Exploring the concept of African Sprititual Conciousness

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Academy of Management (2013, Orlando)

ABSTRACT

Current leadership literature on leadership development does not sufficiently embrace ASC. This gap poses a challenge to the facilitation of identity and potential realisation for leaders in the complex Southern African leadership context.

The study employed a modernist qualitative methodology and constructivist paradigm as its research approach. A case study was used as a research strategy and a life history as a research technique. Purposeful sampling was employed in finding a storyteller and data was collected using solicited and unsolicited sources.

The study yielded a life history with a rich and varied description of how an African person experience of leadership mastery. An analysis of the collected data revealed themes that can inform leadership development with insights from an African experience and understanding of leadership mastery.

The conclusions of the study raise awareness on the particular themes for consideration from the African Spiritual Consciousness perspective and necessitate a further inquiry into the leadership development within the African context. The study provides some understanding of how an African person understands and experiences leadership mastery. The worldview of local Africans is not asking materialistic questions nor support capitalism spontaneously.

Key Concepts: Mastery, Africa(n), African Spiritual Consciousness, ubuntu, life-history, identity and facilitation, connectedness, grounded theory, African worldview, leadership development and qualitative research.

INTRODUCTION

In as much as the post-colonial context in Africa is marked by a renewed impetus towards personal development, self-definition, determination and leadership potential realisation, this journey still proves to be complex for many.

The journey towards leadership mastery for previously indigenous Africans (Mbigi, 2005; Van Rensberg, 2007; Nkomo, 2010). African Scholars (Mbigi, 2005; Broodryk, 2005; Mbiti, 1990) lament that current leadership development frameworks fail to hold in creative tension the contextual variables such as the new economy, change and transformation, diversity management and the complexity of the emerging leadership context. The notable challenge for African leaders is the lack of African consciousness within organisations (Van Rensberg, 2007). Leadership development practitioners are still reliant on leadership development frameworks from the West that predominantly have an individualistic view of personhood (Forster, 2010; Nkomo, 2011). oppressed populations begins with wading through the political, economic, socio-cultural injustices of the past as well as the scientific imperialism that suppressed, erased, and misappropriated their identities (Young, 1990; Biko, 1978; Taylor, 1992). This departure from the past also involves a process of reclamation, re-description, and transformation of negative scripts and conditioning created by the dominant culture(s) of colonialists (Heyes, 2007).The South African context of leadership is a case in point. Thechallenge of transformation and building 'a rainbow nation' (Tutu, 1999) in the post apartheid South Africa continues to raise nuanced leadership challenges that require a particular African consciousness to move the country from a liberation agenda to a transformation agenda.

The struggle for relevance in the new economy is not unique to the African context,leadership scholars (Aburdene, 2005; Naisbitt, 2005; Cavanaugh, 1999; Cashman, 2008; Wong, 2003; Covey, 1999) highlight the following global challenges: workplace instability as a result of

layoffs, downsising, mergers, and globalisation; moral complexity, and rapid shifts in attitude, social and political circumstances, economic conditions and technology; declining job satisfaction and increasing incidents of depression and burnout; environmental pollution and the energy crisis; scandals of unethical corporate behaviour; lack of shared vision, and values; poor strategic plans; poor alignment between structure, people and values; clashing leadership philosophies; lack of personal and interpersonal skills; low trust, co-operation/teamwork and no self-integrity amongst others. All these factors contribute to the complexity of leadership and increased pressure on leaders in the emerging context.

According to Kets de Vries (2001), the added challenge of globalisation and internationalisation of business require culturally well-informed leaders who can lead in a world of great unpredictability. By culture, Kets de Vries (2001, p.228) refers to the "ideals, values, and assumptions about life that are widely shared among a population…that guide specific behaviour patterns…the habitual ways in which people of a nation deal with their internal and external reality." Kets de Vries (2001) further argues that culture influences the way leadership is perceived, the style of decision-making, the way motivation, and control areunderstood, and how one manages multicultural groups. Leaders in the emerging culture should seek a dynamic balance between local and global cultural trends (Kets de Vries, 20001).

In addition, Aburdene (2005) points out that this fast changing world is also characterised by an increasing flow of spirituality from the personal to the institutional domains of life. Spirituality in the workplace escapes its traditional definitions and boundaries to its recognition as an eco-systemic consciousness that provides meaning, purpose and ethical and moral guidance to thought and behaviour in the workplace (Aburdene, 2005; Hicks, 2003; Mitroff & Denton, 1999). Moreover, Mbigi (2005) and Mbiti (1990) highlight that within the African context everything is spiritual; so embracing the 'spirit' in the workplace is

essentially allowing people to bring themselves holistically into the workplace. Mitroff and Denton (1999, p.4) capture the call for spirituality in the workplace in the following comment,

> Being forced to split off fundamental parts of oneself at work, being asked to give more of oneself without having one's whole self acknowledged in return, being asked to care for the soul and its concerns in one's own time rather than in company time— these and similar laments were refrains we often heard throughout our research.

This outcry resonates with African leadership scholars (Mbigi, 2005; Mbiti, 1990; Biko, 1978; Van Rensberg, 2007; Broodryk, 2005) who also draw attention to an integrative African approach in shaping leadership consciousness in the world. African scholars are not alone in the call for revisiting our current leadership theories of human development and the practice of leadership. Wong (2003) and Cavanaugh (1999) assert that the world should move beyond leadership approaches that compartmentalise, alienate the person from their life context, and develop models that create a sense of purpose, meaning, and community in the workplace. Aburdene (2005, p. xxiv) postulates, "the cornerstone of effective leadership is self-mastery, and that is exactly what is missing in business today. The surest route to self-mastery is spiritual practice. Worldly power without self-mastery is the downfall of leadership."

