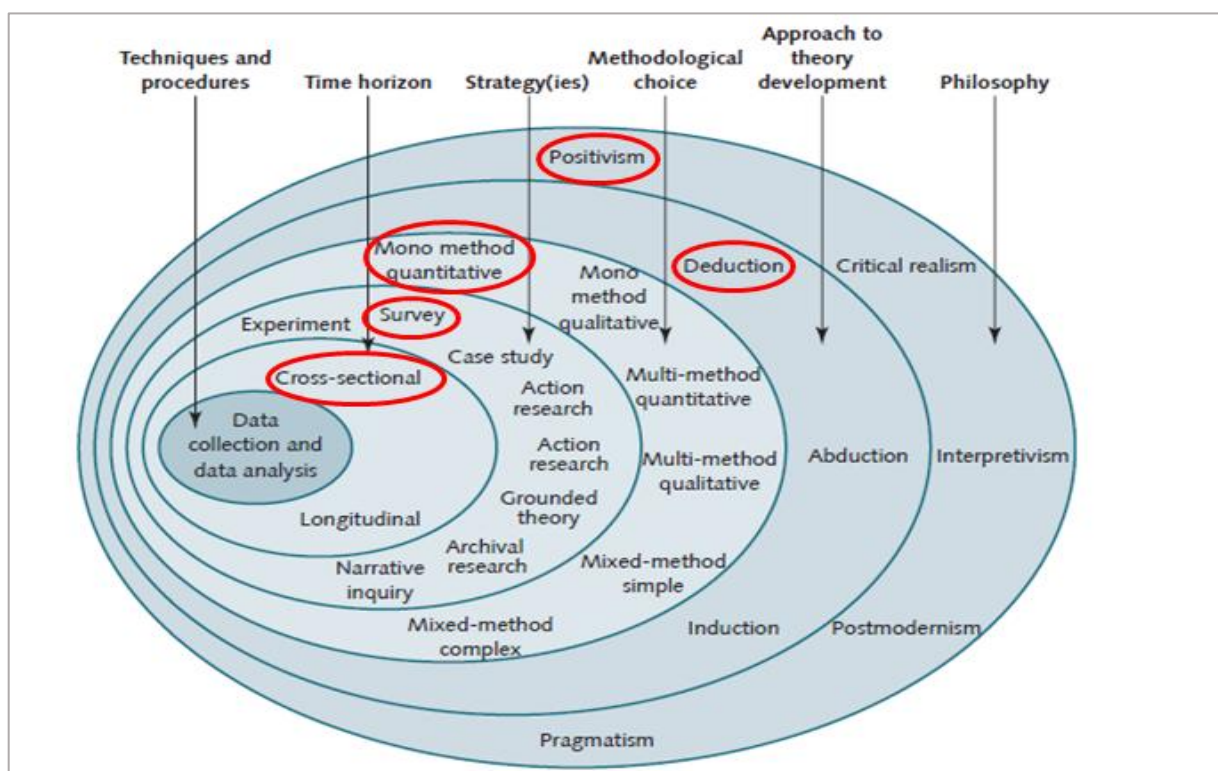
4.13. Conclusion

In conclusion, the research design for this study was descripto-explanatory, which combined descriptive with explanatory research. The researcher adopted a positivist approach, which allowed the researcher to assume an objective view and follow structured methods. The deductive approach enabled the researcher to develop hypotheses from existing theory. The quantitative method, which was aligned to the researcher's positivist approach, was employed. The study made use of secondary data collected through self-administered online surveys by MBA students. The study was cross-sectional, as the data was collected in one period, presenting a view of the subject at a certain point in time.

The population for this study included all employees employed in various organisations in South Africa's private sector. The unit of analysis for this study was individual employees' responses. Criterion sampling was used as a sampling method. The respondents participating in this study were required to be employed in South African private sector organisations that employ more than 50 people and have been in operation for more than three years. The individuals were also required to have experience in strategy implementation. SEM was selected as the most appropriate statistical test, particularly PLS-SEM. Figure 2 presents the research onion (Saunders & Lewis, 2018), which maps out the research process and the choices taken by the researcher.

Figure 2

The Research Onion Showing the Research Process



Note. Adapted from *Doing Research in Business and Management* (2nd ed., p.105), by M. Saunders and P. Lewis, 2018, Pearson Education. Copyright © 2018 by Mark Saunders and Philip Lewis.

5. RESULTS

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the results from the data analysis process described in Chapter 4. The chapter follows a structured sequence, starting with descriptive statistics to describe the sample profile and the measured constructs. This is followed by the results from the normality testing and the measurement model assessment to establish validity and reliability. Lastly, the results from the structural model assessment, including the hypotheses stated in Chapter 3, are presented. The results from the hypothesis testing are presented in dedicated subsections as presented in Chapter 3 to ensure clarity and readability of the report.

5.2. Descriptive statistics

5.2.1. Sample size

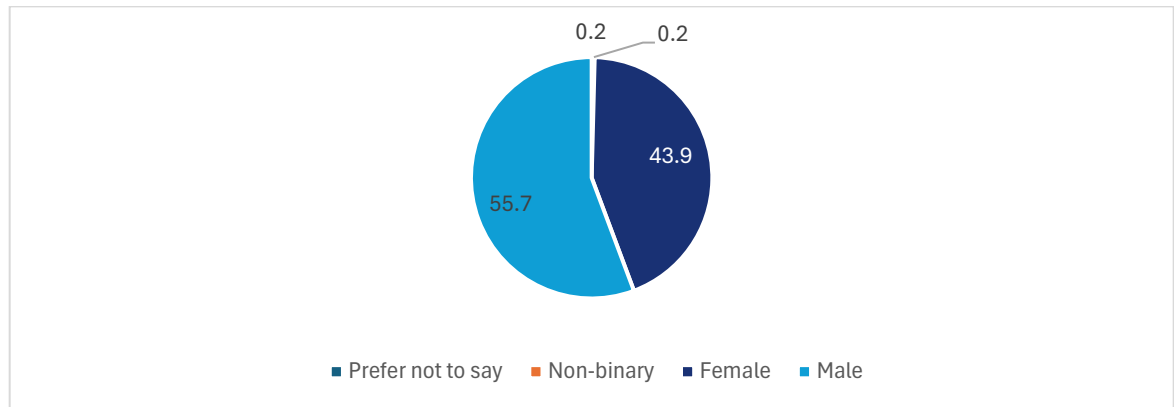
The raw secondary data that the researcher received contained 1594 responses. The sample size was reduced to 1291 after deleting missing data and removing responses that did not meet the qualifying criteria (i.e., organisations with less than three years of operation, organisations employing less than 50 people, organisations not operating in South Africa's private sector, and participants with no experience in strategy implementation). The sample size of 1291 was well above the minimum sample size of 200 responses required to conduct SEM and mediation studies (Hair et al., 2021). This large sample size increases the confidence and generalisability of the statistical test outcomes (Park et al., 2020). A summary of the key participants' demographic information is described in the next section. Additional descriptive statistics are provided in Appendix B for reference.

5.2.2. Sample demographic profile

Figure 3 illustrates the gender distribution of the study respondents.

Figure 3

Gender Distribution of Respondents

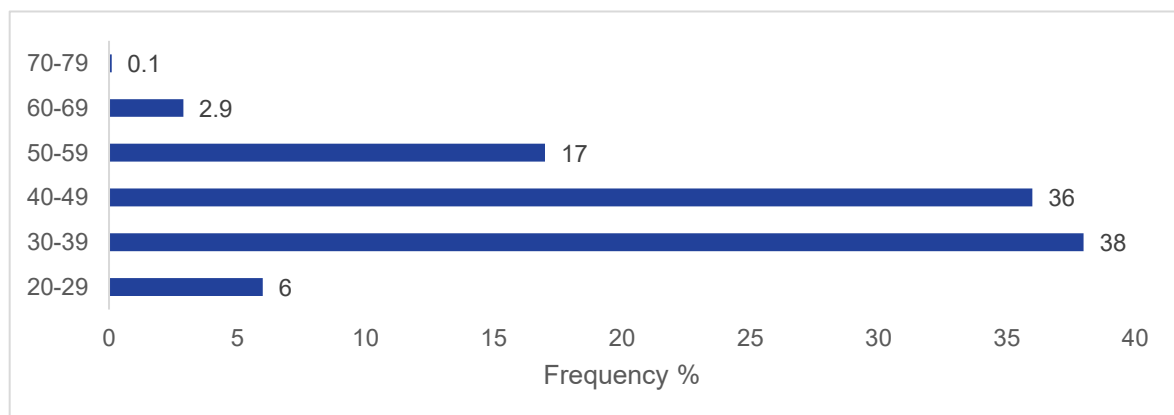


Males account for 55.7% of the respondents, while females account for 43.9%. Non-binary respondents account for 0.2% and 0.2% of respondents preferred not to say. While more than half of the sample represents males, females are also well represented, reflecting a fairly balanced distribution. The researcher is therefore confident that the findings from the study will represent both genders.

The age distribution of the participants is presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Age Distribution of Respondents

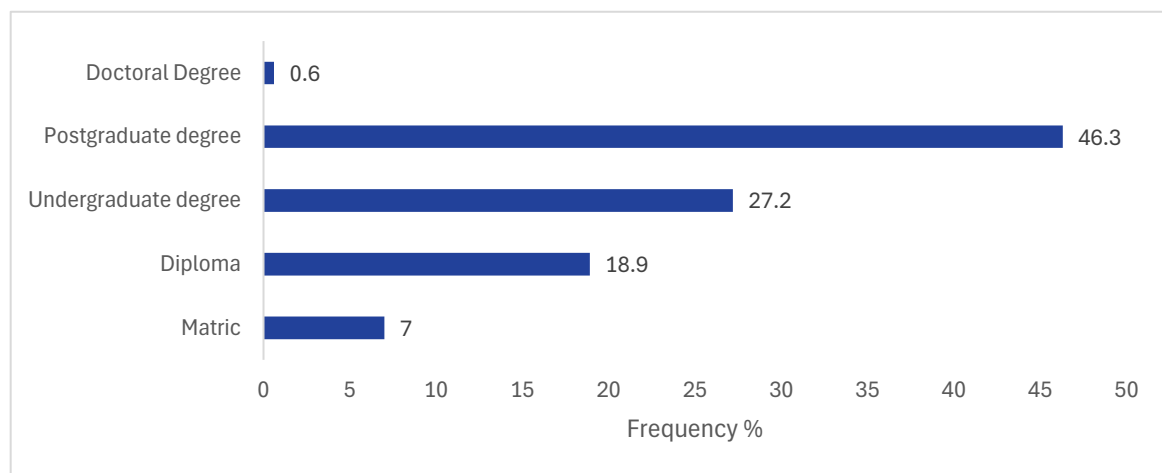


The 30-39 age group accounts for the largest portion of the respondents and makes up 38% of the sample size. This is followed by the age group 40-49, which accounts for 36% of the sample. These two age groups combined account for 74% of the respondents. This sample is heavily concentrated in this age group, which represents middle-aged working professionals. This is in line with the working-age demographic in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2025). The 70-79 age group for the lowest % of the sample, accounting for 0.1% of the sample. This is followed by the 60-69 age group. This is expected as most individuals in those age groups are likely to have retired in line with the retirement age of South Africa.

Figure 5 presents the education level distribution of the respondents.

