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“The challenge of practicing an effective leadership in Africa”

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Abstract

Leadership is the most important asset for developing a country. Preparing leadership is fundamental to the African revolution. Africa has been known as the continent of corruption, abuse, sexual violence, self-enrichment, and conflicts. Africa inherited a strong leadership pattern from colonization, from which several issues were born. From the origin, the vices, and the chronological construction of the practice of leadership, this study explores the difficulty African heads are facing to build resilient and prosperous countries. The study is based on research of published papers, books, and verified experts works from local to international sources. It is proven that most African leaders are not prepared enough to lead nations. Indeed, leadership development must be intentional to cope with modern demanding leadership practice. To have transparent and responsible leaders, Africa must drive education to build wisdom, character, and discernment instead of solely focusing on intellectual prowess.

Keywords: Leadership, conflict, ethics, Ubuntu, politics.

Introduction

Africa is the youngest and most promising continent in the world because of its fast-growing population coupled with the wide access to education made available through digital (Rotberg, 2009). The role of political leaders is to provide goods that citizens cannot access privately. A good leader provides safety, security, and economic development opportunities for both men and women. Also, a responsible leader seeks to be remembered as a person who brought change and worked in justice (Gichuki, 2014). Conversely, bad leaders impoverished people while enriching themselves and their own few. They use force to bring their people into a state of accepting them as gods (PLO Lumumba, 2023). They commit human rights abuses and create conflicts that translate into general poverty, violence, and weak economic infrastructures.

Africa is developing a theoretical approach when it comes to leadership. While the world has developed a single view of African leadership as emerging in corruption and clientelism, there is a cultural and contextualized style of leadership identified as purely African (Udogu, 2008). The African leadership is patriarchal and oriented into serving the

community with tolerance and brotherhood (Msila, 2008). The Ubuntu philosophy dominates African literature as the main leadership theory.

This study contends that the African leadership comes from a sense of community and belonging. Leaders should be the apostles of national cohesion and transparency (Hogan assessment, 2023). Though it is observed that most African leaders have no or limited know-how in governance and leadership, there is a chance to achieve positive results (Joseph, 2011). To face the modern requirement for success, Africa must develop its future leaders by setting rigorous schools and programs that promote inclusion and character building (Msila, 2008).

Defining leadership in different perspectives

Leadership is a concept of research in various areas, including academics, business, and politics. It is defined as the ability of a person to influence others with the purpose of achieving an agreed vision (Adewale, 2020). The global leadership research sees leadership as a means by which a person directs others to realize a certain objective (Osland, 2017). Leadership is not just a matter of position in a group but the act of providing care for others to realize the best of themselves (Udogu, 2008). In the army, a leader is a person with charisma who can transform weak soldiers into mighty people.

Leadership is a skill that people can learn and master with a lot of practice (Bolden & Kirk, 2006). It is important to note that leadership has degrees and levels. People follow a leader once they perceive leadership traits. Conversely, the African continent adopted a definition of leadership that is circled around power and self-enriching (PLO Lumumba, 2023). The main reason for this particular view is that the African leadership has been jeopardized by centuries of colonialism. It is observed that African people desire leadership positions for other purposes than developing people (Ikenna, 2023). In the post-colonialism era, the African continent doesn't accept the basics of democracy, including the pacific transfer of power, transparency, and accountability.

This deviated understanding and practice of leadership has been identified prior to the contact with the western world. Confidence Gbolo Sanka, Patricia Gustafson-Asamoah, Charity Azumi Issaka had found that the poor leadership in Africa started way before colonialism and was worsened by the post-colonial vestiges. Basing their research on the literature of Chinua Achebe, their paper demonstrated that African leaders in power deny their humanity and think that others are born to serve them (Gbolo, Asamoah, & Azumi, 2018). This is manifested in Mobutu's reflection, whose supporters named "Sesseseko," which means immortal or a deity.

According to this study, most African leaders are chosen by the colonial house for increasing the level of division, corruption, and underdevelopment (Rotberg, 2009). It is clear that leadership within the African context is perceived as power abuse and irresponsibility. Defining virtuous African leadership, Adeyinka Adewale pointed out four

values that make virtuous leadership, which include truthfulness, courage, humility, and humanity within a context of communitarianism (Adewale, 2020). The author states that these values must be practiced to break the bondage of underdevelopment and put Africa on the right path.

Matete Lerutla and Renier Steyn asked a fundamental question concerning African leadership perception far from the political and philosophical area. By collecting data across African leaders, they found that African leadership is divided within two concepts: broken (corrupt) and the Ubuntu, which promotes the Afro-centric culture (Asimwe, 2023). Leadership is perceived as service to the community, a means for helping others to become better people and forge a sense of community. while the post-colonialist view of leadership is oriented towards the practice of corruption and self-service (Asimwe, 2023).