Furthermore, Koortzen and Cilliers (2005) concede that the complexity of roles, the pace of change and contextual variables of the world of work confuse the existential (what you believe you are doing), normative (what you have to do) and phenomenal (what others believe you are doing) roles of leaders within organisations. In South Africa, for instance, leaders of different racial (black/white/coloured/Indian) and gender (black/white male or black/white female) groups carry specific historical symbols related to the apartheid past that confuse the conscious and unconscious dynamics of functioning in the workplace (Koortzen & Cilliers, 2005). Mbigi (2005) also points out that the failure to understand the conception of personhood in Africa is an added challenge in understanding African leadership.

The nagging question is: what are African people's views of leadership mastery in postmodern Africa? Current leadership literature suggests that the answer to this question requires endogenous approaches to leadership that seek to reclaim the aesthetics and identity of Africans (Makgoba, 1999; Mbeki, 1998). Whilst accepting the effects of colonialism and the leadership complexity of postcolonial Africa, Nkomo (2011) suggests that the way forward for African research on leadership should not be insular but an open dialogue with other leadership trends around the world. Moreover, most contemporary research agrees that leadership cannot be separated from the historical, cultural, situational and practical contexts in which it is practised (Goffee & Jones, 2006). It is therefore necessary to develop leadership frameworks that hold in creative tension the critical issues cited earlier. It is the contention of this study that leadership mastery in Africa requires developing a framework of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours that are informed by African Spiritual Consciousness (ASC). The West is known for capitalism and free market principles. Maybe leaders in Africa ask different questions of existence.

RESEARCH QUESTION

In the light of the above, the research question is:

> *How can African Spiritual Consciousnessinform leadership development?*

Particular sub-questions of the study are:

- Can African Spiritual Consciousness be conceptualised within current leadership literature?
- How does an African person conceptualise leadership mastery from an African Spiritual Consciousness perspective?
- How can African Spiritual Consciousness inform leadership mastery?

THE AIMS OF THE STUDY

This study has three related aims:

- To conceptualise African Spiritual Consciousness within current leadership literature;

- To conduct a life history study of a person who has been involved in work relating to African Spiritual Consciousness; and

- To establish how African Spiritual Consciousness may be used to inform leadership mastery.

AFRICAN HUMANISTIC APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

In view of the philosophical and ontological inclinations of most African scholars (Mbiti, 1990; Mbigi, 2005; Nsamaneng, 1995; Broodryk, 2005; Biko, 1978), a social constructionist approach was selected to discuss an African humanistic approach to leadership development. According to Myers (1993, p. 31);

> Humanists concern themselves with the human capacities and potentials that have no systematic place in behaviourist and psychoanalytic theory, e.g., creativity, self, growth, basic need-gratification, self-actualisation, higher values, autonomy, identity, responsibility, psychological health... Their aim is to present a more specific picture of the full range of possibilities inherent in the nature of humankind, and how those possibilities can be actualised.

In addition,Hanks (2008) asserts that African humanism goes further than western humanism in that it embodies centuries of indigenous wisdoms and a collectivistic worldview that is paramount to African survival. From the African perspective identity, facilitation and leadership mastery are social constructs (Hanks, 2008; Forster, 2010). African leadership philosophy scholars (Blunt and Jones, 1997; Horwitz, 2002; Jackson, 2004) argue that, because leadership and management challenges in Africa are embedded in a very different cultural, political, economic and social context, Eurocentric leadership philosophies are inadequate in developing culturally relevant leaders in the emerging economy.

The choice of social constructivism as a theoretical approach for this research was motivated by thecontention(Mbigi, 2005; Van Rensberg, 2007; Mbeki, 1998) that current leadership

development frameworks have a western individualistic approach that fails to embrace the holistic and relational nature of African thought and behaviour.These frameworks are also predisposed towards regulating and controlling identity (Carroll & Levy 2010) rather than enabling the dynamic nature of identity to emerge from its social 'situatedness' (Mbiti, 1990; Tutu, 1999). Asocialconstructionist approach to identity work and leadership mastery can be broadly understood as anongoingprocess of interpreting social worlds and phenomena (Pye, 2005) and relational meaning making (Hosking, 2008).

The social constructionist approach to human development is akin to the African world view of life in which identity is perceived as a verb - a thing in motion - a process of continuously engaging in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening, and revising (Corroll& Levy, 2010).In the African mindset, personal identity "does not have a single point or moment of origin" (Wright 2002, p. 2) but emerges synergistically as a confluence of the personal inner drives, motives, feelings and the socio-cultural and behavioural factors of one's existence. When developing leaders in Africa, it is also vital that practitioners resist the temptation of unchecked adaptation and re-inscription of dominant leadership discourseson local cultures but allow a dialogical approach that enables synergistic analogies of leadership mastery (Thomas & Davies, 2005).