Figure 5

Education Level Distribution of Respondents

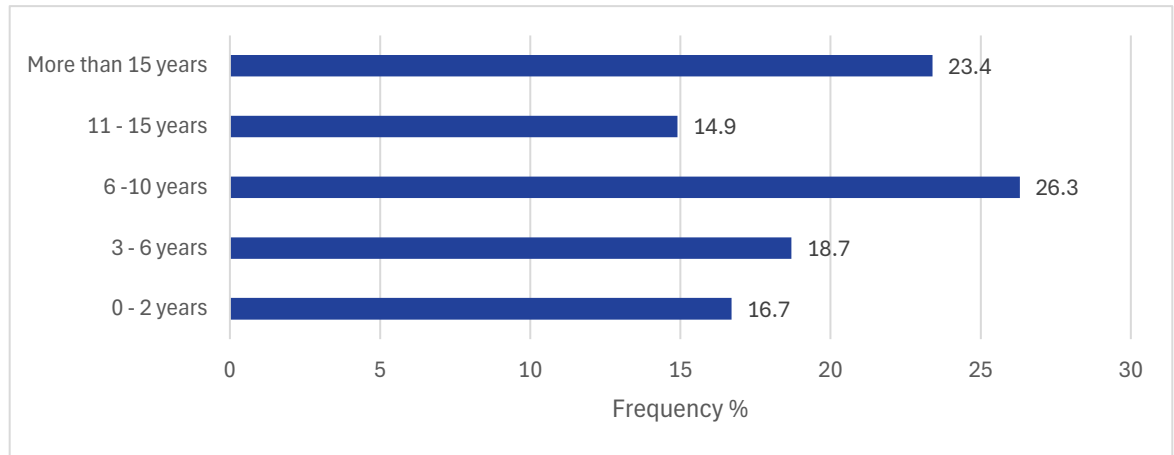


More than 93% of the respondents had a tertiary qualification. Only 7% had a matric level education. Postgraduate degree level accounts for the majority of the respondents at 46.3%. Undergraduate degree level accounts for the second highest portion of the sample at 27.2%. Doctoral degree level accounts for 0.6%, which is the smallest portion of the sample. The sample group is highly qualified, with the majority possessing a tertiary level qualification. This represents a sample group of skilled professionals.

The tenure of the participants in their respective organisations is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Tenure Distribution of Respondents

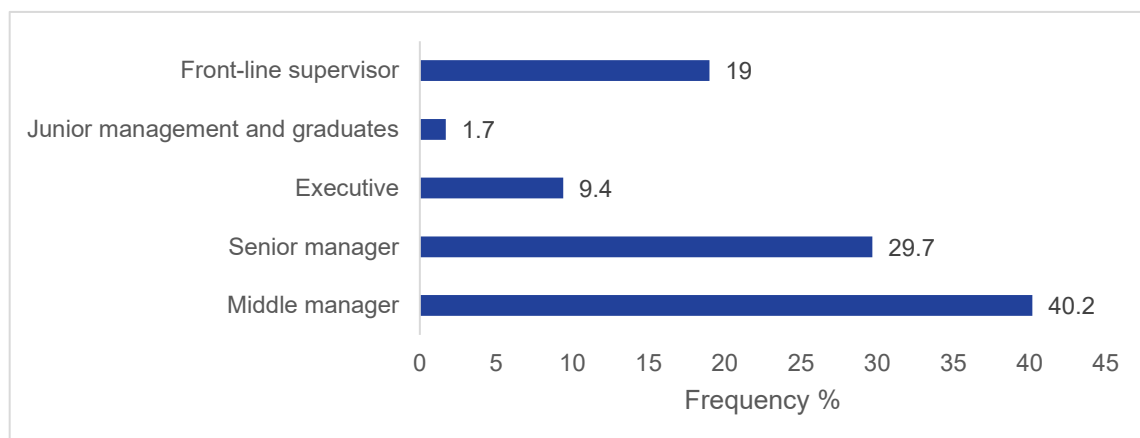


The tenure of the respondents in their organisations is adequately balanced. The largest proportion of respondents (26.3%) have been in their organisation for 6-10 years. This is followed by respondents who have been in their organisations for more than 15 years at 23.4%. The lowest proportion of respondents has been in their organisation for 11-15 years at 14.9%.

The respondents' organisational level distribution is presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7

Organisational Level Distribution of Respondents

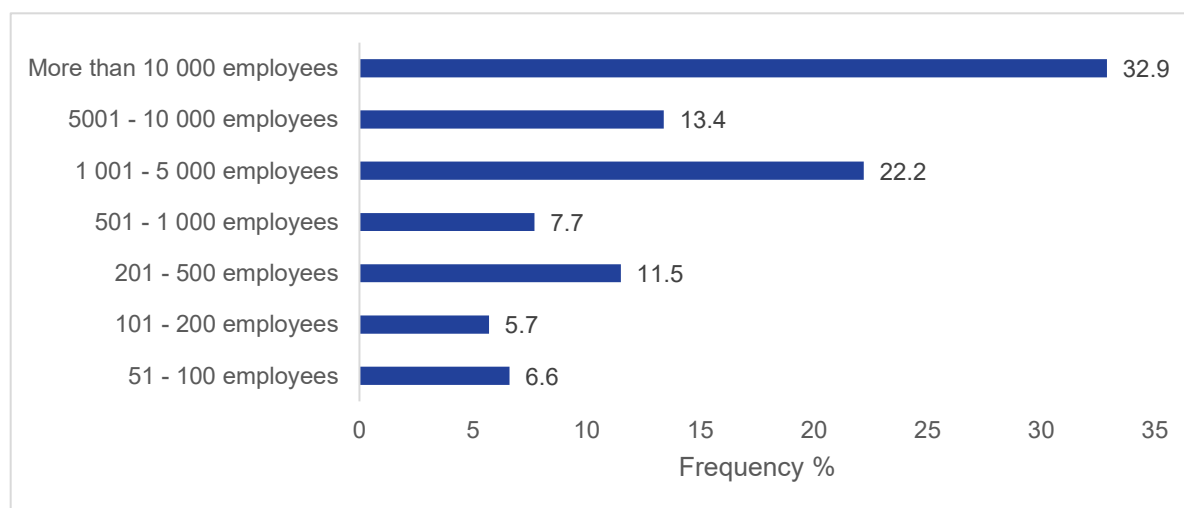


Middle and senior management levels combined account for 69.9% of the respondents (Middle managers make up 40.2%, while senior management makes up 29.7%). Executive level accounts for 9.4% with the smallest proportion of respondents (1.7%) in junior management and graduate roles. This reveals that the sample is predominantly senior, middle management and executive leaders who are responsible for strategy implementation, leadership and decision-making. The findings from the study will thus mostly reflect the perceptions of these leaders. This is satisfactory to the researcher as the majority of recent research in strategy implementation has primarily focused on middle managers. Middle managers have a better understanding of the daily operations and activities related to the strategy implementation process and play a critical role in this process (Tawse et al., 2024).

Figure 8 indicates the organisational size distribution. Participants from organisations that employ less than 50 employees did not meet the criteria for this study and thus were excluded from this study.

Figure 8

Organisational Size Distribution



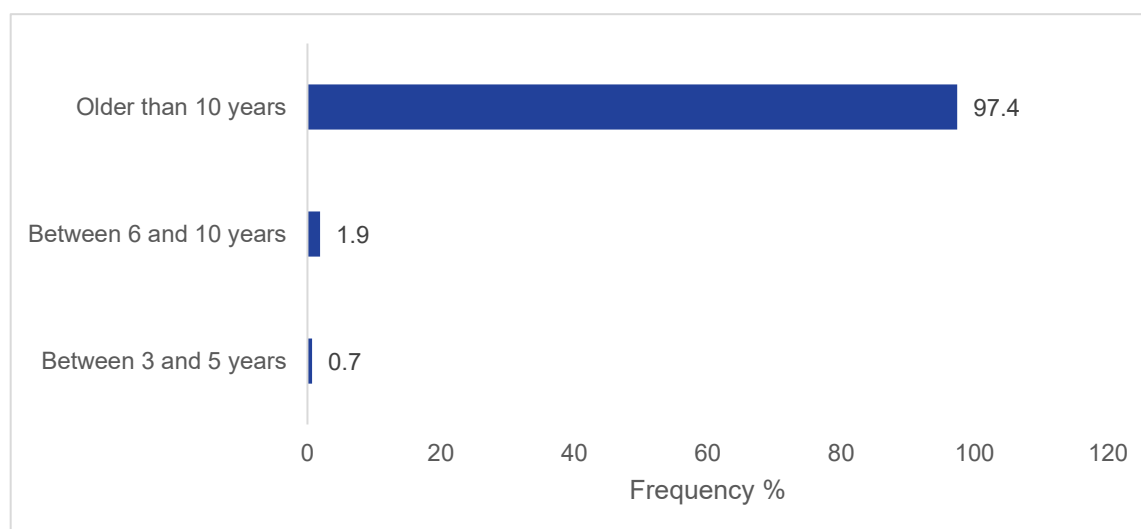
The largest portion of respondents (32.9%) represents organisations that employ more than 10,000 employees, representing large enterprises. This is followed by respondents from organisations employing 1001-5000 employees at 22.2%. The smallest group of participants are employed in organisations that employ 101 – 200 employees. Small

businesses employing fewer than 50 employees were excluded from the study. The data reveals that more than 68% of the sample size consists of participants from large organisations that employ more than 1000 employees.

Figure 9 illustrates the organisational age distribution. Respondents in organisations that have been in operation for less than three years did not meet the criteria for this study and were therefore removed from the sample.

Figure 9

Organisational Age Distribution

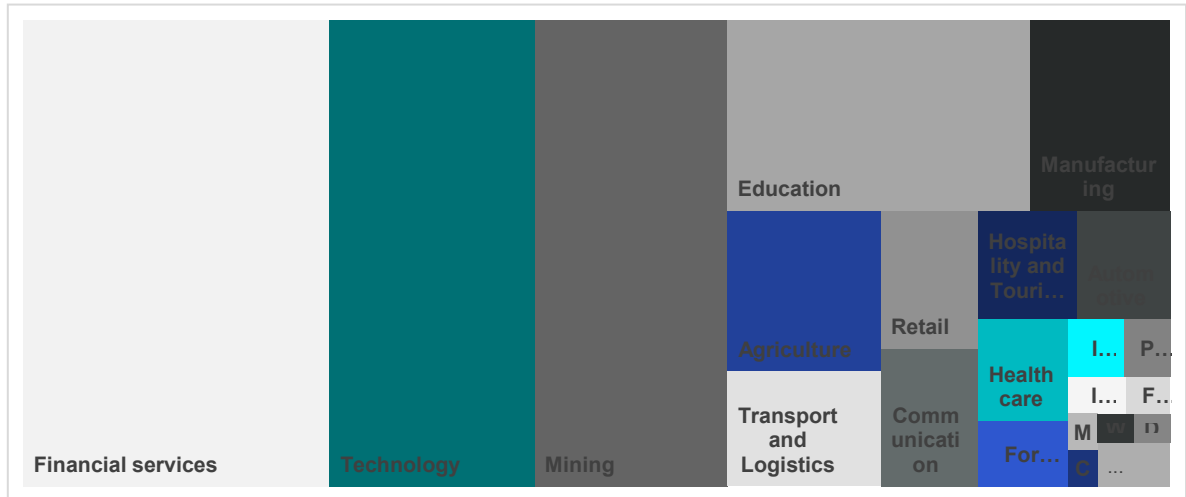


The largest number of respondents (97.4%) are employed in organisations that have been in operation for more than 10 years. The smallest proportion of respondents are employed in organisations between three and five years. The sample highly represents long-established, mature organisations.

