Societal culture as a moderator of the impact of leadership on organisational effectiveness: a conceptual model

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ABSTRACT
This conceptual paper reviews extant literature on leadership and societal culture within the Sub-Saharan Africa context. Based on the literature review, the paper argues that societal culture is an important moderator of the impact of leadership on organisational effectiveness. Furthermore, the paper proposes a conceptual framework useful in explaining the interplay between leadership, societal culture and organisational effectiveness. Finally, the paper outlines some steps to advance leadership theory in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Key words: transformational leadership; servant leadership; collectivistic values; humane orientation values;

INTRODUCTION
Most of the studies on the influence of leadership on organisational performance indicate that effective leadership influences the attainment of individual, unit and organisational outcomes across many contexts and continents (Bass 1997; House et al. 2004). Conspicuously, only a few studies have focused on Sub-Saharan Africa. These studies have examined transformational leadership (Engelbrecht & Chamberlain 2005; Walumbwa et al. 2005), Ubuntu (Mangaliso 2001), servant leadership (Hale & Fields 2007), and cross-cultural perspectives on management (Gray et al. 2008). Nevertheless, research on organisational leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa is lagging far behind when compared to leadership research of other regions.

One research approach with potential to significantly advance leadership theory in Sub-Saharan Africa would be to identify important socio-cultural variables that moderate the impact of leadership on organisational effectiveness (Dickson et al. 2003; House et al. 2004). Clearly, leadership research has indicated the need to examine contextual determinants of leader emergence and effectiveness, with studies proposing that uncovering moderating variables enables leaders to adapt their behaviours according to contexts (Dionne et al. 2005). Therefore, this article has three objectives. First, it examines the extant literature on leadership and societal culture within the Sub-Saharan Africa context. Second, based on the literature review, it builds a conceptual framework useful in explaining the interplay between leadership, societal culture and organisational effectiveness. Finally, the paper outlines some steps to advance leadership theory in Sub-Saharan Africa.
UNDERSTANDING ORGANISATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Due to differences in conceptualising leadership and how it is linked to individual, unit and organisational effectiveness, the concept of leadership effectiveness has remained a contested terrain (Collinson & Collinson, 2009). However, the existing literature conceptualises leadership as a dynamic process of influencing the activities of a group in order to achieve unit and organisational goals (Jackson & Parry, 2008). According to Yammarino et al. (2001: 162), “effective leadership impacts both “soft” and “hard” individual, dyad, group, and organisational criteria and that leaders, regardless of their position or title, need to be cognisant of the impact of their actions on elements such as team building, participation in decision making, and satisfaction as well as performance, absenteeism, and turnover”. Further, leadership has been viewed as an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes (Rost, 1993, 2008).

In addition, Zaccaro and Klimoski (2001) affirm that leadership involves processes and proximal outcomes (e.g. organisational outcomes) that contribute to the development and achievement of organisational purpose. Moreover, Jackson and Parry (2008) emphasise that leadership is based on an influence relationship that is multidirectional and non-coercive, that there is typically more than one leader and always more than one follower in the relationship, and that both leaders and followers work together to bring about substantial changes. Finally, effective leadership has been conceptualised in line with the followers’ contribution to the leadership equation coupled with leaders’ influence over situations and events to transform their followers to higher levels of performance (Kelley, 2008).

Notably, these Western notions of effective leadership have been applied to organisations and countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, many organisations in Sub-Saharan Africa replicate effective leadership and management practices from the West, with minimal changes to accommodate cultural influences (Gray et al. 2008; Horwitz et al. 2002; Horwitz et al. 2006). It is therefore not surprising that leadership researchers postulate that the direction and impact of leadership in organisations in Sub-Saharan Africa would be similar to that found in existing research of other continents. Nonetheless, the body of empirical studies on organisational leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa is still
negligible. In trying to advance the discussion of the potential impact of organisational leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa, this paper is divided into three parts. First, the paper will describe the Sub-Saharan Africa context. Second, the paper will examine the literature on leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa. Specifically, the paper will advance the view that societal culture variables moderate the impact of leadership on organisational effectiveness. Finally, based on the literature review, the paper will propose a conceptual model and some steps to advance leadership theory in Sub-Saharan Africa.

THE SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA CONTEXT AND EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP
Sub-Saharan Africa is made up of 42 mainland and 6 island nations, and is therefore rich in cultural and ethnic diversity. Indeed, Sub-Saharan Africans come from over 800 ethnic groups, speak over a 1000 languages and the societies are heterogeneous in terms of religion, language, customs and race (Seriki et al. in press). Additionally, some countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Kenya, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia) have a large population of European and Asian settlers. Other characteristics of Sub-Saharan Africa context include a fairly well educated labour force, constant institutional restructuring, significantly improved democracies (Newenham-Kahindi, 2009), with social organisations which emphasise humanistic values, harmonious team-work and accepting responsibilities in managing businesses (Horwitz et al. 2002; Jackson, 2004).