The implication from the philosophical African humanistic stance is that leadership development should be based on the belief that people have an innate socially constructed wellspring of psychological well-being from which to draw (Segdeman, 2005; Nsamaneng, 1995) and that the realisation of leadership potential is attached to the existential need for self-actualisation and meaning (Smith, 2009; Frankl, 1984). It is essential in the African context to embed the principal psychological constructs of mind[1],consciousness[2], and

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[1]**Mind** as the unlimited energy and intelligence of existence
[2]**Consciousness** as the ability of the mind to know experience and know how experience is created

thought[3](Polsfuss&Ardichvili, 2008) that underlie personhood and leadership development in African spiritual consciousness. In addition, Carroll and Levy (2010) and Forster (2010) argue that from a social constructionist approach identify facilitation exists within a number of continuums where the individual is subject and object, exists within fluid and fixed relational boundaries and their identity is shaped by both inside and outside realities.

Current leadership development trends

Leadership as one of the central themes in this research has been described in many different ways within academic and general literature. There are vital identifiable features to the phenomenon of leadership: leadership is a process; it involves influence; it occurs within a group context (Northouse, 2007); it involves self awareness, other awareness and reality awareness (Smith, 2009); it is an inside out journey of authentic self expression it involves goal attainment and adding value (Northouse,2007; Covey, 1994; Cashman, 2008). There is an emphasis in current literature that leadership should be aholistic and integrative process that aims at authenticity (Cashman, 2008),flow and optimal performance (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003) andeco-systemic self-mastery (Kets de Vries&Cheak, 2010) that draws from positive psychological capacities, socio-cultural and organisational context (Luthans&Avolio, 2003).

Olivares, Peterson,and Hess (2007) differentiate between leader development and leadership development. They (Olivares, *et.al*, 2007) argue that leader development focuses on developing the individual's generic knowledge,skills, and attitudes with no particular emphasis on the contextual variables. On the other hand, leadership development involves developing the individual within an integrated system that includes other people, social systems, and organisational strategies within a specific cultural context and the global cultural landscape. Put differently, Kets de Vries and Cheak (2010) assert that organisations

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[3]**Thought** asthe ability of Mind to originate specific experiences....the flowing creative ability that sculpts individual reality moment-to-moment

need leadership development frameworks that can contain the micro (holistic view of the individual), the macro (the organisational systemic and cultural) and the global cultural and political aspects of understanding leadership processes.

The earliest typologies of leadership development identified conceptual, skill-building, personal growth, and feedback approaches as the core mainstream components of the leadership development field (Conger, 1992). Most of these typologies had a stronger affinity with traditional leadership theories and focused on the technical "know-how" and are orientated towards constructing a "tool box" (Grint, 2007) for working on the self and others. These approaches render 'identity' effectively as another tool with the potential to provide an organising structure, source of motivation, and store of "personal material" such as life stories (Lord & Hall, 2005, p. 592) that can be mobilised for greater personal and organisational performance.

The emergence of social constructionistcame with the emphasis that identity is neither a tool or personalised development journey but an approach to leadership development that locates truth in relationship and lived experience (Cunliffe, 2009). Using the social constructionist approach in Africa will deepen personal awareness and challenge the dominant discourses (ways of seeing, thinking, and speaking) that structure our social experience, identities, and our knowledge of the world.The advantage of such an approach is that it will help Africans assimilate, complement, and reject (Carroll & Levy, 2010) aspects of the dominant leadership discourses.

According to Day (2001) leadership development in the current context is universally presented as inherently relational, social and collective and correspondingly drawing from three sets of capacities:structural (social and network ties), relational (interactions and relationships) and cognitive (shared representation and meanings).Verrier and Smith (2005)

assert that leadership development should enable the individual to deal with existential (problems and challenges of existence), phenomenological (how life is experienced by the individual) and the anthropological (what are the universal basic needs and acceptable human behaviour) realities of life.In summary, leadership development in Africa needs a socially constructed, holistic integrative approach that is able to hold the existential, sociological, psychological, and cultural factors of the individual's life.

AFRICAN SPIRITUAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The concept of ASC within this research is used as a metaphor that seeks to draw the African cultural conceptions of personhood, spirituality, and philosophy of being (consciousness) into the current scholarly dialogue of leadership. When entering the field of African thought and culture, you are likely to find oneself amidst an explosion caused by the marriage of scientific research and non-verifiable data. As a point of departure, a web definition of the concept "African" can be summarised as… '*of Africa*' - relating to any part of the African continent, or its peoples, languages, or culture of African people, people who live in Africa or trace their ancestry to indigenous inhabitants of Africa.

The adjective African can also be understood as a function of geography or the existential life conditions of African peoples. According to Oguejiofor (cited in Oladipo, 2006) "the adjective African should therefore be understood in such a manner as to be all-inclusive, embracing all possible meaning of the term: geographic, political, cultural, ideological, religious, and so forth." Although some scholars would like to define African as exclusively referring to black people, there is a plausible argument that African people cannot be simply defined by racial groupings, as there are people who have become Africans by other means other than descent (Oladipo, 2006; Ekanola, 2003). It is also interesting that Africa as a continent is geographically sandwiched between the East and the West almost symbolically suggesting a cosmic place that integrates reality.

Secondly, the concept ASC alludes to an appreciation of the African world-view. To understand African consciousness and personhood, one needs to be baptised into the rich ambience of the African people's cultures, language, geography, mythology, and oral tradition, and touch the real-world practices of the people (Mbiti, 1990). An immersion into the African existence reveals a particular cosmology and hierarchy that fashions their world. Mbiti (1990) makes us aware that in the African cosmology is an indivisible reality that includes humans, nature, ancestors, and God. According to Mbiti (1990), Mbigi (2005), and Viljoen (2003), the African cosmology is a product of a holistic and anthropocentric ontology.