The industry distribution of the sample is depicted in the treemap below (Figure 10).

Figure 10

Industry Distribution of Sample



The financial services industry accounts for 26.7% of the respondents, followed by the technology industry at 17.9%. The mining sector accounts for the third largest industry at 16.8%, with Education accounting for the fourth largest at 10.8%. Together, these four industries account for 72.2%. Other industries account for less than 5% each.

The construct level descriptives are presented next.

5.3. Measured constructs descriptives

The construct level means and standard deviations are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Construct Level Descriptives

Constructs	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Authentic leadership	1291	3.66	0.96
Participative Decision-making	1291	3.07	1.02
Strategy Implementation	1291	3.62	0.79

Authentic Leadership

The mean for the authentic leadership constructs was 3.66, which is closer to 4 than it is to 3. The results indicate that the respondents tended to agree with statements that their leaders displayed authentic leadership behaviours most of the time, as reflected by the authentic leadership Likert scale (Appendix C, Table C1). The standard deviation of 0.96 represents a moderate variability around the mean.

Participative decision-making

The mean for the participative decision-making construct was 3.07, which is closer to 3 than it is to 4. The results indicate that respondents tended to agree with statements that their leaders enacted participative decision-making practices about half the time, as reflected by the participative decision-making Likert scale (Appendix C, Table C2). The standard deviation of 1.02 represents a large variability around the mean, thus lower consensus among respondents.

Strategy Implementation

The mean for the strategy implementation construct was 3.62, which is closer to 4 than it is to 3. The results indicate that the respondents were moderately satisfied that the strategy was being implemented effectively in their organisation, as reflected by the strategy implementation Likert scale (Appendix C, Table C3). The standard deviation of 0.79 represents a moderate variability around the mean.

The subsequent section presents the results from the normality assessment.

5.4. Normality testing

Normality testing was conducted using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests for normality. This was done to confirm the distribution of the data prior to the statistical testing. The null hypothesis (H0) for the normality tests states that the measured construct is normally distributed, while the alternative hypothesis (H1) states that the measured construct is not normally distributed. At a significance level of 95%, a p-value ≤ 0.05 rejects the null hypothesis, and a p-value > 0.05 accepts the null hypothesis. The results for the normality tests are presented in Table 8.

Table 8*Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests for Normality*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Authentic Leadership	0.114	1188	0.000	0.938	1188	0.000
Participative Decision-making	0.108	1188	0.000	0.968	1188	0.000
Strategy Implementation	0.093	1188	0.000	0.972	1188	0.000
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction						

The results indicate that the p-values across the three constructs are below 0.05 for both normality tests. These results therefore reject the null hypothesis, indicating statistically significant deviation from normality. This leads to the conclusion that the data is not normally distributed and thus not suitable for parametric statistical tests. As such, PLS-SEM, which is a non-parametric statistical method that makes no distributional assumptions, was deemed appropriate to conduct the SEM (Hair et al., 2019b).

The next section presents the results from the measurement model assessment, which was conducted before the hypothesis testing could be conducted.

5.5. Measurement model assessment

The measurement model was assessed to confirm reliability and validity and ensure the integrity of the structural model analysis. The outcomes from the measurement model evaluation, which comprised indicator loadings, reliability and validity assessments, are presented in the next section.

5.5.1. Indicator loadings

CCA was conducted to assess the degree to which the measured variables or indicators strongly correlate with their associated latent construct (Hair et al., 2021). CCA is assessed by evaluating the outer loadings of each indicator.

Figure 11 presents the PLS-SEM outer model, which reflects the standardised indicator loadings.

Figure 11

Outer Model Indicator Loadings

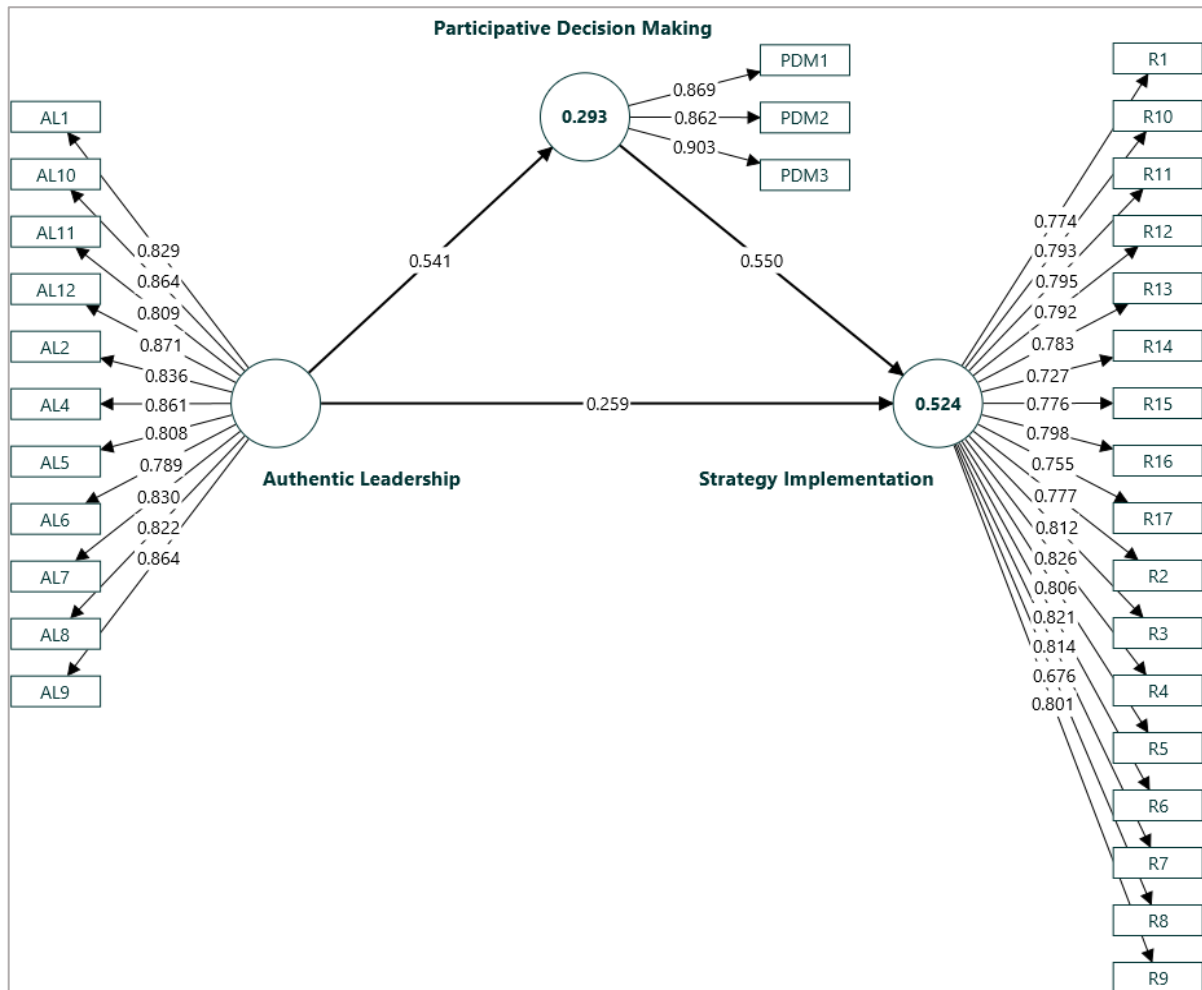


Figure 11 shows that the indicators loaded well onto their intended latent constructs with no cross-loadings. All individual indicators measuring the strategy implementation and participative decision-making latent constructs had factor loadings above 0.5 (Hair et al., 2014). Only one indicator measuring the authentic leadership construct had a factor loading below 0.5 and was thus removed from the model as recommended by Hair et al. (2014). The removed indicator was AL3 (refer to Appendix A for the coding of the questions). The remaining loadings of each indicator exceeded the preferred threshold

of 0.708, except for indicator R8, which had an outer loading of 0.676, which is deemed acceptable and thus retained in the model (Hair et al., 2019b). The outer loadings confirm that the indicators strongly correlate with each of their respective constructs.

5.5.2. Reliability

Cronbach's alpha coefficient and composite reliability were employed to assess the internal consistency and reliability of the measuring scales. Table 9 presents the output of the reliability assessment for each latent construct.

Table 9

Internal Reliability for Latent Constructs

	Cronbach's coefficient	alpha	Composite reliability
Authentic Leadership	0.930		0.940
Participative decision-making	0.852		0.910
Strategy Implementation	0.941		0.944

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient and composite reliability measure for each of the study constructs are well above 0.7. This confirms internal consistency and good reliability of the measuring instruments for each of the constructs.

5.5.3. Validity

Construct validity, which assesses convergent and discriminant validity, was employed to determine whether the measuring instruments accurately measure what they are intended to measure.

Convergent validity

Convergent validity is assessed by evaluating the AVE of the latent constructs. Table 10 presents the AVE values for each of the constructs.

Table 10*Convergent Validity Using AVE Values*

Construct	AVE
Authentic Leadership	0.698
Participative decision-making	0.771
Strategy Implementation	0.616

The AVE for each of the three constructs is above 0.5. The results confirm that each of the constructs explains more than 50% of the variance of its observed indicators, thus confirming convergent validity.

Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity was used to measure the degree to which strategy implementation, authentic leadership and participative decision-making are distinct from each other. Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell and Larcker criterion and the HTMT ratio. The results from the Fornell and Larcker criterion are presented in Table 11.

Table 11*Discriminant Validity - Fornell and Larcker Criterion*

	Authentic Leadership	Participative decision-making	Strategy Implementation
Authentic Leadership	0.835		
Participative decision-making	0.541	0.878	
Strategy Implementation	0.557	0.690	0.785

The diagonal values represent the square root of each construct's AVE. The results indicate that the square root of each construct AVE is greater than the corresponding inter-construct correlations. The Fornell and Larcker criterion confirms that strategy

implementation, authentic leadership and participative decision-making constructs are distinct from each other.

The Fornell and Larcker criterion was followed by the HTMT, whose results are depicted in Table 12.

Table 12

Discriminant Validity – HTMT Ratios

	Authentic Leadership	Participative decision-making
Participative decision-making	0.597	
Strategy Implementation	0.578	0.760

The results show that the HTMT ratios for each of the constructs are below 0.9, which indicates that there is no common variance between the constructs. These results confirm that there are no issues with discriminant validity. The two measures used to assess discriminant validity confirm that there are no discriminant validity concerns. As such, authentic leadership, participative decision-making and strategy implementation are conceptually distinct. The measurement model was satisfactory to proceed with the structural model assessment and hypothesis testing. The results from the structural model assessment are presented in the following section.

5.6. Structural Model assessment

5.6.1. Collinearity assessment

Collinearity assessment was conducted using the VIF to check for multicollinearity among the study predictors (i.e., independent variables). Table 13 presents the VIF results between the predictor constructs.

