Transformational leadership - global model, or mechanism of power? A comparison with leadership in Africa.

This development paper is written from a critical leadership studies perspective (Collinson 2011, Alvesson and Spicer 2012, Tourish 2013) and compares the dominant paradigm of transformational leadership theory to emerging conceptualizations of leadership in Africa. Drawing on both the author's experience of working in East Africa, and the developing body of scholarship on leadership in Africa, the article addresses the question: 'Do Africans lead in different ways?'. It makes two linked arguments and a conclusion. Firstly, any claim for transformational leadership being universally applicable is highly contestable, and secondly, that leadership ways in Africa are differentiated, and have many learning points for leadership scholars and potential utility in more mature economies. The article uses purposeful stories from the author's experience to illustrate the argument; as Babbie (2004:307) comments: "Being there" is a powerful technique for gaining insights into the nature of human affairs in all their rich complexity'.

Transformational Leadership

Leadership has been given considerable attention in the West by practitioners in commerce, industry, and the public sector, and by scholars. The driver for this interest is a broad claim, from the research, that the quality of an organization's leadership has a causal relationship with outcomes (Rajagopalan and Datta 1996, Pollach and Kerbler 2011). Almost all management theory of any significance, has been developed in the first instance from North America and then mainly in the US (Boyacigiller and Adler 1991, Brewster and Larsen 1992). This includes leadership studies and John Kotter (1990), following Zaleznik (1977), was an early advocate that leadership was distinguishable and separate from management and administration. His unevinced claim that leadership is required to produce change, whilst management’s function is predictability and order was, and remains, highly influential (Kotter 2012:29). Case studies such as Jack Welch’s twenty-year tenure as CEO of GE (Welch and Byrne 2001) are held to provide positive leadership examples, whilst the leadership at Enron provides a morality tale of how toxic leaders can destroy organizations (Elkind and McLean 2003).

The leadership ‘industry’ (Kellerman 2012) has now expanded as new strands such as authentic, toxic, and servant leadership have developed. However, the dominant theory remains the transformational and transactional model of leadership (Diaz-Saenez 2011, Northouse 2013). The theory has its origins in a work by the Pulitzer Prize winner and political scientist James McGregor Burns, entitled simply Leadership that examined political leadership (Burns 1979). It is a long piece, over 500 pages, and belongs in the ‘oft referenced – rarely read’ category. The schema for the text is firstly to examine leadership, power and purpose, then the origins of leadership, then what Burns termed transactional and transformational leadership before finally focusing on the implications, as he saw them, for theory and practice. Examined critically, the text itself however is
rather idiosyncratic both in its form which is densely written, somewhat inchoate, and prone to making unevidenced claims. It also suffers from the 'Mother Teresa' problem.

Seneca’s maxim (Epistles vi 5) that: ‘the way by precept is long and tedious, whereas that of example is short and powerful’ can be a two edged weapon. The classic use of Mother Teresa as a noble figure beyond reproach illustrates just how difficult it is for public figures to sustain any idea of complete virtue when subjected to forensic analysis. Both Hitchens (1995) and Larivée et al (2013) argue that, far from her virtuous media image, there was a dark side to her life and work. For example, her approach to her cancer patients was that pain was a sign of God’s love, so medication was not made available to them. Also there was little or no accountability for the large sums of money donated to her charity and it remains unclear who benefited.

Burns exemplifies the problem by his odd choice of leadership exemplars, for example he valorizes Lenin and Mao Zedong. Regarding Mao, who although he died in 1976, was alive presumably during the compilation of the book, and his excesses by then public knowledge, he says:

> If one of the supreme qualities of the gifted political leader is to understand not only the needs of potential followers, but the way in which those needs could be activated and channeled, Mao’s experience perception and analysis gave him an unparalleled opportunity to mobilize and lead.

(Burns 1979:235)

In a strange and contradictory stance, given his views on Mao and Lenin, Burns is highly critical of the concept of realpolitik, conceptualised by Machiavelli in his Discourses and The Prince:

> More than mere selfishness, at the core of Machiavellianism lay the most pernicious and inhuman concept of all: the treatment of other persons, other leaders, as things.

(Burns 1979:446)

Burns (1979: 19-20), does not elaborate on transformational leadership until fairly late on in the text, through this passage:

> In the progression of both leaders and followers through stages of needs values and morality leaders find a broadening and deepening base from which they can reach out to widening social collectives to establish "higher" values and principles. This broader more principled kind of leadership - the kind of leadership that tends to be visible formal and legitimate – is usually expressed at the higher stages of moral development. Gandhi and Wilson and Tito and Franklin Roosevelt are prime examples in this century.
Again, each of his exemplars has attracted significant criticism, for example Gandhi for his alleged racist philosophy when in South Africa, and his alleged strange personal habits in later life regarding young females. In fact, Burns himself provides some confirmatory evidence of the pitfalls in a Great Man approach with his account of a personal meeting with Lyndon Johnson at the White House in 1968 where the President, as described by Burns, was all too human.