Thirdly, According to Forster (2006) the concept of *Ubuntu* captures the philosophical premise and offers a generous ontology that opens researchers into the integrative understanding of life within Africa. The concept of *Ubuntu* or *botho* - loosely translated as 'humanness' – is a comprehensive philosophical, anthropological, sociological and cultural premise for African thinking about human identity and consciousness (Mbiti,1990;Setiloane,1998 & Mbigi,2005). This concept is encapsulated by the Southern African Zulu maxim, '*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu'* (A person is a person through other persons).Mangaliso (2001: 24) defines*Ubuntu* as:

> Humaneness—a pervasive spirit of caring and community, harmony and hospitality, respect and responsiveness - that individuals and groups display for one another. *Ubuntu* is the foundation for the basic values that manifest themselves in the ways African people think and behave towards each other and everyone else they encounter.

Forster (2006; 2010) continues to argue that within the *Ubuntu* concept lies the framework for understanding human identity, the essence of being (spirit) and a relational way of thinking about being in Africa. As Mbiti (1990), Setiloane (1998), and Mbigi (2005) argue,*Ubuntu* is a dynamic concept with far-reaching implications for research on identity

and consciousness within leadership development frameworks.Inorder to understand it, one needs to glean from the deep fabric of African culture, idioms, myths, and rituals.

Therefore defining ASC theoreticallymoves us beyond objective empirical (biology and sociology) and subjective phenomenological (such as philosophy and theology) approaches to an inter-subjective integrative approach to human development. Forster's (2010) concept of generous ontology is a helpful bridge for the world of research as it offers an integral approach to understanding personhood and leadership development as illustrated by the works of Ken Wilber (1998; 2000), Judith (1996) Zohar and Marshall (2000; 2004). Thefollowing argument put forward by Forster (2010, p.12) offers a point of departure towards conceptualising African Spiritual Consciousness:

> The question "who am I" (subjective) is intricately related to who you say that I am (objective), and who we are together (inter-subjective). Instead of being a lone subject, or a quantifiable and containable object, we are all "intersubjects", fundamentally interwoven into a common cosmic identity and being that is run through with sacred dignity. It is not just me, it is not just you, it is not just the material reality, neither is it just the spiritual reality; true reality is a sacred interweaving of all these things – true reality is beyond one single quantifiable truth, it is generous. Identity, in this sense, is a dynamic engagement and discovery of mutual identity and shared dignity – that is, a generous ontology.

Setiloane (1998), Mbigi (2005), and Ramose (1999) who support an integrative research approach emphasise that the African worldview is a holistic one in which the internal, external, and transcendent aspects of being are interwoven into the same cosmos. Mbigi (2005) goes further to say that the essence and spirit of African consciousness is characterised by the values of connectedness, harmony, compassion and empathy and a respectful relationship with creation. In view of the challenges posed by African history and the scarcity of scholarly work on African approaches to human consciousness, individual identity and

leadership development, this research sought to explore the narrative of a black African person and how their conceptualisation of ASCinforms leadership development and practice.

In summary embracing, the African perspective on personhood within leadership development frameworks promises a more holistic paradigm that combines the *Mitwelt* (the essential social existential factors), *Umwelt* (the cultural, political, and natural environmental factors) and the *Eigenwelt (*identity andpersonhood factors) of human experience (Moss 2001; Hanks, 2001).

RESEARCH DESIGN

In conducting the study a modernist qualitative approach was adopted in order explore the subjective world (Hussey and Hussey, 1997; Mouton, 2001)of an African person's life and their conceptualisation of African spiritual consciousness. A single case life history (Plummer, 2001)was used tosocially construct (rather than impose) meaning to of ASC through analysing the storyteller's lived experience. Lived experience in this regard entails opinions, ideas, social constructions, beliefs, stories, interactions, social or cultural experiences, biographies, words and actions that give character and meaning to the subjects being researched (Goodson & Sikes, 2000; Plummer, 2001).The whole research process was underpinned by the principles of grounded theory and social constructionism.

Using the Life history technique

From literature discussed above, it is evident that there is no sufficient evidence for the conceptualisation of ASC within current leadership literature;therefore the life history technique (Plummer, 2001) was chosen as a data collection strategy. Simms (2003, p. 80), states that the underlying philosophy to using life history as a data gathering technique is that "we understand our own lives – our own selves and our place in the world – by interpreting our lives as if they were narratives … and life understood as narrative constitutes self-

understanding."Of the various types of life stories,a *short topical life-story*with elements of a long story was employed to give conceptual clarity on an ASC approach towards leadership development.

Sampling

The life-history research was conducted on an ordinary black, middle-aged (mid forties), South African person living in the Johannesburg area. This individual was purposively selected primarily because they have specific experience, insight, and exposure to leadership and understands the historical dynamics and current issues of identity facilitation in South Africa. According to Plummer (2001) a life can selectedby virtue ofwillingness, availability, and the ability to articulate and having a good story to tell. The participant was appropriately consulted and he agreed to participate in the study.