Table 13*Multicollinearity Assessment Using VIF Values*

Independent variable	Dependent variable	VIF
Authentic Leadership	Strategy Implementation	1.415
Authentic Leadership	Participative decision-making	1.000
Participative decision-making	Strategy Implementation	1.415

The VIF values for the predictor constructs are all less than the ideal threshold of 3.0, confirming that there are no multicollinearity concerns in the model.

5.6.2. Coefficient of determination

The model's coefficient of determination (R square), which measures the model's explanatory power and goodness of fit, is presented in Table 14.

Table 14*Explanatory Power of the Structural Model*

	Coefficient of determination (R square)
Participative decision-making	0.293
Strategy Implementation	0.524

The results indicate that the model explains 29.3% of the variance of participative decision-making, which is representative of a weak to moderate explanatory power. The model also explains 52.4% of the variance of strategy implementation, which represents a moderate explanatory power.

5.6.3. Predictive relevance

The model's predictive relevance (Q^2), which measures the model's predictive capability, is presented in Table 15.

Table 15*Predictive Relevance of the Structural Model*

	Predictive relevance (Q²)
Participative decision-making	0.292
Strategy Implementation	0.309

The Q² values presented in the table are greater than 0.25, which demonstrates a medium predictive power of the predictors of participative decision-making and strategy implementation.

5.7. Hypotheses testing

The structural model assessment was followed by the study hypothesis testing. The results present the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variables. The path coefficient (β) indicates the direction and strength of the relationship between the constructs. The p-value indicates the significance of the relationship while, Cohen's f^2 indicates the effect size.

5.7.1. Hypothesis 1: Authentic leadership and Strategy Implementation

The output for hypothesis 1 testing, which examined the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation, is presented in Table 16.

Table 16*Results for Hypothesis 1 Testing*

	Path coefficient (β)	Effect size (f^2)	P-value
Hypothesis 1: There is a significant, positive relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation	0.259	0.100	0.000

The path coefficient (β value) of 0.259 indicates that there is a positive relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation. The p-value of 0.000 confirms that the relationship is statistically significant. Moreover, the $f^2 = 0.100$ indicates

a small effect size, which means authentic leadership explains 10% of the variance in strategy implementation. As a result, the hypothesis that there is a significant, positive relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation is accepted.

5.7.2. Hypothesis 2: Authentic leadership and Participative decision-making

The output for hypothesis 2 testing, which examined the relationship between authentic leadership and participative decision-making, is presented in Table 17.

Table 17

Results for Hypothesis 2 Testing

	Path coefficient (β)	Effect size (f^2)	P-value
Hypothesis 2: There is a significant, positive relationship between authentic leadership and participative decision-making	0.541	0.415	0.000

The path coefficient (β value) of 0.541 indicates that there is a positive relationship between authentic leadership and participative decision-making. The p-value of 0.000 confirms that the relationship is statistically significant. Moreover, the $f^2 = 0.415$ indicates a large effect size, which means authentic leadership explains 41.5% of the variance in participative decision-making. As a result, the hypothesis that there is a significant, positive relationship between authentic leadership and participative decision-making is accepted.

5.7.3. Hypothesis 3: Participative decision-making and Strategy Implementation

The output for hypothesis 3 testing, which examined the relationship between participative decision-making and strategy implementation, is presented in Table 18.

Table 18

Results for Hypothesis 3 Testing

	Path coefficient (β)	Effect size (f^2)	P-value
Hypothesis 3: There is a significant, positive relationship between participative decision-making and strategy implementation	0.550	0.448	0.000

The path coefficient (β value) of 0.550 indicates that there is a positive relationship between participative decision-making and strategy implementation. The p-value of 0.000 confirms that the relationship is statistically significant. Moreover, the $f^2 = 0.448$ indicates a large effect size, which means participative decision-making explains 44.8% of the variance in strategy implementation. As a result, the hypothesis that there is a significant, positive relationship between participative decision-making and strategy implementation is accepted.

5.8. Mediation Analysis

The final hypothesis that states that participative decision-making mediates the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation was tested. The results are presented in Table 19.

5.8.1. Hypothesis 4: Mediating effect of participative decision-making

Table 19

Results for Mediation Testing

	Path coefficient (β) Indirect effect	P-value	Path coefficient (β) Direct effect	P-value
Hypothesis 4: Participative decision-making mediates the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation	0.298	0.000	0.295	0.000

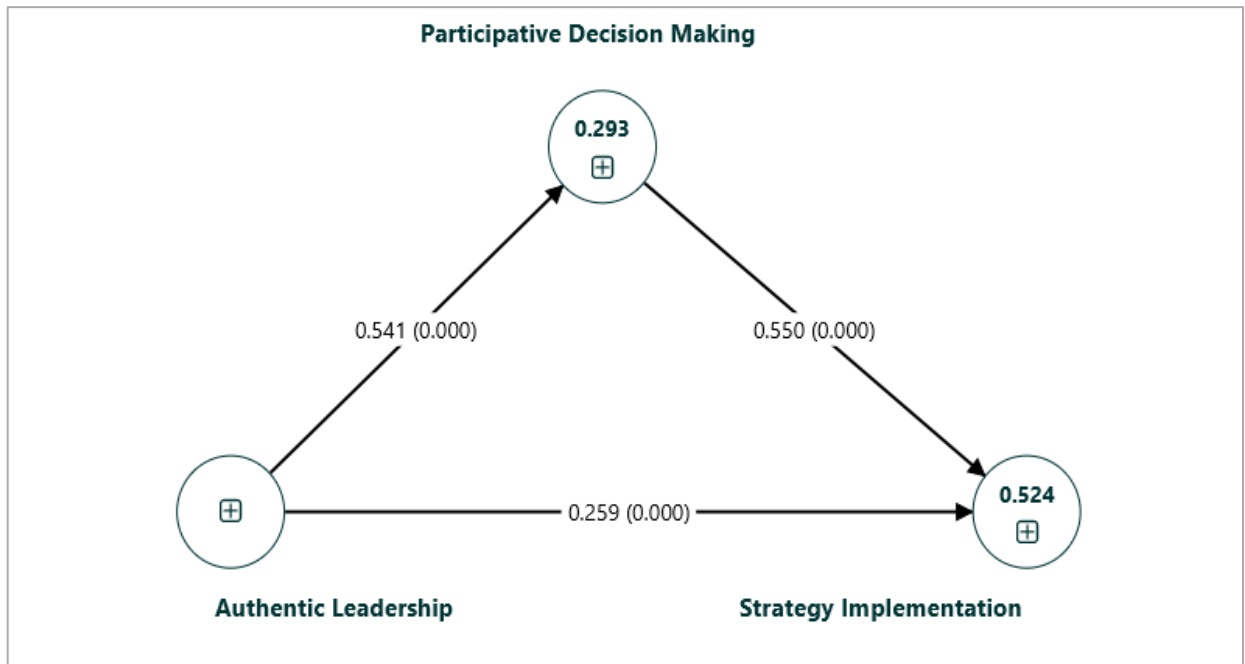
The indirect effect of authentic leadership on strategy implementation through participative decision-making is statistically significant with a path coefficient (β value) of 0.298 and a p-value of 0.000. This confirms that participative decision-making mediates the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation. Additionally, the direct effect of authentic leadership on strategy implementation remains statistically significant with a path coefficient (β value) of 0.295 and a p-value of 0.000. This indicates partial mediation. The result confirms that authentic leadership influences strategy implementation both directly and indirectly through participative decision-making.

5.9. Conclusion

This chapter presented the sample demographics and construct-level descriptives. The study sample was largely dominated by middle-to-senior managers employed in large, established organisations that have been in operation for more than 10 years. The participants were highly educated, with the majority possessing a postgraduate qualification. Additionally, financial services, technology, mining and education were the dominant industries represented in this sample. The measurement model revealed strong Cronbach's alphas and composite reliability with no convergent validity or discriminant validity concerns. This confirmed the reliability and validity of the constructs. The structural model for the study is presented in Figure 12.

Figure 12

Structural Model



The model summarises the coefficient of determination, path coefficients and p-value of the relationships described in the study. The p-values for hypotheses 1,2,3, and 4 were significant, revealing that authentic leadership behaviours have a positive influence on strategy implementation and participative decision-making. Additionally, participative decision-making practices have a positive influence on strategy implementation and partially mediate the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation. Table 20 summarises the results of the study's hypothesis testing.

Table 20

Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypotheses	Hypothesis conclusion Accepted / Rejected?
Hypothesis 1: There is a significant, positive relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation	Accepted

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant, positive relationship between authentic leadership and participative decision-making	Accepted
Hypothesis 3: There is a significant, positive relationship between participative decision-making and strategy implementation	Accepted
Hypothesis 4: Participative decision-making mediates the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation	Accepted

6. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed discussion of the results presented in Chapter 5. The objective of this chapter is to interpret the results and establish whether the findings detailed in the study are consistent with existing literature presented in Chapter 2 of the report. The chapter also provides an answer to the research questions and hypotheses presented in Chapters 1 and 3, respectively. The findings discussed in this chapter are drawn from a sample dominated by highly educated individuals, mostly occupying middle-to-senior management roles in large, established organisations that have been in operation for more than 10 years. The financial services, technology, mining and education industries were the dominant industries represented in the study sample. The chapter starts by discussing the key insights revealed in the measurement and structural model assessments, which is then followed by a discussion of each hypothesis before concluding the chapter.

6.2. Measurement model assessment

6.2.1. Indicator loadings

The outer model indicator loadings presented in Chapter 5, Figure 11, established that the indicators loaded well onto their intended latent constructs with no cross-loadings. The results confirmed that authentic leadership, strategy implementation and participative decision-making are unidimensional constructs as suggested in prior studies. While Walumbwa et al. (2008) conceptualised authentic leadership as a higher-order model, studies by Scheepers and Storm (2019) and more recently by Grobler and Grobler (2024) have reported that the four dimensions of authentic leadership load under one factor, creating a single-factor model that outperforms the higher-order model. These studies support the findings reported in this study. The study by de Oliveira et al. (2019) conceptualised strategy implementation as a multidimensional construct comprising five subdimensions. The results from this study suggest that in the current context, strategy implementation is a single unidimensional construct as all indicators load onto one factor. This implies that strategy implementation is treated as an integrated process rather than a distinct process in practice.

Lastly, a study by Nqumba and Scheepers (2023) reported participative decision-making as a unidimensional construct, thus supporting the study results.

6.2.2. Reliability

The Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which measure the internal consistency and reliability of the measuring scales, were well above the acceptable limit of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2019a). The authentic scale reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.930, which is slightly higher than the 0.70 to 0.90 range reported in previous studies (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Additionally, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.852 for the participative decision-making scale was slightly higher than the 0.82 reported by Nqumba and Scheepers (2023). Finally, the strategy implementation scale reported a high Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.941. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients and composite reliability values reported in Table 9, Chapter 5, confirmed internal consistency and very good reliability of the measuring instruments used in the study.

6.2.3. Validity

The results from the validity assessments established the scales' convergent and discriminant validity, therefore confirming that authentic leadership, participative decision-making and strategy implementation are conceptually distinct unidimensional constructs. These findings verify the reliability and the validity of this study and the implications thereof.

The next section discusses the findings from the hypothesis testing.

6.3. Hypothesis 1: Authentic leadership and Strategy Implementation

6.3.1. Findings

The purpose of hypothesis 1 was to answer the following research question:

Research question 1: What is the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation?