... the man was almost impotent. He could not run again for reasons of both bodily and political health [...] Looking at him, especially from afar, people saw a man of vast power, looking out at the people he felt lonely and powerless.

So, in choosing historical figures from whom to abstract the concept of transformational leadership, Burns seems simply to be repackaging Great Man theory (Galton 1869, Carlyle 1888, Borgatta Rouch and Bales 1954). Van Seters and Field (1990) comment that this approach, drawing as it does from personality, was of little practical use since personalities are difficult to imitate. From this rather unpromising start, scholars in the organizational leadership field identified a potential cross over from political science. Transformational leadership in this context was conceptualized initially by Tichy and Ulrich (1984) then developed by Bass (1985). Of course, given the intense politico-Judaeo Christian culture of US society, and a discourse freighted with high agentic power within that culture, transformational leadership sits very well. As Bass notes: ‘[..] Jesus, was a great transformer’ (1985:183). Guthey and Jackson however make an interesting claim in their work on cultural leadership theory (CLT) that there was a concerted campaign in the US, post WWII, to ‘discredit New Deal liberalism, and undercut the legitimacy of organized labour (Guthey and Jackson 2011:174) Drawing on the work of Fones-Wolf (1994), they claim that the deliberate aim of this propaganda campaign was to associate the American way with competitive individualism. The outcome was that: ‘the US shifted from collectivist values towards a culture of individualism, better suited to validating and perpetuating the continued dominance of big business above labour’ (Guthey and Jackson 2011:174).

It might also be argued that the discourse of reframing organizational managers to be organizational leaders, is correlated to the high relative increase over the same period for CEO and Board members’ pay and remuneration. Bolchover (2010:5) states that, in 1980, the average US CEO had an earnings multiple of 42 times the average blue-collar worker. By 2000, that multiple had increased to 531. It might also be a factor in the increasingly skewed distribution of global wealth, or the ‘vertiginous growth of the top 1% since the 1970s and 1980s’ (Picketty 2014:vii). Interestingly, Spector (2014:363) links the appeal of
transformational leadership in the US to what President Carter termed “The crisis of the American spirit” in the 1970s. In this period, a combination of economic and political misfortunes such as the OPEC hike in oil prices, and the war in Vietnam, led Carter to conclude that the American people wanted leadership not management from public officials. Perhaps for that reason, Tichy and Ulrich’s (1984) and then Burns’s conceptualisation of transformational and transactional leadership (Burns 1985) were quickly adopted and adapted for use in an organizational context. A further aspect of this discourse is that it suppresses the significance of structure, context, or randomness (Giddens 1986, Taleb 2007) on organizational outcomes. The discourse is also extremely resilient - for example it seems to have survived intact the global financial crisis of 2008.

Bass is also strong on Great Men, charisma and the American Judaeo Christian tradition. At one point he states that “ We can be inspired by reading the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution, or the Bible” (Bass 1985:62). He claims that transformational leadership can be achieved: “[..] By getting us to transcend our own self-interest for the sake of the team, organization, or larger polity” (Bass 1985:20). This defies common sense and our lived experience. Writers on exchange theory such as Blau (1964) and Emerson (1976) are clear that what we do is always in exchange for something. At a deeper level, this is the imperative to pass on our genes (Dawkins 1989). Bass dismisses exchange theories as being ‘simple carrot-and-stick formulations’ (1985:8) but the leadership field is better cognizant of exchange based relations through work on eg Leader Member Exchange (LMX) theory (Dienish and Liden 1986, Ilies et al 2007).

Reichers (1985) takes a more realistic view of organizational life when positioning organisations as complex entities. Large organizations will be bureaucratic hierarchies of some stripe perhaps with SBUs, certainly customers, and a complex and political network of stakeholders to satisfy. As Reichers states, employee commitment will more likely take the form of a collection of multiple commitments to various groups that comprise the organization (1985:469). Interestingly, Becker et al (1996) identified that commitment to the supervisor (nearby leader) was positively associated with employee performance, whereas commitment to the organization was not.

Both Burns and Bass consider transformational leadership to be virtuous, and describe it in complex detail (Bass 1985). Bass then has to invent the concept of pseudo-transformational leadership to explain that despite the charismatic nature eg of Adolf Hitler’s leadership, he was not a transformational leader. To illustrate the point, Bass in a long article, somewhat devoid of examples, nevertheless also encounters, literally, the Mother Teresa problem:

For many moral analysts, leadership is a many-headed hydra that alternately shows the faces of Saddam Hussein and Pol Pot, as well as those of Nelson Mandela and Mother Teresa.