Data collection and storage

Data collection was done through intensive semi-structured and unstructured interviews to obtain data from the social world of the life-story participant (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). Using face-to-face interviews elicited relevant material from the detailed experiences and thoughts from the participant's story. The interviews were structured into a sequence of six meetings over a month. The meetings took place in the participant'soffice, as this was convenient for his busy schedule and accessible to me.During the interviews, notes were taken of what happened, of the interactions, the key issues of the content and of the general impressions on the process. The interviews were digitally recorded using two electronic, downloaded into a computer and thensystematically transcribed and coded in preparation for analysis.

Data analysis

The data was analysed using three stages grounded theory analysis as suggested by Glaser (2001; 2003):

I. **Open coding -** the initial process of identifying, selecting and naming categorising of the collected data;

II. **Axial coding -** the process of putting together the data through identifying causal relationships between categories and explaining how they give shape the phenomenon to which they relate; and

III. **Selective coding** – the process of selecting and identifying the core categories and systematically validating those relationships, filling in, and refining and integrating them into a Grounded Theory – the research outcome.

The process of *noticing, collecting,* and *thinking* (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) proved to be *iterative* and *progressive,* recursive and holographic (Seidel, 1998). Conceptualising how ASC inform leadership masteryalso required the inductive analysis as well as confessional and ethnographic tales of representation (Sparkes, 2002).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Connectedness of Life

> *As children, we were always made to feel that we belong to the broader community...Sometimes we would have meals at different homes in the neighbourhood…teachers treated us as their own children...I am grateful that my community taught me the connectedness of life and living...all these influences (good and bad) have continuously helped me to create and shape my identity in the world.*

Belonging and humanness

Related to the concept of connectedness is the idea of **'belonging'** as a basic premise of self-understanding is another critical feature in African thought. According to Tutu (1999):

> A person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that

comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed.

Meaning and belief in the Higher Being – spirituality

In Africa, spirituality is not an aspect of life you connect and disconnect from, but it is the very essence of life – everything is spiritual. The presence of a supreme being is a given.

> *I am connected to something bigger than I am...the spirit of the Supreme Being that connects me with family, my community, and nature...this Being is always available to guide us towards responsible behaviour and healthy relationships.*

Personal Identity

> *I see myself as a connected being...that feeds from other forms of energy as suggested in metaphysics...This means that I stop viewing other parts of life as meant for my consumption and personal entertainment – because such an attitude is exploitative of people and other forms of life…my warmth this winter is joined to someone making a jersey for me in another part of the world....that persons existence defines part of who I am.*

The concept of personal identity in the African context is a very complicated one. Individual identity in Africa can best be described as integrated. There is no clear distinction between the individual and other objects (trees, animals or event) of creation (Senghor, 1994). The dualisms between human beings and nature, subject and object, mind and matter are absent in the African mind (Ekanola, 2003). The individualised **'I'** centred self in Western thought is replaced with the 'familial and contextualised self' – the **'we'** centred self **- in Africa.**

Inthe African perspective personhood is characterised by: (i) the unity of the person with the environment, (ii) the vital Love/Life Energy (force) that connects people intrinsically with others and nature, (iii) unique space-time cognitive affectional, behavioural consciousness

and moral capacity, and (iv) the desire to collectively develop without high levels of competition (Khapagawani, 2006; Mbiti, 1990; Viljoen, 2003; Nsamaneng, 1995).

Leadershipmastery in Africa

'In Africa you do not compartmentalise life'

The use of the concept of mastery within the African worldview suggests both an individualistic and a commercialised approach to leadership. The participant seemed more inclined toward dynamic balance than mastery. There are no distinctive processes programs of leadership development in the traditional African context. This is probably the cause for some resistance to some of the current leadership development programs in the workplace. The major cynicism comes from the premise that leadership development programs use instruments that 'dissect life for specificity' and compartmentalises life. In the participant's terms, "specificity is a product of the markets that seeks to reduce people to a set of skills and behaviours...almost saying you exist because of what you know and do". In Africa, when you reduce people to competencies, they become disconnected from their existential purpose and motivation.

Secondly, in the current leadership development discourse people are subjected to emotional intelligence training, 360 degrees feedback, cognitive processing profiles, and personality tests that do not sufficiently capture the language and ontological inclinations of African people. Participant also intimated that the reason some of these programs have not yielded best results is because the fail to embrace the non-textual and narrative world of African people.. In as much as there are no scientifically proven techniques for assessment in the African context there are particular ways of giving coaching, mentoring, and giving feedback to individuals and communities in most African cultures. These are often enshrined in the symbolic metaphors contained in idioms, poetry, songs, rituals, and initiation rites.

Thirdly, organisations strive to optimise profit in capitalistic societies. The question of existence of people in Africa are mostly focussing around sacrificing the self for the benefit of the tribe, the community or the family (Viljoen, 2008). Commercial questions are often not considered and therefore profit and optimisation of organisational performance do not come spontaneously.

A fourth notable feature of African consciousness is that there is no heavy reliance on biological and psychological sciences. The use of psychological constructs and methodologies and their impact on African conceptions of personhood is worth investigating.