Drawing on the literature discussed in Chapter 2, the researcher hypothesised that there is a positive, significant relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation. PLS-SEM was used to test this hypothesis. The results of the

hypothesis testing are presented in Chapter 5, Table 16. The results confirmed that the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation is positive and statistically significant, with a total path coefficient of 0.259 and a p-value of 0.000. These results therefore support the hypothesis.

Additionally, the results revealed that authentic leadership had a Cohen's effect size of 0.100 on strategy implementation, which is classified as a small effect. This implies that authentic leadership explains a modest amount of variance in strategy implementation, and other variables, not included in the current study, play a substantial role in influencing strategy implementation. This result is expected as strategy implementation is a complex, multifaceted construct influenced by several organisational factors (Köseoglu et al., 2020).

6.3.2. Interpretation

The strategy-as-practice perspective, which focuses on the doing of strategy - who does it and what they do - helps us understand the practical shaping of strategy in organisations (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). The results viewed from the strategy-as-practice perspective highlight the role of authentic leaders as practitioners who, through their daily interactions and behaviours, positively influence strategy implementation (Kohtamäki et al., 2022). To understand how authentic leadership behaviours positively influence strategy implementation, it is important to restate that strategy implementation is a highly behavioural and socially interactive process (Tawse et al., 2019). Likewise, the strategy-as-practice perspective emphasises the central role that people play in the strategy implementation process, which introduces interpersonal and relational dynamics to the implementation process (Köseoglu et al., 2020; Aladag et al., 2020).

Authentic leaders possess a social capital that allows them to connect with and understand the perspectives of the people involved in the strategy implementation process (Kida et al., 2021). The foundational principle of authentic leadership theory is that leaders who are highly self-aware, ethical and transparent foster positive emotions, optimism, hope and trust, which influence followers' attitudes and behaviours (Gardner et al., 2021; Avolio et al., 2004). This fosters collaboration and a shared sense of purpose, therefore inspiring action to improve strategy implementation.

Authentic leaders' relational transparency, which they demonstrate by being open, encouraging others to speak up and openly admitting their mistakes and fears, builds trust and credibility with followers (Rego et al., 2022). More importantly, it promotes active dialogue and two-way communication, which improves translation of the organisational strategy and problem-solving during implementation (Weiser et al., 2020; Van Ruler, 2020). Two-way communication has been emphasised to be critical for effective strategy implementation as it enables discussion and negotiation between the different departments and alignment on the resources required for implementation (Köseoglu et al., 2020; de Oliveira et al., 2019). Moreover, the relational transparency of authentic leaders has been found to assist in overcoming employees' resistance to change and enhancing their commitment to the strategy actions (Gill et al., 2018).

Leaders who are authentic objectively analyse information and solicit opposing views, which improve decision-making and the organisation's ability to quickly and effectively respond to changes (Crawford et al., 2020). This enhances the organisation's control and feedback systems to drive effective strategy implementation (de Oliveira et al., 2019). Through balanced processing, authentic leaders also improve coordination by encouraging information flow across disciplines and functions. Coordination during strategy implementation has been stressed to be significantly complex and difficult to achieve (Trein et al., 2021).

The high levels of self-awareness that authentic leaders possess allow them to understand how their actions impact others. As a result, they actively seek feedback to improve and adapt their approach and decisions (Steffens et al., 2021). This level of adaptability fosters strong strategic feedback loops, which are necessary for effective strategy implementation. These leaders also have a positive influence on the development and alignment of HR policies and competencies to support effective strategy implementation (Gill et al., 2018). They internalise the HR policies through constant reflection and dialogue to ensure that there is alignment between HR policies and the strategic objectives (Gill et al., 2018). Authentic leaders also have a strong commitment and interest in developing individuals' skills and competencies (Ribeiro et al., 2022).

Authentic leadership behaviours therefore support the interpersonal and relational dynamics involved in the strategy implementation process (Musa et al., 2017; Allgood, 2015). These leaders are perceived as genuine, honest and ethical in their exchanges and build trust with their followers through open communication and establishing a system of collaborative relationships (Zeb et al., 2020). Authentic leadership challenges traditional top-down leadership styles, where followers are forced to align with the leader's views. Instead, it focuses on empowerment and influence by promoting a positive, ethical and transparent working environment (Steffens et al., 2021; Seifu & Jalata, 2022; Wang et al., 2021; Gardner et al., 2021). Authentic leaders, therefore, influence strategy implementation by demonstrating relational transparency, self-awareness, balanced processing, and ethical decision-making in practice rather than through traditional structures and formal planning.

In understanding the modest influence of authentic leadership on strategy implementation, it is important to consider the sample demographics. The sample was largely dominated by senior individuals employed in established organisations that have been in operation for over 10 years. These mature, established organisations rely on formal, bureaucratic processes and structures that may dilute the behavioural and relational impact of leaders (Kakavelakis & Edwards, 2022). It is thus not surprising that in these contexts, other factors not included in this study may have a stronger influence on strategy implementation; the influence of authentic leadership is nevertheless significant. This also confirms the complex and multifaceted nature of strategy implementation. Helmuth et al. (2023) also stress that authentic leadership, like other leadership styles, is context dependent and influenced by organisational, social and situational factors.

6.3.3. Comparison to existing literature

As previously stated in Chapter 2, very little has been found in the literature on the direct effect of authentic leadership on strategy implementation. A similar study by Musa et al. (2017) that studied the direct effect of authentic leadership on strategy implementation reported a statistically significant relationship with a slightly lower path coefficient of 0.12 than reported in the current study. A possible explanation for this may be the result of contextual differences and methodological choices in the two studies. The study by

Musa et al. (2017) did not make use of an empirically validated scale to measure the strategy implementation construct, additionally it had a single focus on small-to-medium enterprises in Nigeria's banking industry while the current study focused on private sector organisations in South Africa with the dominant industries represented in the sample being financial services (26.7%), technology (17.9%), mining (16.8%) and education(10.8%). Nonetheless, the study by Musa et al. (2017) revealed that authentic leadership at the strategic level within an organisation has a direct and positive impact on strategy implementation and the firm's performance, thus validating the study's findings.

Additionally, an empirical study by Seifu and Jalata (2022) reports that authentic leadership practices significantly predict the implementation success of planned organisational change, an aspect of strategy implementation (de Oliveira et al., 2019). Their study revealed that the four components of authentic leadership enhanced openness, engagement and commitment, which in turn improved the implementation of planned organisational change (Seifu & Jalata, 2022). Similarly, a study by Allgood (2015) that followed a qualitative, case study research methodology also reported a positive relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation. These study findings underscore the importance and relevance of leaders' authenticity in positively influencing an organisation's ability to successfully implement strategy.

The study findings support scholars who have reported a positive correlation between authentic leadership behaviours and multiple organisational outcomes, including increased coordination, commitment, employee performance and engagement (Zhang et al., 2022; Gardner et al., 2024; Seifu & Jalata, 2022; Steffens et al., 2021). The modest influence, however, confirms some of the criticism that authentic leadership is not a silver bullet solution to organisational challenges (Alvesson & Einola, 2022; Alvesson & Einola, 2019). Authenticity on its own is not sufficient to guarantee implementation success; other factors also influence strategy implementation.

6.3.4. Hypothesis conclusion and theoretical contribution

The findings, therefore, provide an answer to the research question by concluding that there is a significant, positive relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation. This conclusion is in line with previous studies and adds to the strategy-

as-practice theory by highlighting the important role of authentic leaders as practitioners in enhancing strategy implementation. The hypothesis was also tested using an empirically validated scale to measure strategy implementation, which increases the reliability of the findings. Previous studies have relied on practitioner-developed instruments to measure strategy implementation.

6.4. Hypothesis 2: Authentic leadership and Participative decision-making

6.4.1. Findings

The purpose of hypothesis 2 was to answer the following research question:

Research question 2: What is the relationship between authentic leadership and participative decision-making?

The researcher hypothesised that there is a positive, significant relationship between authentic leadership and participative decision-making. The hypothesis was tested using PLS-SEM. The results of the hypothesis testing are presented in Chapter 5, Table 17. The results confirm that there is a strong, positive and statistically significant relationship between authentic leadership and participative decision-making, with a path coefficient of 0.541, a p-value of 0.000 and a Cohen's effect size of 0.415, which indicates a large effect. These results therefore support the hypothesis. Statistically, an increase of one standard deviation in authentic leadership is associated with a 0.541 standard deviation increase in participative decision-making.

The structural model and coefficient of determination presented in Figure 8 and Table 14 in Chapter 5 show that 29.3% of the variance in participative decision-making is explained by authentic leadership.

6.4.2. Interpretation

The findings highlight the significant role authentic leadership behaviours play in shaping participative decision-making practices in organisations. Authentic leadership emerges as a key enabler of participative decision-making practices, which, under the strategy-as-practice perspective, is a strategic practice enacted by practitioners on a recurrent basis. These leaders influence the extent to which individuals across the organisation are involved in decisions. The findings suggest that leaders who demonstrate authentic

leadership behaviours create an environment where individuals across all levels of the organisation are encouraged and empowered to participate in decisions involving their work (Nqumba & Scheepers, 2023; Black, 2020). These leaders create an inclusive and participative environment where decisions are made at the right level of the organisation and employees feel like important stakeholders (Oketch & Ainembabazi, 2021; Kahnweiler & Thompson, 2000). Such an environment increases employees' willingness to share ideas and participate in decisions (Kumar et al., 2024).

These findings are expected since authentic leadership behaviours, particularly balanced processing of information, directly mirror the principles of participative decision-making. The findings further support the idea by Black (2020) that reported a strong correlation between a leader's degree of self-awareness and their ability to employ participative practices.

Authentic leaders, through openness, honesty and transparency, build trust among followers, therefore creating a psychologically safe environment where followers feel comfortable to voice their views and participate in the decision-making process. Moreover, authentic leaders show that they value the input of others by actively inviting and seeking diverse perspectives. These authentic leadership qualities are essential in creating inclusive and participative environments where decision-making is decentralised (Nqumba & Scheepers, 2023).

One of the key barriers to employees speaking up, as highlighted by classical psychological safety scholars, is the lack of confidence that the employee's opinions will be valued and considered (Edmondson, 2003). Authentic leaders overcome this barrier by building trust with their followers, which is foundational for building psychological safety (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023). This trust is further strengthened by authentic leaders' ethical behaviour and moral conviction. The findings reinforce the assertion by Wang et al. (2022) that participative decision-making only takes place in environments where there is trust between the leader and the follower.

Authentic leadership behaviours provide the relational and ethical climate that enables genuine participative decision-making practices. This extends beyond passive permission to involve employees in decision-making, but instead includes active engagement, promotion of voice behaviours and trust building. It reflects a structural

change in how decisions are traditionally taken in organisations. It is interesting to note that even in the current study context, dominated by respondents from mature organisations and largely hierarchical sectors, such as financial and mining sectors, authentic leaders can overcome the power gap and foster employee involvement. The findings are also reflective of South Africa's post-apartheid reconstruction, where organisations have placed a stronger emphasis on inclusive and participatory practices in organisations (Bell & Reed, 2022).

6.4.3. Comparison to existing literature

The findings of the current study are consistent with those of Nqumba and Scheepers (2023), who reported a statistically significant relationship between authentic leadership and participative decision-making in their study that examined the direct influence of authentic leadership on strategic CSR and indirect influence through participative decision-making in South African private organisations. Their study reported a path coefficient of 0.42 between authentic leadership and participative decision-making, which is slightly lower in comparison to the 0.541 reported in the current study. Another study by Jang et al. (2023) also reported a significant, positive relationship between authentic leadership and employee participation in performance management, thereby confirming the findings.