It is imperative that our search for effective leader behaviours in Sub-Saharan Africa goes hand in hand with the search for contextual variables likely to assuage the impact of leadership behaviours on individual, team and organisational outcomes. As suggested by Jackson (2004), it is important that researchers and management professional understand the significance of contextual factors when managing in Sub-Saharan Africa. Consequently, researchers need to understand the role of societal culture in order to define boundary conditions which constrain the efficacy of effective leader behaviours as well as clarifying how different cultural, structural, and environmental conditions affect different leadership styles and outcomes (Dickson et al. 2003).
EXAMINING LEADERSHIP AND CONTEXT WITHIN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

While extant Western studies indicate that various forms of leadership act as important catalysts for attaining individual, unit and organisational effectiveness, the body of empirical studies on organisational leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa is rather limited. Furthermore, existing theory building literature on leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa takes several viewpoints. Some literature examines leadership from contextual and cross-cultural perspectives (Bolden & Kirk 2009; Jackson 2004; Theimann et al. 2006). Other studies explore the limits of Western leadership theory in Africa (Blunt & Jones 1997), some indicating that contemporary Western management theorists can gain valuable insights through the observation of the simplistic organisational finesse of traditional Sub-Saharan Africa societies (Nicholson 2005). Nevertheless, only a handful of the studies have examined socio-cultural influences on leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa. There is therefore a need for a deeper exploration of the influence of societal culture on the emergence and development of effective leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa.

A few empirical studies carried out in Sub-Saharan Africa show significant and positive relationships between leadership behaviours and models, and various organisational outcomes. For example, studies by Walumbwa and colleagues (Walumbwa et al. 2007; Walumbwa et al. 2005; Zhu et al. 2009), and Engelbrecht and colleagues (Engelbrecht & Chamberlain 2005; Engelbrecht et al. 2005) have found positive effects of transformational leadership on various organisational outcomes. These studies sustain the claim that transformational leadership readily manifests in collectivistic cultures (Jung et al. 2009), a cultural profile fitting many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Other studies have examined servant leadership (Hale & Fields 2007; Koshal 2005; Nelson 2005; Nicholson 2005) and Ubuntu (Horwitz et al. 2002; Karsten & Illa 2005; Mangaliso 2001; Newenham-Kahindi 2009). Servant leadership theory (Greenleaf 1977) is appealing for application in a collectivistic context such as that of Sub-Saharan Africa, and especially as it is founded on the ideals of helping others accomplish shared objectives through the facilitation of individual development, empowerment, and collective work.
To help integrate the literature on these two approaches to leadership, it is important we focus on the key characteristics, behaviours and models of leadership for organisations in Sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, we need studies focusing on the moderating role of societal culture on the impact of leadership on organisational effectiveness in Sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, in recognition of the need to define boundary conditions which constrain the efficacy of effective leader behaviours and models (Dickson et al. 2003), this paper proposes a conceptual framework (Figure 1) to examine the interplay between some models and approaches to leadership and socio-cultural variables in determining organisational outcomes within Sub-Saharan Africa. Due to space limitations, this paper will examine only two societal culture variables (collectivism and humane orientation) and two leadership variables (transformational and servant leadership) which appear to be more pertinent to Sub-Saharan Africa. It is anticipated that a brief but systematic literature review together with the conceptual framework will help consolidate and build on extant research findings to stimulate future research agenda.

Figure 1 A conceptual model of effective leadership, societal culture and organisational effectiveness.

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA
Some studies conducted in legal-rational bureaucracies of Western have examined how transformational leadership indirectly influenced individual, unit and organisational outcomes through
surrogate variables such as organisational commitment, organisational citizenship behaviours, and self and collective efficacy (Avolio et al. 2009). Other studies further indicated that transformational leadership directly influenced overall unit, group and organisational performances (Judge & Piccolo, 2004), and that it was a universally accepted form of effective leadership (Bass, 1996, 1997).

According to Bass and Avolio (Avolio & Bass, 2002; Avolio, 2005; Bass, 1985), transformational leadership focuses on four leader behaviours that influence followers’ values and aspirations and arouse them to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the organisation. These four leader behaviours include idealised influence or charisma (serving as followers’ role model such that followers seek to identify with their leaders and emulate them), inspirational motivation (inspiring followers with challenges and persuasion that provide meaning and understanding), intellectually stimulating (involves expanding followers abilities by questioning assumptions, challenging the status quo, and encouraging problem reformulation, and novel approaches to solving problems), and individualized consideration (providing the followers with support, mentoring, and coaching).