Bass and Steidlmeier (1999:181)
Bass also valorized Lee Iacocca, one of the US's management heroes at the time of writing (Bass: 1985:61). Iacocca, at the time, was credited with single handedly restoring the fortunes of Chrysler. However, Spector (2014) provides a counterpoint to this approach with his deconstruction of the myth. He states: ‘This use of Iacocca as personification and embodiment of the transformational leadership construct was at best a highly romanticized take on an individual. At worst the use of Iacocca was misleading and dangerous’. (Spector 2014:361).

Bass operationalized transformational and transactional leadership through two principal pieces of research. Firstly, he conducted a pilot study with a group of seventy male South African senior managers (Bass 1990, Northouse 2004:194). His exact methodology is unclear, but Bass then proceeded to work further on the concept with groups of MBA students, and some graduate MBA students plus social science students enrolled on a seminar in leadership (Bass 1985:198). The output from this, plus reference to the extant leadership literature, particularly on charisma, House (1977), was a questionnaire instrument, that ‘made a reliable distinction between transformational, and transactional leadership’ (Bass 1985:198). This was administered to a sample of 104 military personnel of whom 95% were US Army officers and less than 2% were women. Drawing from the strong analytic, and hence positivist, tradition in US social research, ‘a principal components factor analysis was run with varimax rotation’ from the 104 military officers’ data (Bass 1985:207). This identified that ‘charisma accounted for 64.9% [...] of the 89.5% of variance of consequence’ Bass 1985:207). An additional 72 senior military officers were then added to the sample but this made little significant difference to the charisma results. Bass and Riggio (2006), after several iterations, define transformational and transactional leadership by the eight factor mode in Fig 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Leadership Style</th>
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<tr>
<td>Charisma or Idealised Influence</td>
<td>Transformational</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inspirational Motivation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Intellectual Stimulation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individualised Consideration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contingent Reward</td>
<td>Transactional</td>
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<tr>
<td>Management by Exception (Active)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Management by Exception (Passive)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laissez Faire</td>
<td>No leadership</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Fig 1 Transformational and transactional leadership Model (Bass and Riggio 2006:10),

This research data was fully developed into a questionnaire instrument entitled the Multi Factor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). This was an instrument by which managers could either self report their leadership style, or subordinates could evaluate their manager’s leadership style. The MLQ contains a series of questions, each linked to an aspect of transformational/transactional/laissez faire leadership model, with an associated five point Likert scale score frame. As an example, this question appears in the self-reporting questionnaire Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire Leader Form (5x-Short):
Q: I instill pride in others for being associated with me (anchored to: 'Idealized Influence' in the scoring analysis framework)

The theory has been subjected to extensive validation in the leadership field eg Hoyt and Blascovich (2003), but the statistical analysis approach and discussion of results tends to be complex and opaque, particularly to the lay person. As an example, below is an extract from Walumbwa et al (2005) that describes the approach used in their comparative study of rank and file bank staff in Kenya and the US on transformational leadership. One issue in the study was language: would the terms used in the questionnaire have equivalent meanings in Kenyan and US culture? Rather than using back translation, or asking respondents, the following quantitative approach was used:

To do this [comparability of the questions] we performed CFA [not defined] to establish the validity and reliability of the scales used in this study and their equivalency across the two countries. Consistent with Lam, Chen and Schaubroeck (2002) each scale was assessed separately using AMOS 4.0 maximum likelihood estimation (Arbuckle and Wothke 1999). Maximum likelihood method was used because its estimators are asymptotically unbiased, consistent and efficient (Bollen 1989). We followed the procedure recommended by Fitzgerald, Drasgow,Hulin, Gelfand and Magley (1997) by forming multi item indicators for each of the constructs and assuming covariation among the latent variables.

Walumbwa et al (2005:242)

Critique of Transformational Leadership Theory

The provenance and development of transactional/transformational leadership poses significant problems for the validity of the theory:

Firstly, to what extent can Burns’s political science text Leadership be accepted as the start point for Bass’s work? Bass appears to foreground Burns’s work and accept without challenge that such a dichotomy exists. It seems his objective then became to operationalize Burns’s model as a social research instrument.

Secondly, to what extent can research conducted on two groups of overwhelmingly white male respondents, one US military, one South African, and a group of US MBA students be considered in any sense generalizable?

Thirdly, the use of a questionnaire creates an iron cage constraint in accessing any respondent’s mental map of leadership. The list of questions is all there is, so any claim that the questionnaire data confirms the model becomes, in effect, a circular argument. In effect, such a questionnaire is really seeking opinions about

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1 Unfortunately the lead author has had to make six journal article retractions, five to Leadership Quarterly. http://retractionwatch.com/2014/04/30/florida-leadership-researcher-walumbwa-notches-sixth-retraction/- accessed 02.12.14
the researcher’s opinions. As a counter argument, the author’s research on military leadership (Dunn 2007, 2014), which used the grounded theory methods of Personal Construct Psychology (Kelly 1955) and Critical Incident (Flanagan 1954), failed to validate the model. The most important aspect of military leadership to respondents was ‘professionalism’, which does not figure in Bass’s model at all, although interestingly, he refers (Bass 1985:69) to a study by Hayes and Thomas (1967) that argues the significance of a soldier’s confidence in his superior, buddies, equipment and himself.