While the findings are consistent with the empirical evidence found in the literature, a study by Zhang et al. (2021) reported a more nuanced dynamic between authentic leadership behaviours and teachers' voice behaviours, which is a related construct to participative decision-making. Their findings revealed that the influence of authentic leadership on teachers' voice behaviours was positively moderated by the teacher's level of interpersonal trust (Zhang et al., 2021). This suggests that in some contexts, authentic leadership's influence in promoting participative practices may not be uniform and may instead be dependent on the level of interpersonal trust.

6.4.4. Hypothesis conclusion

In conclusion, the findings confirm that there is a strong, significant and positive relationship between authentic leadership and participative decision-making. Authentic leaders are key enablers of participative decision-making practices.

6.5. Hypothesis 3: Participative decision-making and Strategy Implementation

6.5.1. Findings

The purpose of hypothesis 3 was to answer the following research question:

Research question 3: What is the relationship between participative decision-making and strategy implementation?

Based on theoretical evidence discussed in Chapter 2, the researcher hypothesised that there would be a positive, significant relationship between participative decision-making and strategy implementation. The outcome of the hypothesis testing is presented in Table 18, Chapter 5. The results of the hypothesis confirmed that there is a strong, positive and statistically significant relationship between participative decision-making and strategy implementation, with a path coefficient of 0.550, a p-value of 0.000 and a Cohen's effect size of 0.448, which indicates a large effect. These results therefore support the hypothesis stated by the researcher. The path coefficient results revealed that an increase of one standard deviation in participative decision-making is associated with a 0.550 standard deviation increase in strategy implementation, which signals a substantial increase in the organisation's ability to implement its strategy effectively.

6.5.2. Interpretation

These results imply that employees who are involved in strategic decision-making are likely to direct their efforts to support the successful implementation of the formulated strategy. This finding aligns with the strategy-as-practice perspective, which focuses on what people do to implement strategy. The path coefficient highlights the significant effect of inclusive and decentralised decision-making practices in achieving successful strategy implementation.

This study positions participative decision-making as an important strategic practice under the consequentiality view of the strategy-as-practice theory. Under this view, participative decision-making is a strategic practice enacted by leaders to yield effective strategy implementation, which is an important organisational outcome (Seidl et al., 2024). By embedding these behavioural practices into daily operations, leaders promote

a relational and structural environment that enhances strategy implementation. Participative decision-making is thus a very powerful strategic practice that practitioners can enact to enhance strategy implementation.

Participative decision-making practices promote strategy translation by ensuring that employees are involved in the interpretation and establishment of clear actions to meet the strategic objectives (Bell & Reed, 2022). This boosts employee motivation and persistence of behaviours (Oketch & Ainembabazi, 2021). Employees involved in decision-making are clear on the strategic objectives, align their efforts and are more likely to be accountable for their actions (Bell & Reed, 2022).

Participative practices foster employee voice behaviour and two-way communication (Wang et al., 2022). This voice behaviour is often expressed in the form of increased ideas and information sharing in the organisation. The increased flow of information and two-way communication improves strategy implementation and drives early resolution of implementation challenges (Qing & JinHua, 2023). Furthermore, successful strategy implementation relies on effective control and feedback mechanisms. This includes internal and external environment analysis for changes that require adjustment to implementation actions (de Oliveira et al., 2019). Participative decision-making practices enhance the control and feedback process by allowing faster identification of external and internal pressures (Kwon & Kim, 2025). This is explained by the fact that employees actively engaged in the implementation of strategy often possess the knowledge of internal and external changes that could potentially influence implementation effectiveness. As a result, involving these employees in the decision-making process allows faster identification and resolution of challenges. Participative practices thus promote proactive organisations that are adaptable to changing external conditions (Valverde-Moreno et al., 2021).

Participative decision-making practices that are fully embedded in daily operations promote a relational and inclusive environment that empowers employees and enables decision-making at the right levels. This subsequently promotes employee commitment and buy-in to facilitate effective strategy implementation (Ogu, 2024; Srinivasan, 2021). This is in support of the idea that employees who feel like important stakeholders strive

to improve their performance and align efforts towards goal achievement (Oketch & Ainembabazi, 2021).

6.5.3. Comparison to existing literature

These findings are consistent with the findings reported by Al-Hashimi et al. (2022), who studied the relationship between participative decision-making and the implementation of strategic decisions in public organisations and reported a positive relationship. Additionally, the findings reinforce the theoretical argument made by Zhou et al. (2020), who argue that organisations seeking to successfully implement their CSR strategies need to improve their employee involvement in the decision-making process.

On the contrary, a study by Philip and Arrowsmith (2021) offers conflicting findings to those found in this study. Their study, which focused on small not-for-profit organisations, reported that high levels of employee participation in the absence of structured HR policies and processes failed to deliver the intended performance outcomes. Instead, it led to poor performance, increased burnout levels and high turnover rates (Philip & Arrowsmith, 2021). This contradictory study underscores the need to embed participative decision-making practices within organisational frameworks and strategic platforms to ensure effective participatory practices.

6.5.4. Hypothesis conclusion and theoretical contribution

In conclusion, the findings from the study provide an answer to the research question by confirming that there is a strong, significant and positive relationship between participative decision-making and strategy implementation. The findings contribute to the strategy-as-practice perspective by confirming that participative decision-making is a strategic practice that can be enacted by practitioners to lead to successful strategy implementation, which is an important organisational outcome under the consequentiality view. The results also confirm that participative decision-making practices are valuable even in high power distance contexts.

6.6. Hypothesis 4: Mediating effect of participative decision-making

6.6.1. Findings

The purpose of hypothesis 4 was to answer the following research question:

Research question 4: Does participative decision-making mediate the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation?

The researcher hypothesised, based on existing literature, that participative decision-making would mediate the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation. The mediation analysis using the bootstrapping technique on PLS-SEM was conducted to test the hypothesis. The mediation analysis focused on the significance of the indirect effects of authentic leadership on strategy implementation through participative decision-making. The results of the hypothesis testing are presented in Chapter 5, Table 19. The results revealed that the indirect effect of authentic leadership on strategy implementation through participative decision-making is positive and statistically significant, with a path coefficient of 0.298 and a p-value of 0.000.

This confirms that participative decision-making has a mediating effect on the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation. The results also revealed that the direct effect of authentic leadership on strategy implementation remains positive and statistically significant, with a path coefficient of 0.295 and a p-value of 0.000. This confirms that participative decision-making has a partial mediation effect rather than a full mediation effect, based on the findings that both direct and indirect paths are statistically significant.

6.6.2. Interpretation

This result suggests that participative decision-making does not fully explain the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation, and only explains a part of the relationship. Given the partial mediation result, the study indicates that other factors not included and tested in this study likely explain the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation.

The contextual realities of South African private sector organisations provide a likely explanation for the partial mediation outcome. Most South African organisations have deeply embedded hierarchical structures with high-power distance environments (Valverde-Moreno, 2021; Harunavamwe & Palmer, 2020). In such contexts, decision-making is often centralised and directive, with participative decision-making practices inconsistently applied across the organisation. Resultantly, leaders may rely on authentic leadership behaviours to promote trust and build credibility with followers, which allows them to positively influence strategy implementation even in contexts of low participative practices. Though participative decision-making acts as a mechanism through which authentic leaders can enhance strategy implementation, it does not fully explain how authentic leaders impact strategy implementation.

An important result to highlight is that the indirect effect, with a path coefficient of 0.298, although similar in strength, is slightly higher than the direct effect, with a path coefficient of 0.295. So, while it is evident that both direct and indirect paths are meaningful, the indirect path is marginally higher, which suggests that involving employees and enacting participative practices offers a significant and powerful mechanism to enhance strategy implementation. This finding expands our understanding of strategy-as-practice by demonstrating how authentic leadership behaviours and participative decision-making practices interact in the doing of strategy. Authentic leadership behaviours, displayed by practitioners, directly influence strategy implementation. At the same time, authentic leadership behaviours enable participative practices. These practices are the actual daily work of engaging and involving employees across all levels of the organisation to improve strategy implementation. Strategy implementation is thus dually influenced by the behaviours and values enacted by authentic leaders as well as the participative actions taken daily in practice.

Authentic leadership through self-awareness, balanced processing, transparency and internal moral compass creates inclusive, decentralised environments that enable participative decision-making practices. These participative practices, in turn, promote successful strategy implementation by positively influencing strategy translation, coordination, communication, commitment control and feedback and HR practices. At the same time, this indirect effect does not replace the direct effect of authentic leadership behaviours on effective strategy implementation.

The structural model and coefficient of determination presented in Figure 8 and Table 14, respectively, in Chapter 5 show that 52.4% of the variance in strategy implementation is explained by authentic leadership and participative decision-making. The R square value of 0.524 indicates a moderate explanatory power (Hair et al., 2011). The model, therefore, does well in explaining strategy implementation, which suggests that authentic leadership behaviours and participative decision-making practices are significant levers for strategy implementation effectiveness and success.

6.6.3. Comparison to existing literature

In reviewing the literature, no data was found that studied the mediating effect of participative decision-making on the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation. Similar studies have, however, reported the importance of participative decision-making as a mediator between authentic leadership and other organisational outcomes. For example, a study by Nqumba and Scheepers (2023) provides empirical evidence that participative decision-making acts as a mechanism through which authentic leaders influence CSR. The study reported that participative decision-making fully mediated the influence of authentic leadership on employees' perception of whether their organisations were socially responsible (Nqumba & Scheepers, 2023). Additionally, a study by Jang et al. (2023) reported a partial mediating effect of participative practices on the relationship between authentic leadership and job satisfaction.

The findings reported in this study thus corroborate previous empirical studies that have found participative decision-making to have a mediating effect on the positive relationship between authentic leadership and other organisational outcomes (i.e., CSR, Job satisfaction).