> *The African mind uses a narrative pattern of thought...we tell stories about what wisdom is and though these stories values and teachings are being carried through generations of people and cultures. In the African mind, there is a deep humility and openness because there is a deep appreciation of the mystery and connectedness of life...*

What comes through quite clearly is that the African mind has a strong sociological orientation. Mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing as critical aspects of personal development are all situated in the context of relationships. An essential feature highlighted by the lifestory about ASC is the need to keep an 'open mind' because there is a deep appreciation that knowledge at any given time is always in part. Cultivating this quality within the different leadership domains enablesagility and physiological wellbeing

Interpersonal relationships

> *I do not regard myself to exist outside of my social network. The popular maxim is 'Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' (I am a person through other persons). I think the worst punishment anyone can get in life is not death but social exclusion. In Africa, there is no identity or any other construct outside the social construct – you exist because others exist.*

According to Hanks (2008),the concept of *Ubuntu* (humanness) is a comprehensive framework through which African people view the world. According to Mutahhari (cited in Broodryk, 2006) a worldview entails a deducible premise that gives meaning to reality and existence, motivates, and fosters commitment to ideals. As a relational ontology (Forster, 2010)*Ubuntu* embraces the values of non-discrimination, tolerance, cooperation, cohesion, sharing, caring, collective solidarity, goodness, dignity and someone striving to master the life-coping skills of being human (Broodryk, 2006; Mbigi, 2005; Tutu, 1999).

Withinthe African context, leadership mastery is not measured as an extension of the individual but as the person ability to live in peaceful and synergistic relationships (Viljoen, 2003). When someone fails to live in a way that adds value, they can be referred to as a predator (or having lost their humanity). In addition to *Ubuntu* being a value guidance principle it is also value about the preservation of the humanity of a people. Some scholars (Oladipo, 2006; Mbiti, 1990; Viljoen, 2003) note that the down side of the *Ubuntu* concept is the challenge of maintaining an individual identity within the community.

A major threat to relationships in the world and in the current African (particularly South Africa) context is the issue of resources. When resources are limited or have to be distributed,the philosophy of *Ubuntu* is threatened. In the participants words "when resources are limited,people stop being people, they become Hutsis and Tutsis like in Rwanda...they start using other labels of discrimination. The current discourse on balancing the economy with historical and current economic challenges in South Africa is a case in point.

One further point on the African relational ontology is that there is a clear hierarchy on how family and community relationships work. Thehierarchy is a helpful relational tool but it still needs to be challenged in terms of its patriarchal nature and how its carries unchecked assumptions about power and status (Koortzen & Cillers, 2005). African leadership scholars, like Mbigi (2005) point out that the hierarchical nature of African cultures creates a particular

leadership dynamic and relationship with authority in the workplace. Cilliers and Koortzen (2005) argue that, for black African man their understanding of authority and its boundaries is deeply influenced by the fact that they occupy a superior role within the cultural hierarchy than women. Kassin, Fein & Markus (2008) cautions that, for better interpersonal relationships in the workplace, there is a constant need to check the cultural heuristics at play within relationships. In essence, as the participant asserted, relationship mastery from an ASC perspective means,

> *Developing the patience and capacity to deal with the daily contradiction of life (or relating with people) and still contribute positively towards others. It further means developing self-awareness that allows me to live dynamically with people in a way that reminds them who they are at their best and who they can still become. You do not master relationship by control but by dynamically managing the nuances of living in relationships.*

According to Van Vlaenderen (2001) any form of knowledge in the African worldview is for practical purpose, namely to be safe and prosperous - and this cannot   be achieved by any person in isolation. Therefore, the practical aim of leadership mastery is the social welfare of the group.

An African understanding of vocation

> *Our current world is characterised by competition, climbing the pyramid and satisfying the pyramid creators, unaccountable business leaders, presidents using dodgy rhetoric to avoid reality and truth, materialism and greed. In such a world vocation becomes a selfish pursuit that is disconnected from the social setting of people and serving the greater good.*

Within the African world view there is a clear link between discovering your vocation and community service. The participant asserted

> '*the commodification of services and skills is a modern phenomenon…in traditional Africa work was rarely a means of providing livelihood or a*

process of accumulation...it was always about service to the greater good and community wellbeing".

Historically African cultures have always priced concern for the vulnerable. Work in such a context is way of contributing to the welfare of the family and the community as well. In the current worldview, work is often seen as an individualistic pursuit and a way of achieving personal goals. The social and eco-systemic relevance of work has not been sufficiently validated in leadership development programs within companies. Therefore, ASCstands as a critique to the materialistic and individualistic culture purported by leading economies in the world.

Motivation and financial benefits

Just as selling ones skills was not a major motivationfor work in the African perspective, the accumulation of wealth was not a high motive. In as much as work and earning money are critical for survival 'money cannot important for its own sake' it has to be linked to a higher purpose and benefit the family and community. The participant argued;

> *Ifmoney becomes an end in itself, it will sooner or later run out of things to buy...money should serve my basic needs and the needs of the greater good of my family and community...all material benefit in the traditional African sense are meant to enrich the whole...cattle, goats and land were given away to help those who suddenly could not provide for themselves to help them find their feet...the ability to share and sustain other lives was the true measure of character and wealth.*

From this worldview, motivation and meaning in life lie in the non-material aspects of life – spiritual wellbeing and social connectedness. Money is not a primary motivator but a means towards an end that can be used to deepen the meaning of life. The greater purpose of work and earning money is to fulfil ones deepest goal and meaning in life. Therefore,work and money cannot become the master of the person's heart.