Following on the US studies, several studies have examined the occurrence of transformational leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa (Engelbrecht & Chamberlain, 2005; Engelbrecht et al. 2005; Walumbwa et al. 2007; Walumbwa et al. 2005). In one study, Walumbwa et al. (2005) found that transformational leadership had strong and positive effects on organisational commitment and job satisfaction among samples drawn from Kenya and the US. In another study using data from South African workers, Zhu et al. (2009) found that transformational leadership had a more positive effect on follower work engagement when follower characteristics were more positive. In another study, Engelbrecht et al. (2005) found that altruism positively influenced transformational leadership, while transformational leadership in turn had a positive effect on ethical climate in South Africa. They also found that integrity moderated the effect of transformational leadership on ethical climate. Finally, van Aswegen and Engelbrecht (2009) found that transformational leadership had a positive effect on the dimensions of an ethical climate.
It can be argued logically that as workers in Sub-Saharan Africa continue to embrace Western values, education and training, there is bound to be a shift in values and perceptions among workers, making employees quite receptive of transformational leadership behaviours. Based on the literature cited above, this paper classifies transformational leader behaviours as a form of effective leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa. Building on the extant literature, this paper proposes more studies be replicated across the many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa to further understand how transformational leadership influences organisational effectiveness. It is proposed that the direction of the leadership influence will be as suggested in Figure 1 above.

Another important approach to understanding leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa is based on the servant leadership theory (Greenleaf, 1977). In one cross-cultural study comparing samples from Ghana and the USA, Hale and Fields (2005) found that Ghanaians reported experiencing servant leadership behaviours significantly less than North Americans, although they also found that the ‘vision’ dimension of servant leadership had a significantly stronger relationship with leader effectiveness for Ghanaians in comparison to North Americans. Furthermore, two other studies (Koshal, 2005; Nelson, 2003) found that African leaders identified with the servant leadership dimensions of humility, service and vision.

A recent study of the Maasai ethnic group from East Africa concluded that contemporary organisations could learn valuable management and leadership lessons from the Maasai (Nicholson, 2005). In that study, Nicholson found that the Maasai were intensively collectivist, most valued abilities perceived to be economically useful to the collective, and their leaders existed to serve their community. Nicholson (2005) concluded that Maasai leaders favoured both stewardship and ‘servant leadership’ (Greenleaf, 1977). Furthermore, the effective leadership model for the Maasai can be summarised as collective authority or team leadership. Since the ethnic group was held together through clans, the Maasai selected the leadership team from all clans. According to Nicholson (2005, p. 261), the ‘leadership roles of these individuals was clearly low in the exercise of power, though high in status and authority’. Furthermore, a group of elders made all critical decisions and their role was to capture and exemplify consensual authority.
It is plausible that many of the traditional African societies are still led collectively, and that the most favoured leadership models include stewardship, servant leadership and team leadership. Based on the above evidence, this paper puts forward an overarching proposition that variant forms of servant leadership will be preferred forms of effective leadership among clusters of employees from Sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore this paper proposes more studies be replicated across the many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa to further understand how servant leadership influences organisational effectiveness. It is proposed that the direction of the influence would be as suggested in Figure 1 above.

**Linking societal culture to leadership and organisational effectiveness**

Hofstede (1980, 2001) identified five cultural-value dimensions that represent the essence of national or social culture, namely: Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism (as opposed to Collectivism), Masculinity (as opposed to Femininity), and Long-Term Orientation. Later, a more comprehensive research by House and colleagues in the GLOBE Project (House et al. 2004), classified countries into broad cultural groups based on measures of Assertiveness, Future Orientation, Gender Egalitarianism, Humane Orientation, Institutional Collectivism, In-Group Collectivism, Performance Orientation, Power Distance, and Uncertainty Avoidance. From the few countries explored in the two seminal studies, Sub-Saharan Africa was classified as being high in collectivism (Hofstede, 2001), and high in humane orientation (House et al. 2004). According to Hofstede (2001) high collectivistic societies valued an in-group collectivism based on family ties, and religious or ethnic backgrounds are important. In turn, the GLOBE study described societies high in humane orientation as demonstrating compassion and generosity, a concern for the welfare of others, and a willingness to sacrifice one’s own self-interest to help others.

Research by Jung and Avolio (1999) found that collectivists with a transformational leader generated more ideas, an indication that collectivist values fitted well with the transformational leadership. Another study by Pillai and Meindl (1998) found that collectivism was positively related to charismatic leadership, which in turn was positively related to supervisory ratings of several organisational effectiveness variables. Also, some studies on social context characteristics (especially
the aspect of collectivistic orientation) and organisational characteristics (especially the aspect of collectivistic work units) suggest that they enhance transformational leadership (Dvir & Shamir, 2003). Also, the GLOBE studies indicated that some cultural dimensions such as In-Group Collectivism and Humane Orientation were predictive of leadership orientations such as Team-Oriented Leadership. In general, it was expected that leadership factors would be consistent with the dominant sociocultural values in order to be effective. Therefore, sociocultural context would be expected to explain the variance in leadership factors.