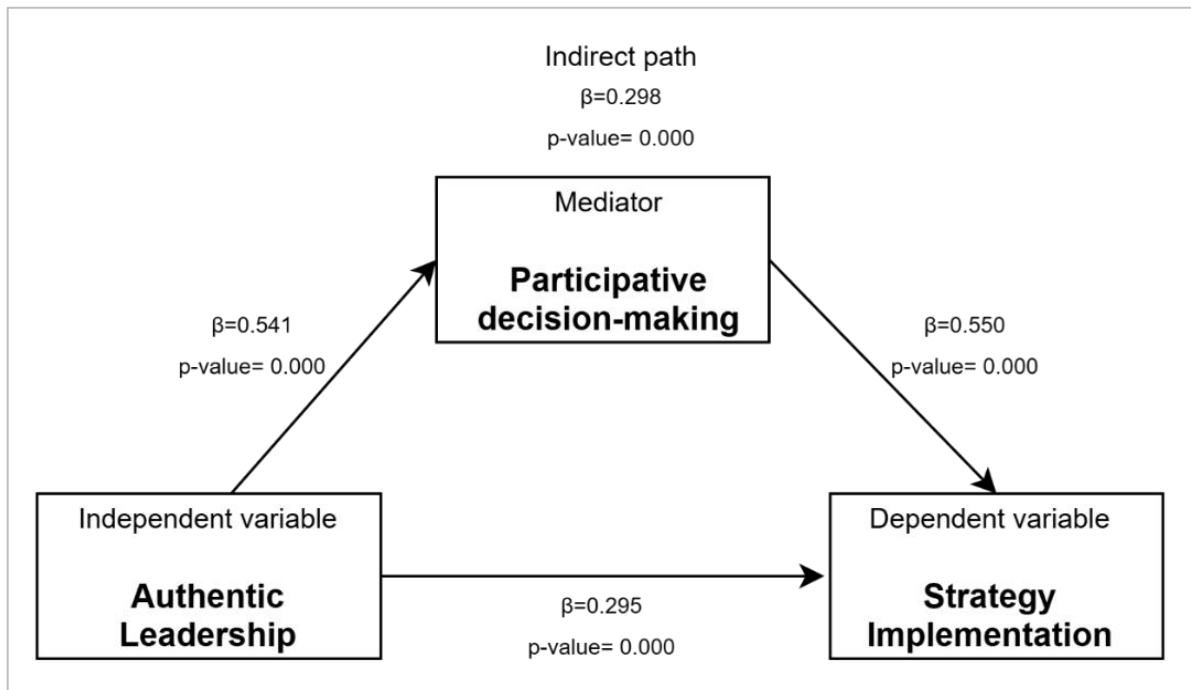
The study findings, therefore, provide an answer to the research question by confirming that participative decision-making has a partial mediating effect on the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation. It therefore acts as a mechanism through which authentic leaders achieve effective strategy implementation.

6.7. Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed discussion of the results and made the following conclusions: There is a significant, positive relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation. There is a significant, positive relationship between authentic leadership and participative decision-making. There is a significant, positive relationship between participative decision-making and strategy implementation. Lastly, participative decision-making has a partial mediating effect on the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation. Participative decision-making therefore, emerges as a key strategic practice that authentic leaders can adopt to achieve effective strategy implementation. Figure 13 depicts the findings from the study.

Figure 13

Study Model Showing Partial Mediation Effect



7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The objective of this study was to address the critical gap between strategy formulation and implementation by exploring how authentic leadership behaviours can be utilised to enhance strategy implementation both directly and indirectly through participative decision-making practices. The study was grounded in authentic leadership theory and the strategy-as-practice perspective, which emphasises the central role of people in the strategy management process. The strategy-as-practice theoretical lens centers on specific interactions, practices and actions enacted by practitioners to implement strategy (Jarzabkowski et al., 2024; Kohtamäki et al., 2022).

By studying the influence of authentic leadership and participative decision-making on strategy implementation, the study moves away from the traditional focus on organisational structures, processes and formal systems that support implementation. Instead, the study focuses on the behavioural and social dynamics that influence strategy implementation. With strategy being implemented through people, several scholars have emphasised the central role of interpersonal factors in the implementation process (Aladag et al., 2020; Köseoglu et al., 2020; Jarzabkowski et al., 2024). This underscores the need to gain a better understanding of the human side of the strategy implementation process.

This study was important to undertake due to compelling evidence indicating that organisations continue to invest vast resources in formulating strategies yet fail at implementing these strategies to unlock the intended value (Olsen, 2022; Twum, 2021; Correani et al., 2020). Moreover, limited academic research has focused on the implementation of strategy, with most of the research in this field being produced by practitioners and consultants, therefore lacking in theoretical grounding (Köseoglu et al., 2020; Tawse et al., 2024; Seidl et al., 2024; de Oliveira et al., 2019).

The study was carried out among South African private sector organisations. Authentic leadership and participative decision-making are relevant concepts to study in South Africa as they closely align with Ubuntu leadership principles of interconnectedness and collaboration, which are deeply rooted in African culture (Chetty & Price, 2024). These constructs, which are focused on building inclusive workplace environments and a

sense of community and belonging, were best suited to study in the South African context (Chetty & Price, 2024). The country's post-apartheid reform strongly emphasises inclusive and participatory practices in organisations (Bell & Reed, 2022).

The central research question that the study aimed to address was how authentic leadership behaviours influence the implementation of strategy, and what mediating role participative decision-making practices have on the relationship. The sub-questions that supported the research question were presented in Chapter 1.

To answer the research questions, the researcher followed a cross-sectional, quantitative methodological approach and used SEM, specifically PLS-SEM, to test the hypothesis developed in the study. The study sample comprised mainly middle-to-senior managers employed in large (> 1000 employees), established organisations that have been in operation for more than 10 years. The main findings from the study are summarised next.

7.1. Principal findings

The study revealed four principal findings, which are stated below:

7.1.1. Hypothesis 1: Authentic leadership and strategy implementation

Firstly, the study found that there is a significant and positive relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation. The strength of the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation was found to be modest but significant, nonetheless. The modest relationship points to the complex and multifaceted nature of the strategy implementation construct, which is influenced by several organisational factors (Köseoglu et al., 2020). The existing literature highlights the positive impact of authentic leadership on several organisational outcomes (Gardner et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2022; Seifu & Jalata, 2022; Steffens et al., 2021). This study extends this literature by highlighting the important role of authentic leadership behaviours in enhancing strategy implementation.

From a strategy-as-practice perspective, this finding highlights the importance of who does strategy and what they do in practice to shape strategy (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). Authentic leaders, through their behaviours and values, connect with individuals

and build trust relationships. These leaders create positive work environments and foster hope and optimism (Gardner et al., 2021). This environment enables two-way communication, effective strategy translation, control and feedback, coordination, and alignment of HR policies and competencies to drive successful strategy implementation (de Oliveira et al., 2019; Gardner et al., 2021). The modest relationship implies that other factors contribute to strategy implementation. As such, authenticity on its own may not be sufficient to guarantee strategy implementation success.

The findings are in alignment with previous studies that have reported that leaders who are perceived as authentic by demonstrating relational transparency, balanced processing, self-awareness, and ethical decision-making positively influence strategy implementation (Musa et al., 2017; Seifu & Jalata, 2022; Allgood, 2015).

7.1.2. Hypothesis 2: Authentic leadership and participative decision-making

Secondly, the study confirmed that there is a strong, significant and positive relationship between authentic leadership and participative decision-making. Authentic leadership behaviours emerge as instrumental in shaping and enabling participative decision-making practices in organisations. Authentic leaders provide the relational and ethical climate that increases employee's willingness to participate in decisions and share their ideas (Kumar et al., 2024). Decision-making is thus inclusive and decentralised. Authentic leaders involve employees not out of compliance but out of genuine intention to solicit other views and promote employee voice behaviour across all levels of the organisation (Wang et al., 2022; Galeazzo et al., 2021).

The study supports literature that has reported a strong, significant relationship between authentic leadership and participative decision-making (Nqumba & Scheepers, 2023; Jang et al., 2023). Participative decision-making has become increasingly important as employees' expectations to be included and contribute to decisions involving their work increase (Aramovich & Blankenship, 2020). Authentic leaders emerge as critical in enabling participative decision-making practices within organisations.

7.1.3. Hypothesis 3: Participative decision-making and strategy implementation

Thirdly, the study found that there is a significant and positive relationship between participative decision-making and strategy implementation. The strength of the relationship was found to be strong, which underscores the significant effect of participative decision-making practices in effecting strategy implementation. Participative decision-making is thus a key strategic practice that needs to be fully integrated in daily interactions and organisational processes to facilitate effective strategy implementation in practice. Participative decision-making practices promote a relational, inclusive environment that empowers employees and enables decision-making at the right levels. This subsequently promotes employee commitment and buy-in to drive strategy implementation.

While studies have previously studied practices such as strategic meetings, structure, negotiation and PowerPoint slides as key practices to implement strategy (Friesl et al., 2021; Kohtamäki et al., 2022; Jarzabkowski et al., 2022), none have examined participative decision-making as a strategic practice to improve strategy implementation. The results reveal that participative decision-making, as a strategic practice, guarantees strategy implementation success. The findings are in line with existing literature that reported a strong correlation between participative decision-making and successful strategy implementation (Al-Hashimi et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2020).

7.1.4. Hypothesis 4: Mediating effect of participative decision-making

Lastly, the study reported that participative decision-making has a partial mediating effect on the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation. This reveals that authentic leadership has both a direct and indirect influence, through participative decision-making practices, on strategy implementation. The strength of the indirect path was found to be marginally higher than the direct path.

This means that while authentic leaders can directly lead to effective strategy implementation through their behaviours and values, their influence on strategy implementation is improved when they enact practices to involve employees and encourage voice behaviour. Participative decision-making is the action that needs to be

enacted daily and integrated into routines and organisational processes to translate authentic leaders' intent into action. This aligns with the strategy-as-practice view, which focuses on the daily interactions, practices and routines that shape strategy implementation. Strategy implementation is thus positively influenced by the behaviours and values displayed by authentic leaders as well as the participative actions taken daily to involve employees in decision-making.

The partial mediation effect reveals that participative decision-making practices only partly explain the relationship between authentic leadership and strategy implementation. This suggests that other factors not included and tested in this study may better explain the mechanism through which authentic leaders influence strategy implementation. Future research to explore these mediators is therefore recommended.

Similar studies in the literature have highlighted the role of participative decision-making in acting as a mechanism through which authentic leadership influences organisational outcomes such as job satisfaction (Jang et al., 2023) and CSR implementation (Nqumba & Scheepers, 2023).

7.2. Implication for business

This study offers meaningful insights for management on how authentic leadership behaviours and participative decision-making practices can be adopted to enhance strategy implementation. Given that most causes of strategy implementation failures have been linked to people-related factors (Radomska & Kozyra, 2020; Ateş et al., 2020; Köseoglu et al., 2020), it is expected that leadership approaches and practices that address these factors will improve strategy implementation. The study underscores the important role of authentic leadership behaviours and participative decision-making practices in building trust, commitment and buy-in to lead to effective strategy implementation. Organisations should therefore not solely rely on their formal process, structures and systems to implement strategy.

The findings indicate that authentic leadership behaviours play a crucial role in shaping strategy implementation in organisations. Organisations should therefore invest in developing leadership programmes and coaching that will enhance managers' levels of self-awareness, balanced processing of information, relational transparency and ethical

decision-making. By enhancing leaders' self-awareness, leaders will gain a better understanding of their values, abilities and emotions and how their actions impact others. The balanced processing of information skills will help managers build their authenticity by being objective in their decision-making and considering different viewpoints to promote unbiased decision-making. Relational transparency will increase leaders' ability to show vulnerability and openly share their thoughts and emotions. Lastly, by developing leaders' internal moral perspective, leaders will be better equipped to act in conformity with their values and ethical standards while withstanding external pressure (Gardner et al., 2021; Crawford et al., 2020).

In addition to incorporating authentic leadership skills in leadership programmes and coaching, organisations can also be more intentional in recruiting leaders who display authentic leadership behaviours and skills. It is important for organisations and managers to view authentic leadership not as a personality trait that leaders either possess or not, but rather a developmental and inspirational state that leaders can grow towards (Gardner et al., 2021). As leaders grow towards authentic leadership, they act as role models and inspire followers to display similar behaviours (Gardner et al., 2021).