Culture and leadership development

Throughout the reconstruction of the participants,social reality the subject of culture became unavoidable. The cultural dimensions of our life manifest in the personal, interpersonal, and professional dimensions of our lives. According to Kets de Vries (2001), we can no longer ignore the cultural elements and expressions of leadership within the global context. By culture, Kets de Vries (2001, p.228) refers to the "ideals, values, and assumptions about life that are widely shared among a population…that guide specific behaviour patterns…the habitual ways in which people of a nation deal with [with] their internal and external reality. As the participant conceded, we all carry cultural stereotypes that need to be consciously engaged and countered when necessary. Cultureinfluences the way leadership is perceived, the style of decision-making, the way motivation, control is understood, and how one manages multicultural groups (Kets de Vries, 2001).

Kets de Vries (2001, p.231) summarises the cultural dimensions of leadership as follows: (i) *Environment* – how people perceive reality, goodness/evil, what is certain/uncertain, how to achieve control/harmony and the trust-mistrust continuum; (ii) *time* – monochronic/polychronic and past, present and future orientations of time; (iii) *thinking* – inductive and deductive, holistic/part oriented; (iv) power – egalitarian/hierarchic and ascription or achievement orientation; (v) relationships – some people view the world from individualistic/collectivistic, universalistic/particularistic, competitive/cooperative orientation; (vi) space – private/public orientation; (vii) language – high/low context language often influenced by the culture of orientation; (viii) action orientation – being/doing oriented and internal or external control and meaning; and (ix) emotion – expressive or inhibited.

In the participant's life story, it was evident that African culture(s) are generally inclined towards collectivistic and cooperative relational stance, symbolic and narrative

communication, inductive and holistic thinking, hierarchic power, and a polychronic time orientation that values past, present and future time as equally important. In addition, African culture has a narrative and dialogical approach to leadership. It is the participant's view that the West has subjected many African leaders to cultural and ideological colonisation to the extent that leaders had to become clones of leaders elsewhere. The future of leadership in the world needs to be both global and contextually relevant. That being said, Kets de Vries (2001) further cautions that cultural sensitivity is not the ultimate goal; the goal is that the leader will fully embrace their culture and transcend to a plain where they are also globally competent.

DISCUSSION

The above analysis reveals a number of themes that emerge from both the participant'sstory and the reviewed literature. According to Henning (2004), using grounded theory analysis anticipates the emergence of theory from the causes and conditions of the studied phenomena. The following are some of the dominant themes that emerge on conceptualisation of ASC within leadership development frameworks.

Firstly, the connectedness of life within the African is both a critique and an avenue for further exploration within current leadership literature. The challenge to view leadership development from a holistic perspective echoes through both the African person's life history and current leadership literature. The eco-systemic nature of ASC highlights the social location and relatedness of any human endeavour towards leadership mastery.Most current leadership development frameworks either focus on particular knowledge, skills and attitudes the individual has to master or the meeting of organisational objectives whilst an ASC approach aims at enriching the whole ecosystem of relationships. Therefore, leadership mastery in this context is never an individual pursuit but a journey of growth that adds value to self, the organisation, the community, and a sustainable world.

The **second** insight is the lack of compartments within the African worldview. As the participant noted although the current leadership paradigmsare gravitating towards holistic frameworks their endeavour to achieve specificity in the different dimensions of assessments lend them at theverge of compartmentalisation. Wort (2011) makes an important contribution when he suggests that leadership development should be seen from a quantum physics perspective of indivisibility. In order to develop people holistically people's personal (physiological, psychological, spiritual), social and ecosystem dimensions of life should be viewed like an atom that constantly receives and transfers energy within and without in order to create balance. Smith (2009) basing his argument on t Ilya Prigogine (1977) theory of dissipative structures argues that people are like open energy systems that receive energy from the environment, transforms it and dissipates to the environment.

From an African relational ontology (Forster, 2010), the eco-systemicexistence of people provides a specific way of relating with the others and the world. According to Wilber (2001), Forster (2006; 2010) and Viljoen (2003) a relational ontology based on an inter-subjective form of consciousness that integrates the objective and subjective components of human existence and reality. ASC emphasises the co-creation of identity through authentic relationship with other human being and creation. It is my contention that the African ontological assumptions suggest that personal mastery in not only an inside-out (objective) but also outside-in (subjective) process of growing self awareness and potential realisation – an inter-subjective approach to identity facilitation. This ontology still needs to be embraced in development of leadership competency frameworks.

Fourthly, ASC begin from the premise that all life is spiritual. Based on a premise the spiritual life dimension exists as the abode of meaning, value guidance, motivation, and purpose and the uniting Love-Life Energy force of life, it is essential that spirituality be authentically embraced within the workplace (Hawks, 1994). Hicks (2003) points out that

23

embracing spirituality does not mean embracing religion but the characteristic attributes that spirituality hopes to achieve such as awareness, intuition, purpose and meaning. In this regard, The African perspective bridges the gap between the transcendental elements of spirituality and the behavioural components of living in 'spirited' relationships.

Fifthly, the research process revealed the importance of the non-textual world of narrative and stories in the context of leadership development and mastery. As Drake (2008, p.52) asserts "we use [stories] to remember and organise our past, communicate about and negotiate our present, and envision and act into our future". It is my contention that leadership in the future needs a narrative approach as evidenced by the growing field of coaching psychology. Such an approach is able to socially construct meaning and values, encourage a holistic view of the person who is leading, and grow cultural relevance. Within the African context, narrative leadership development and coaching promises a respectful interaction with the cultural world of the African peoples that is filled with stories and metaphors. In the process of this research, the participant told a number of stories about leadership development, initiation, mentoring as well as celebration of achievement that grounded the theories of leadership in a real cultural context.