Within Sub-Saharan Africa, studies suggest that contextual factors such as national culture have a determining effect on the design and implementation of human resource practices (Horwitz et al. 2006; Jackson 2004). For example, a cross-cultural study using data from Kenya, China, India and the US found that, for ‘those individuals who were more allocentric, transformational leadership was more positively associated with work-related attitudes/outcomes’, while ‘individuals who were more idiocentric, transactional contingent reward leadership was more positively associated with work-related attitudes/outcomes’ (Walumbwa et al. 2007: 225). These studies (Horwitz et al. 2006; Jackson 2004; Walumbwa et al. 2007) suggest that the influence of leadership on follower responses and organisational effectiveness would be moderated by societal culture. Therefore, this article considers societal culture as an important contextual factor for consideration in leadership research in Sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, it is plausible to assume that collectivistic and humane orientation values could influence leader effectiveness in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is proposed that the impact and direction of influence of socio-cultural variables on organisational outcomes will be as suggested in Figure 1 above.

CONCLUSIONS

Following the literature review of leadership and societal culture, this paper has proposed a conceptual framework useful for explaining the leadership phenomenon in Sub-Saharan Africa. Specifically, the paper examined the interplay between two forms of leadership (transformational and servant leadership), societal culture (collectivistic and humane orientation values) and organisational effectiveness in Sub-Saharan Africa. The proposed conceptual model has the potential to help
management developers design appropriate leadership development programs that would help leaders adjust their leadership styles to fit specific contextual factors. Furthermore, the conceptual framework should act as a trigger for credible research questions that should spur more researchers into studying the various leadership approaches discussed here, and the relationships between leadership, societal culture and organisational effectiveness in Sub-Saharan Africa.

To advance leadership theory in Africa, this paper proposes several steps. First, future research should consciously integrate leadership approaches in comprehensive organisational studies which examine how leadership manifests in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is important especially as it enhances our confidence when generalising the extant research findings to wider African and other populations. It is imperative that leadership research incorporates more predictor and criterion variables, is conducted in multiple Sub-Saharan Africa countries, with samples drawn from different ethnicities, and from public and private sector organisations. Second, researchers should design broader studies which build on existing studies that have examined contextual factors (such as collectivistic and humane orientation values) so that we understand how societal culture influences organisational effectiveness. Due to space limitations, this conceptual paper examined only two socio-cultural variables (collectivism and humane orientation) which appeared to be more pertinent to Sub-Saharan Africa. Clearly, there is need to examine how all socio-cultural variables discussed by Hofstede (2001) and the GLOBE Project (House et al. 2004) impact on leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa. Third, researchers need to examine the conceptualisation, measurement and applicability of current cultural dimensions to countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. The current cultural dimensions have already been faulted for ignoring the values the multicultural countries of Sub-Saharan Africa (Gray et al. 2008). Fourth, although left out in the current conceptual model, this paper acknowledges the need for future research models to incorporate dispositional characteristics, including personality traits, and cognitive abilities within a larger conceptual framework of leadership emergence and development in Sub-Saharan Africa. Fifth, this paper did not explore many other ‘intuitively appealing’ theories and models, other than transformational and servant leadership, which appear to easily tap into leadership phenomena in Sub-Saharan Africa. For example, the social processes of leadership theory (Parry,
developed through grounded theory research, is intuitively appealing for application in Sub-Saharan Africa as it focuses on leadership as a social process of influence in the context of achieving adaptation and change in response to changes in the organisation’s environment. The theory could apply to Sub-Saharan Africa considering that many organisations in Sub-Saharan Africa are undergoing changes and therefore social processes of leadership theory presents an opportunity to better capture effective leadership processes. Finally, in order to capture contextual factors accurately, researchers need to employ mixed-methods approaches, where both qualitative interviews and survey questionnaires are used to collect research data involving leaders and followers alike. In fact, some studies have indicated that the use of qualitative interviews within mixed-method studies could provide a grounded basis for the development of new theoretical concepts as well as allowing for the integration of leadership phenomena operating at multiple levels (Bryman, 2004; Mumford et al. 2009).

In conclusion, this paper has proposed a conceptual framework for examining the interplay between leadership, societal culture and organisational effectiveness in Sub-Saharan Africa. Although the focus of the paper is on Sub-Saharan Africa, the conceptual model may be relevant to other contexts such as Asia, where societal culture has been theorised to moderate the impact of leadership on follower responses and organisational effectiveness (Jung et al. 2009; Jung & Avolio 1999).

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