The study has also indicated the critical role of participative decision-making as a key strategic practice that can act as an interface between authentic leadership and strategy implementation. Participative decision-making practices that include genuine involvement of all employees, thus not limited to top executives, strongly predict strategy implementation. Organisations should embed frameworks and processes that encourage employee involvement and cultivate voice behaviours. Platforms such as workshops and cross-disciplinary sessions that will be accessible to all employees may be effective. The participative practices need to be perceived as genuine by the employees and not as symbolic or disingenuous, as this can lead to mistrust and hamper the benefits (Frega, 2021; Jang et al., 2023). Additionally, managers should ensure that individuals are empowered with the appropriate competencies and knowledge to contribute effectively to decisions to avoid any dilution in the decision-making process. Employee capability building is thus important in empowering individuals to participate in decision-making and enhancing ownership and commitment.

The higher effect, whilst marginal, of the indirect path highlights the importance of strategic practices in enhancing strategy implementation. Organisations should therefore encourage managers to not only display authentic leadership behaviours but also take action through participative practices in their daily interactions. These practices need to be supported and integrated into the organisation. Leadership behaviours and practices thus form part of the strategy implementation process. As such, organisations that want to ensure effective strategy implementation need to ensure that they have managers who can lead with authenticity and take deliberate action to include employees routinely in the decision-making process to maximise implementation success.

Authentic leadership's ability to influence strategy implementation both directly and indirectly means that authentic leadership behaviours can be leveraged even in organisational settings with strong hierarchical structures and low employee involvement.

By empirically validating the strategy implementation measurement tool developed by de Oliveira et al. (2019), the study confirms the reliability of the instrument in the South African context. This offers strategy implementation practitioners and managers with a reliable measurement tool that can be employed to measure strategy implementation effectiveness in the organisations.

7.3. Theoretical contribution

This study advances strategy-as-practice theory by highlighting the strategic importance of authentic leadership behaviours in directly affecting strategy implementation and enabling participative decision-making practices. Additionally, it identifies participative decision-making as a visible strategic practice enacted by leaders to enhance strategy implementation, which is an important organisational outcome. Strategy implementation is thus influenced by the people involved in the strategy, who they are (authentic leaders), as well as the practices that they enact (participative decision-making) to implement strategy.

By focusing on authentic leadership behaviours and participative decision-making practices, this study contributes to the adaptive turn in strategy implementation, which

moves away from the structural control view of strategy focused on systems and structures and highlights the behavioural interactions, practices and social dynamics involved in implementing strategy in practice. It thus engages the scholarly call to provide more practical and psychologically grounded contributions to the strategy management theory (Ateş et al., 2020).

The study moves away from typical consultancy research to more theoretically and empirically validated research by using an empirically validated measurement instrument developed by de Oliveira et al. (2019) to measure the strategy implementation construct. This instrument was originally developed and tested in Brazil. The scholars have invited researchers to adopt the measurement instrument and test it in relation to other variables. This study confirms the reliability and validity of the measurement instrument in the South African context.

The relationships, as combined and positioned in this study, have, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, not been previously examined in the existing literature, representing a unique contribution. The study also offers a bridge between leadership theory and strategy-as-practice theory by positioning authentic leadership as an enabler for participative decision-making practices.

7.4. Limitations of the study

This study provides valuable insights into how authentic leadership behaviours and participative decision-making practices can be enacted in practice to positively influence strategy implementation. However, like many studies, several limitations need to be acknowledged. Firstly, the study focused on private sector organisations in South Africa. Additionally, the study sample was largely dominated by middle-to-senior managers employed in large (> 1000 employees), established organisations that have been in operation for more than 10 years. This, therefore, limits the generalisability of the findings.

Secondly, the study only focused on how authentic leadership and participative decision-making influence strategy implementation. As a result, it did not account for other factors that may influence these variables in practice, such as organisational

culture, other leadership styles and organisational structure, which could enrich the study.

The structural model does not include control variables, thus limiting the ability to partial out the true effects of authentic leadership behaviours and participative decision-making practices on strategy implementation from other factors. The lack of control variables in the structural model does not take away the theoretical insights generated in this study, but highlights the need to interpret the findings with caution. The lack of control variables in this study supports recent scholars who caution against excessive use of control variables, especially demographic variables, without strong theoretical reasoning, as they can distort true relationships and reduce the statistical power of the relationships (Hünermund & Louw, 2025; Sturman et al., 2022; Bernerth & Aguinis, 2016). Most scholars routinely include demographic variables as control variables purely based on previous studies with no clear theoretical justification and rationale, which is not best practice (Sturman et al., 2022; Bernerth & Aguinis, 2016). The study interpreted the findings within the contextual factors instead of controlling for them. Future researchers can enrich this study by identifying and testing suitable control variables with a strong theoretical justification.

Finally, the study was cross-sectional, which can under-or overrepresent the correlations between the study variables (Maier et al., 2023). Cross-sectional studies are also prone to information bias due to participants' inclination to give socially appropriate answers (Maier et al., 2023). Strong causal inferences can thus not be established (Wang & Cheng, 2020). Moreover, the non-probability sampling technique employed in this study poses a higher risk of sampling error (Stratton, 2023).

7.5. Recommendations for future research

Future studies can explore the influence of authentic leadership behaviours and participative decision-making practices on strategy implementation in different geographical and industry contexts, particularly in lower power distance contexts. Additionally, these relationships should be tested in smaller-sized organisations that are lower on the organisational growth curve, as they are expected to be less established and bureaucratic (Agarwala et al., 2024) and thus present a different dynamic. Future studies should also focus on lower management and frontline supervisory level

employees to establish their perceptions on authentic leadership behaviours, participative decision-making practices and strategy implementation.

Given the partial mediation effect of participative decision-making, other mediators that can explain the mechanism through which authentic leadership influences strategy implementation can be studied. Additionally, future studies can identify theoretically suitable control variables and test their influence on the relationships established in this study.

Authentic leadership was selected and recognised as a promising leadership approach to foster interpersonal relations and enhance strategy implementation. Future studies can focus on other positive leadership styles, such as servant leadership and transformational leadership. Linnhoff et al. (2020) highlight the importance and effectiveness of longitudinal studies when examining complex business topics such as leadership and strategy implementation. Scholars can therefore contribute by exploring how the relationships in this study evolve over an extended period.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Measurement scales and codes

Authentic leadership

Scale sourced from Walumbwa et al. (2008), p.121.

Table A1

Authentic leadership scale and data analysis codes

Survey question (Indicator variable)	Code
Relational transparency:	
Admits mistakes when they are made	AL1
Encourages everyone to speak their mind	AL2
Expresses emotions in line with own feelings	AL3
Internalised moral perspective:	
Demonstrates beliefs that are consistent with actions	AL4
Asks me to take on responsibilities that support my core values	AL5
Makes difficult decisions based on high standards of ethical conduct	AL6
Self-awareness:	
Seeks feedback to improve interactions with others	AL7
Accurately describes how others view his or her capabilities	AL8
Knows when it is time to re-evaluate his or her position on important issues	AL9
Shows he or she understands how specific actions impact others	AL10
Balanced Processing:	
Solicits views that challenge his or her deeply held positions	AL11
Listens carefully to different points of view before coming to conclusions	AL12

Participative decision-making

Scale adapted from Kahnweiler and Thompson (2000).

Table A2

Participative decision-making scale and data analysis codes

Survey question (Indicator variable)	Code
In our organisation, employees at all levels are empowered to participate in decision-making	PDM1
The right decisions are made at the right levels in our organisation	PDM2
Our organisation includes employees as important stakeholders in decisions	PDM3

Strategy implementation

Scale sourced from de Oliveira et al. (2019), p.337.

Table A3

Strategy implementation scale and data analysis codes

Survey question (Indicator variable)	Code
Results - Translation	
Ability of the established actions to meet the purpose of the strategy	R1
Ability to comprehensively monitor the implementation of the strategy by means of the defined indicators and goals	R2
Ability to monitor the implementation of the strategy along time by means of the defined indicators and goals	R3
Results - Coordination:	
Commitment of managers and employees with the implementation of the strategy	R4
Consistency between the procedures of the persons involved and the elements of execution (actions, deadlines, resources)	R5
Synchronism and sequence of actions	R6
Reduction of obstacles/oppositions to strategy execution	R7

Engagement of people towards organizational changes related to strategy execution	R8
Transformation of conflicts in proposals for solutions and improvement	R9
Cooperation among the involved players (people and areas)	R10
Results - Communication:	
Understanding (by the employees) about the strategy and the elements of its execution (actions, responsible persons, goals, deadlines, resources)	R11
Understanding (by the employees) about the adjustments made to the strategic plan, the related actions or the goals	R12
Existence of active dialog (discussion and negotiation) between the areas involved in the action of strategy execution	R13
Results - Control and feedback:	
Ability to quickly respond/adapt to changes in the internal of external environment	R14
Results - Development of human resources policies and employee competences:	
Contribution of HR policies (recruitment, development, evaluation, compensation) to the commitment with strategy execution	R15
Stimulation of the personnel evaluation practices in consistency with strategic goal attainment	R16
Capacity of the employees to perform as demanded by strategy execution needs	R17

Appendix B: Descriptive statistics

Demographic variable	Frequency	Frequency %
Race		
Black	661	51.20%
Coloured	75	5.80%
Indian	177	13.70%
White	369	28.60%
Not listed	4	0.30%
Asian	3	0.20%
Caucasian	2	0.20%
Discipline of Work		
Finance	449	20.9%
Human Resources	170	7.9%
Information Technology	252	11.7%
Marketing	159	7.4%
Operations/Production	447	20.8%
Projects	132	6.1%
Research and Development	44	2.0%
Sales	311	14.4%
Administrative work	7	0.3%
Engineering	23	1.1%
Legal/Compliance/Risk	60	2.8%
Procurement and supply chain	33	1.5%
Healthcare	3	0.1%
Learning and Development	1	0.0%
Training	1	0.0%
Transformation	1	0.0%
Governance	1	0.0%
Sustainability	1	0.0%
Agriculture	7	0.3%
Real Estate/Property services	2	0.1%

Support services	4	0.2%
Management	23	1.1%
Insights	2	0.1%
Regulatory/ Strategy	4	0.2%
Planning	3	0.1%
Transport and Logistics	7	0.3%
Branch	1	0.0%
Stakeholder Relations	2	0.1%
Automation	1	0.0%
Technical	2	0.1%

Demographic variable	Frequency	Frequency %
Types of Strategies used in Company		
Introduction and/or discontinuation of technology	732	16%
Significant changes related to management	704	15%
Significant changes in functional areas	781	17%
Reaction to severe economic, political, and regulatory changes	616	14%
Introduction and/or discontinuation of services	557	12%
Opening and/or closing technical units	288	6%
Expansion to and/or exit from a market	439	10%
Acquisition and/or merge with another company	348	8%
Not listed	26	1%
So far, I have not experienced any	65	1%
Communications and crisis management	1	0%
Transformation strategy	1	0%
Procurement and outsourcing strategy	1	0%
Innovation and brand development strategy	1	0%

Appendix C: Likert scales

Table C1

Five-point Likert scale used to measure Authentic leadership

1	Never
2	Sometimes
3	About half the time
4	Most of the time
5	Always

Table C2

Five-point Likert scale used to measure Participative decision-making

1	Never
2	Sometimes
3	About half the time
4	Most of the time
5	Always

Table C3

Five-point Likert scale used to measure Strategy Implementation

1	Extremely dissatisfied
2	Somewhat dissatisfied
3	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
4	Moderately satisfied
5	Extremely satisfied