Sixthly, the location of identity within community in the African perspective has the potential to confuse the task, role, and boundaries for the individual in the workplace. According to Koortzen and Cilliers (2005) there is often an amount of conflict within the workplace that emanates from the failure of individuals understand their normative (what they are suppose to do), existential (what they believe they are doing) and phenomenal (what others perceive them to be doing) roles. Koortzen and Cilliers (2005) add that the lack of understanding of the conscious and unconscious influences of African people's behaviour contributes to the poor sense of boundary it often leads to conflict, failure to understand their own authority and ultimately role confusion.

Finally, the life history highlights that the essence of an African worldview of life is the desire for harmonious existence. The story revealed that such harmony could only be achieved through co-operation, compassion, unity and the ethics of *Ubuntu* as outlined by African scholars like Mbigi (2005), Broodryk (2006), and Mbiti (2005). Upholding these values will lead us away from the competition, materialism, and individualism that dehumanise and commodity people. Mnyandu (1997, p.81) conception of *Ubuntu* provides a helpful hint of the promise of leadership mastery from an African perspective:

> Ubuntu is not merely positive human qualities, but the very human essence itself, which lures and enables human beings to become *abantu*or humanised beings, living in daily self-expressive works of love and efforts to create harmonious relationships in the community and the world beyond.

In essence, ASC about bringing together African mind, thought and consciousness in the context of leadership at a personal interpersonal and professional context of leadership. Therefore, the above meta-insights and emerging themes have given voice to the conceptualisation of AS withinleadership development literature and practice. As the outcomes of a grounded theory research journey, they have also opened avenues for further research using life histories.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Firstly, the findings and the emerging themes of this research endeavour have implications for leadership facilitation and development programs as well as coaching. According to Koortzen and Cilliers (2005), executive coaching and development in the current work context should validate both the conscious (rational) and unconscious (irrational) dynamics of individuals and groups. A holistic approach to leadership development and potential realisation should

include the cognitive, behavioural and affective, cultural aspects of the individual. According to Kets de Vries and Cheak (2010), any leadership and coaching approach should deal with the individual's internalised schemas for self-understanding and meaning making, developmental issues and motivational issues to enable positive reframing of the self within the organisational context. M ost of the work that has been done to validate African spiritual conscious and *Ubuntu* as a leadership framework has been descriptive of the core characteristics of which most of them already exist within leadership vocabulary. Viljoen (2008) warns that the national cultural dynamics should always be taken in to account when intervening on Individual, Group or Organsiational level. Future research should be done on this topic and conceptual models should be developed on how ASC can inform leadership paradigm and culture within organisations.

Secondly, from a practical point of view, the inter-subjective (relational ontology) nature of ASC calls for an inquiry into the existing instruments of assessing and developing competency frameworks for organisations. For instance, most 360 degrees feedback instruments begin and end with feedback to the individual (Kets De Vries, 2010). It is my contention that the new clinically based psychodynamic models of group coaching and facilitation unveils an opportunity to development more relational tools for facilitating leadership development within organisations (Koortzen & Cilliers, 2005). The psychodynamic model has its strength in its ability to narratively deal with the conscious and unconscious realities within relationships.

Thirdly, the use of life-history methods in the field of management, spirituality and religion needs to be encouraged as it promises to give bridge real life experiences with academic research work. For instance, the use of the life history method in this study has given voice to particular nuances that embrace cultural and racial realities within the larger social and political contexts of leadership. Thus, the use life history in this study has illuminated some

of the practical challenges of facilitating leadership development within the domain of management, spirituality and religion. A case in point is the lack of resources that begin from an African consciousness. Furthermore, the combination ofthe social constructionist approach, grounded theory, and life history allowed me to reach an in-depth interpretation that would have not been possible with other methods.

Lastly, the study has revealed the lack of scientifically verifiable data on ASC and how it can inform leadership practice. A further challenge is the contextualisation of existing approaches to leadership development approaches within the African context. More research in this regard can lead to a better understanding and application of African leadership perspectives.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As a particular form of qualitative study, this research used a single case, which made it difficult to generalise about its findings. Generalisability was not so much the point, however, as allowing the richness and depth of the participant's unique story and his conceptualisation of leadership from an ASC perspective to be heard, while also contributing to emerging theory. There is no doubt that there exists a need for more research and for more narratives on ASCto be heard. While the amount of data collected was enormously rich and detailed, it was overwhelming for a study of this size. Spesific effort was made to express the richness and detail of the narrative but there is possibly more that could have been done in this regard.

CONCLUSION

This research has qualitatively explored how African spiritual consciousness can inform leadership development practice. Meta insights on the importance of socially constructing identity in the African context were highlighted and described. It emerged that to conceptualise ASC within leadership development paradigms the study required the life-history technique and grounded theory to socially construct emergent themes that can inform research and practice in the future. Thelife history and worldview of an African person has

been heard, therelational ontology and social location of African people have been reiterated, and the implications of ASC for leadership development in the future have been discussed. The outcomes of the research journey have also enriched the foundational assumptions of leadership development in Africa and opened to door to further research on its influence on leadership mastery. It became clear that the question of how to make more money is not occupying the mind of African leaders. A much more integrated and systemic approach towards life is adapted.

Ultimately, the journey towards conceptualising ASC with management, spirituality and religionperspectives has begun.

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29

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