

Africa is not for sissies

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“The time to build is upon us. We have at last achieved our emancipation. We pledge ourselves to liberate all our people from the continuing bondage of poverty, deprivation, suffering and discrimination. Let freedom reign. The sun shall never set on so glorious a human achievement. God bless Africa.”

Nelson Mandela, 10 May 1994

Africa is the home of many peoples, many tribes and many beliefs. Boon (1996) stated that there is, however, a vision of Africa, which is based on past nobility and tragedy. The decolonisation of Africa, of which the dismantling of apartheid is a significant example, contributed to the awareness of the diversity of cultures on the African continent and in the rest of the world (Van der Merwe, 1996).

Global consciousness is growing and people are becoming increasingly aware of human rights and equality (Viljoen, 2009). The availability and exponential innovation of technological solutions and globalisation are largely responsible for this shift. Cross border operations and multi-cultural organisations extending their footprint in Africa are faced with complex diversity dilemmas. An awareness of how different national cultures operate is one of the most important characteristics of effective global intelligence.

Global intelligence is no new concept. Wechsler (1944), a psychologist that developed various intelligence tests still used sometimes today, defined intelligence more than sixty years ago as the global capacity of the individual to act purposefully, to think rationally and to deal effectively with his environment. For multi-cultural companies it is critical to employ leaders that understand how to cope with the environmental demands and that have the skill to engage with people from different cultures (Viljoen, 2009).

Africa as a continent is severely neglected, and, although ad hoc interventions do happen periodically, it seems as if the rest of the world is intent on abandoning Africa to its fate. Besides the hunger and famine that the continent has to endure, there is also a critical shortage of knowledge, skill and technology (NEPAD, 2010). In order to survive in a world with scarce resources a specific resilience and way of operating are needed.

The challenges facing Africa are daunting. The impact of increased corporate activity in Africa can be seen as a new round of break-ins and thefts. According to Bond (2007: 39), “The burglar’s tools include exploitative debt and finance, capital flight, skewed donor relations, unfair trade, distorted investment, ecological exploitation and the brain drain”. He continued by adding that the unintended consequence of all this is that Africa is the world’s region with the highest inequality. The African continent has the highest proportion of people living in **extreme poverty** and is not on target to meet any of the **Millennium Development Goals which were** agreed at the United Nations in 2000.

Sociologists, anthropologists and academics that study national culture over the last fifty years, documented the significant challenges that face the inhabitants of a world characteristic by having scarce resources. Sauvy (1952) first called countries that share common characteristics such as poverty, high birth rates and economic dependence on the advanced countries, classified economically underdeveloped countries such as Africa, Asia and Latin America as “Third World”.

Spiral dynamics as described by Graves (1978) and made operational in South Africa by individuals such as Loraine Laubscher explain that different people and groups of people ask different questions of existence that is linked to coping mechanisms in the brain. Everything goes well and the status quo remains if a person’s coping mechanisms can deal with the current question of existence of an individual, group or society. Laubscher (2011) explains that only crisis can create a situation where the individual unconsciously will start asking a different question of existence.

Beck and Cowan (1996) stated that most of Africa, as part of the Third World, had suffered the consequences of European colonialism and had yet to experience the agrarian movement. They described an Africa still filled with superstitions, and clan and tribal conflicts and characterised by periods of social implosions and lawlessness. Not much has changed over the last twenty years. Maybe Laubscher's (2011) proposition that no change will happen without crisis holds true.

Different colours were assigned by Beck, *et al* (1996) to categorise the different values systems described by Graves. Laubscher (2011) adapted this approach to explain dynamics in developing and under developed countries. She repositions the different value systems detailed initially by Graves (1978) as Human Niches.

A Human Niche is something at which humans excel. Due to the question of existence that people and groups of people unconsciously ask, a specific Human Niche or way of being crystallise. In figure 1 below, the Human Niches are described and integrated with the different colours assigned by Beck, *et al* (1996):

Figure 1: Human Niches (Laubscher, 2011)

Colour	Question of Existence that determine Human Niches
Yellow	How can I survive while the world survive?
Green	How can we sacrifice for the benefit of the world, and peace?
Orange	How can I conquer the material world and take calculated risks?
Blue	How can we sacrifice to prepare for the future?
Red	How can I get power?
Purple	How can we sacrifice for the benefit of the community / family / elders?
Beige	How do I survive?

Laubscher (2011) agrees with Beck, *et al* (1996) that most African countries display characteristics of PUPRLE. In some cases RED are emerging. Other human niches are also visible but are only present in the minority. As most of Africa's peoples ask a question that will lead to behaviour that protect the community, the family and the elders in the society, they excel at human relationships. The quest to make money or to improve the social fabric of society does not exist spontaneously (Viljoen, 2009).

One can just listen to the stories of Africa to become aware of the wisdom that filters through in oral history and the narrative of PURPLE people. As one leader in Ghana explained when a younger team member rebelled against the General Manager of the company:

"It is really silly to upset the crocodile if you want to cross the river"

I agree with Boon (1996) who explained that a land with "strong cultures may survive and grow together with the increasing education of a proud people secure in the knowledge that they are the future mentors of the world" (Boon, 1996, np). Maybe the world can find the key to leadership in Africa and the ways of its people.

Harrison (1990) studied the reasons why certain African countries that had escaped third world conditions, namely, excessive authoritarian structures and stagnant economies, had survived. He found that countries which were prospering were characterised by the emergence of a Puritan-Confucian-Islamic type of work ethic, the existence of the values associated with individual initiative, a stable society in terms of law and order, and respect for personal rights and property – thus awakened BLUE/ORANGE.

As managers and leaders in organisation we have no choice but to invest in leadership development and management training to ensure that BLUE structures are developed in our people (Laubscher, 2011). By doing that, maybe we can escape the crisis promised by a transmission from PURPLE to RED and to BLUE.

No system should ever be viewed from the perspective of the mental model of the leader, consultant or facilitator, but instead through inquiry and the sharing with the individual within the context of his/her climate; the group, organisation and/or societies. Leaders in multi-cultural environments should realise that employees from different nationalities will always manifest diverse mental models impacted by national cultural dynamics and that this will directly influence the way in which the systemic dynamics operate.

Doing business in multi-cultural environments will always require cultural translation. Global intelligence is critical. Functioning in a world different than your own while managing people that ask different questions of existence than you, are indeed not easy. We need a special kind of leadership to cope with these complexities. In the words of one of the expatriate leaders that have worked in Africa for years, Peet van Schalkwyk,: “Africa is really not for ‘sissies’.”