The original African leadership

The African leadership has been interpreted as a leadership filled with corruption, self-enrichment, power abuses, conflicts, and weak institutions. While these facts are real and heavily rooted in the current leadership, especially in public management, there is an angle of view that gives a thoroughly different definition (Galperin, 2017). Following that, African leadership is based on two main philosophies, including Ubuntu, "I am because we are," as well as the patriarchalism based on the existence of a king or a chief who leads others (Msila, 2008).

The current leadership of Africa is intrinsically unethical, and Africa is paying the heaviest price in terms of conflict, abuse, sexual violence, and poverty (Afegbua & Adejuwon, 2012). The actual design of the continent is made to make Africa an eternal provider of raw material for the industrialized world (Gbolo, Asamoah, & Azumi, 2018). These philosophies prompt the appointment of incompetent leaders at the head of state, which translates into tribalism, clientelism, terrorism, and gender-based injustices (Rotberg, 2009). Most development programs currently implemented for African countries are managed by western organizations because of poor management identified among African public leaders (Ikenna, 2023).

The current narrative is of an Africa being home to corruption, dictatorship, and bloody conflicts, which could be seen as the negative consequence of the encounter with the western world (Rotberg, 2009). Conversely, Africa is a land of 1.2 billion people filled with care, responsibility, communitarianism, and the willingness to serve others (Hogan assessment, 2023). In Africa, a person older than I am is considered a role model, mentor, and coach. To promote the use of contraceptive products within the Sub-Saharan countries, organizations such as *DKT and MSI Reproductive Choice* used the concept of 'Yaya,' which means older sister (MSI RD Congo, 2025). This concept is based on the understanding of the huge influence of older sisters on their younger ones. These organizations leverage this influence to compel young girls to use contraceptives, and the

success was immediate. This sense of trust of the younger generation in the old makes African leadership unique compared to others (Kirk & Bolden, 2006).

Therefore, the real African leadership revolves around communities where a chief or king surrounded by a group of counselors provides leadership in collaboration with his team (Kirk & Bolden, 2006). The African Christian Church is not out of the awful circle of abuse of power, tribalism, insensitivity, and indefinite unethical behavior (Amofo, 2013). There is a call to reinvigorate the education of potential leaders to foster a strong and impactful church and community (Escandon & Kamungi, 2008).

Vices of African Leadership

As demonstrated in this paper, the African leadership is paternalistic, taking its roots in ancient culture where a person is esteemed to be called for being the head on the inside (Gbolo, Asamoah, & Azumi, 2018). People attached to serving him are being called to remain in that position (Lumumba, 2023). It is clear that the influence of culture is still present in every organization in Africa. People are still having the natural tendency of over-celebrating their leaders as though they were gods. A study of the Mandela Institute of Development Studies identifies tribalism as the cancer of the African leadership. In Kenya, since the first president, Jomo Kenyatta, came into power, the Kikuyu tribe became the most powerful (Gichuki, 2014).

African leaders continue to blame the wrongdoings of colonialism (Joseph, 2011). While there are still gaps between what they say and what they do. The African Leadership Council contends that Africa needs more leadership now than years ago. Bad leadership, exemplified by Mobutu Sese Seko and Idi Amin, impoverishes people, uses force to stay in power, serves their own interests and those of their own few, destroys accountability mechanisms, and promotes corruption (Rotberg, 2009). The consequences of this leadership model are that Africa registered the deadliest conflicts, human abuse, poverty, and inexistent social infrastructure, including medical care, education, air communications, roads for commerce, and so on.

Through the use of force and corruption, African leaders make the unacceptable acceptable. African leaders rarely demonstrated the attempt to consider development as a crucial area of their people (Hogan assessment, 2023). In most African countries, resources are exploited by external capital, labor, and securities, which provoked the escape of economic dividends from Africa. The good governance expert Richard Joseph contends that African leaders have created kleptocratic states in which the greed of small elites creates economic mayhem and armed conflicts. In the DRC currently, the M23 rebellious group is perpetrating massive killings and economic sabotages as a result of the refusal of Tshisekedi to come to the table of negotiation (Gichuki, 2014).

African leadership construction overtime

The modern African leaders began to rise when a few of them had the chance to access education or human dignity (Sampson, 1949). This critical thinking was sponsored by the Pan-Africanism movement promoted by leaders such as Casely Hayford, Nelson Mandela, Patrice Lumumba, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, and many others whose names have been buried in the flux of neocolonialism (Kirk & Bolden, 2006). Their leadership was oriented to noble causes from democracy to equality of rights and independence. They embodied the response of Africans on the question of whether or not they are able to take care of themselves (Amofo, 2013).

Two documents of reference are used to circumscribe the concept of leadership, especially political leadership, in Africa (Osland, 2017). They are the African Code of Leadership as well as the Mombasa Declaration on Leadership. The two documents provide qualities that a good African leader must embody. Furthermore, the documents in one accord state the consequences of good and wrong leadership (Osland, 2017).

The Mombasa manifesto states that good leaders globally guide governments of nation-states to perform effectively for their citizens; they deliver high security for the state and the person, a functioning rule of law, education, health, and a framework conducive to economic growth (Kirk & Bolden, 2006). They ensure effective arteries of commerce and enshrine personal and human freedoms. They empower civil society and protect the environmental commons. Crucially, good leaders also provide their citizens with a sense of belonging to a national enterprise of which everyone can be proud (Kirk & Bolden, 2006). They knit rather than unravel their nations and seek to be remembered for how they have bettered the real lives of the governed rather than be the fortunes few (Udogu, 2008).

(Udogu, 2008) pointed out, among others, that the code of African leadership proclaims the following works as part of good leaders:

- They encourage broad participation of all levels of society, including all minorities and majorities, and emphasize the deliberative nature of the best democratic practices.
- They lead by example and teach to acquaint their peoples with respect for dissent, the ideas of others, and the importance of disagreement between political parties and individuals.
- They recognize that they are accountable for their actions and that no one is above the law nationally and internationally.
- They promote policies aimed at eradicating poverty and respect all human rights and civil liberties (Udogu, 2008).

Challenges of African leadership

The African leadership is facing challenges as a result of the unpreparedness of most appointed leaders. Most leadership positions in sub-Saharan Africa fall into the hands of

insecure and not-ready leaders (Escandon & Kamungi, 2008). This imposition pattern of the majority of African leaders explains the profound moral decline in every area of endeavor around the continent (Afegbua & Adejuwon, 2012). The influence of leaders on the lives, practices, and behaviors of the population is undeniable. Therefore, creating a systematic training that responds to the local aspirations can have a massive influence on social change (Bolden & Kirk, 2006).

The view of leaders and power in Africa has been critically influenced by colonialism and authoritarian culture (Gbolo, Asamoah & Azumi, 2018). In one of his podcasts, the professor, PLO Lumumba, demonstrated how once plugged into power, African leaders cease to think of themselves as humans; they become semi-gods (Lumumba, 2023). They suddenly estimated that they are the only people deserving that place of honor and dignity. This philosophy has transformed civil servants into tyrants leading through abuse, corruption, and human rights violations (Lumumba, 2023).

The way to power in Africa is heavily domiciled to other forces than the quality of leadership, which derives from an eloquent journey (Rotberg, 2009). This statement fueled the astounding query of Thabo Mbeki: when Europe sneezes, will Africa catch the cold? (Mbeki, 2011). Today Africa is experiencing a particular type of regime that Richard Joseph calls an electoral authoritarian system (Joseph, 2011). This emeritus professor, former Brookings expert, contends that regimes such as Rwanda ruled with force by Paul Kagame or Congo Brazzaville ruled by Denis Sassou Nguesso can organize elections just for proclaiming one individual. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, President Tshisekedi has announced his intention of changing the constitution to remain in power. This decision is among the main causes of the escalation of violence and the occupation of North and South Kivu.

Reforms

- Revise the education system from being strictly intellectual to being character-building;
- Promoting African culture and philosophy to foster unity;
- Organization must invest in future leaders' development (Hogan, 2023);
- African leaders should pay attention to data-driven decision-making (Hogan, 2023);
- Organizing an intentional program for promoting the inclusion of women and other minorities.

Conclusion

This study brings the reader into the very practice of leadership in the African context for identifying factors that trigger the present conditions (Rotberg, 2009). Currently Africa has been built largely on corruption and the culture of taking and remaining in power by using unethical ways. Conversely, Africa has its own leadership style, which is patriarchal and communitarian. The good leadership in Africa collides with the pressure the global role given to it has as a simple exporter of raw material for the industrialized world (PLO

Lumumba, 2023). This tendency contends for appointing unprepared and incompetent leaders with heavy consequences in social and economic situations (Gichuki, 2014). It is therefore fundamental that Africa must train its young generation in both intellect and character to face the modern world's requirements (Gichuki, 2014). The question of what education style Africa should set up for having its children prepared deserves special attention (Msila, 2008).

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