Fourthly, the use of interval-ratio statistical analysis tools, such as standard deviation, is inappropriate for use with the ordinal data produced by Likert scales. More importantly, any supposition that the complexity of human psychology and experience can be reduced to numbers, is surely fallacious. The resultant statistical analysis, particularly within US scholarly journals, is generally incomprehensible, certainly to any lay reader, and therefore lacks utility for the development of leadership practice.

The extended use and popularity of the theory raises a separate issue: the commercial exploitation of management and leadership academic theory within the US Academy. Put simply, when a theory or model gains traction within the business community, it is common for the developers and their institution to seek to gain commercial advantage from it. So, the use of the MLQ questionnaire and analysis is controlled by Mind Garden 2 a commercial firm established by Bass and his partners. Another example is Hershey and Blanchard’s model of situational leadership 3. A final example is provided by Michael Porter, a leading strategy academic of the Harvard Business School. He founded the Monitor Group consultancy, to advise companies and nation states on the models he developed for corporate strategy and the determinants of national advantage. Ironically, the company was bankrupted in the recession of 2008 and now trades as Deloitte Monitor. 4

The field of leadership development appears particularly lucrative with the size of the US market alone was put at $14bn pa in 2012 by the consultancy Bersin by Deloitte (Loew and O’Leonard 2012). In order to succeed in a commercial market place, management models require both face validity, and simplicity for ease of administration. Their academic provenance and obviousness provide face validity, but the requirement for simplicity means that complex constructs such as leadership have to be reduced to standard questionnaires then simple 2x2 type models, to meet the requirements of clients for ease of administration. Ironically, Owen et al (2014:1) although speaking from a consultancy viewpoint, suggest that the outcome of most corporate leadership development processes is ‘sub optimal’.

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2 http://www.mindgarden.com/index.htm - accessed 08.11.14
In conclusion, transformational leadership and its current dominance might be better understood as the combination of an attractive commercial product, fortuitous timing, and cultural fit in its US home market, rather than the outcome of an objective and appropriate academic research methodology, and rigorous scholarship. As Blunt and Jones (1997:7) comment: ‘modern thinking in the West about issues of management is ethnocentric. That is to say, it promotes a culturally determined and largely North American view of the world of work”. Given this conclusion, an ensuing question is: do other parts of the world have a contribution to make to the leadership debate?

This next section focuses on leadership in Africa, for, as Klitgaard (1994:76) comments: ‘Differing cultures deserve respect. Too much has been made of the negative features of traditional societies and not enough of the positive from which so-called modern societies can learn’. Following Briggs and Sharpe (2004) who identify an upturn of interest by the West in indigenous knowledge, the function of social research here might be compared to the search for non-native plants with medicinal qualities. Leadership practices that disconfirm Western orthodoxy should be identified and examined for their potential adoption in a more global context, perhaps initially through the use of ‘purposeful’ stories, such as du Preez’s account of the African sage Mohlomi (du Preez 2011), rather than theory construction.

**Leadership in Africa**

The author’s experience of African traditions and cultures derives from both teaching African students on Masters programmes in the UK, and teaching leadership and management in East Africa, in particular in Ethiopia and South Sudan. This section briefly examines some contextual issues for the study of leadership in Africa, then reviews the emerging body of scholarship on leadership in Africa before developing a conclusion about the direction of travel in this field.

The continent of Africa, as a unit of analysis, is daunting. It is the second largest and second most populous continent on earth. The population is 1.1 billion at 2013 and, with 50% of the population under 19 years, is poised for significant population growth and urbanisation. This will be further accelerated if African healthcare is improved and mortality rates reduced. The pharmaceutical industry, although its reputation as ‘Big Pharma’ is subject to criticism (Law 2006), has already identified the potential for growth in Africa with its success in developing antiviral drugs to control AIDS, and its move now to attacking other major endemic diseases in Africa such as malaria and dengue fever. The fast tracking of a vaccine for Ebola has demonstrated that quick progress is possible.

Africa comprises 54 recognised sovereign states, and two de facto independent states with limited or no recognition: Republic of Somaliland and Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. From an analysis viewpoint, the continent is traditionally divided into sub Saharan Africa, and North Africa. This paper has a focus on sub Saharan Africa, but, in any event, generalisations about Africa need to be guarded so an *emic* rather than *etic* focus is advisable perhaps even to the point of each
locus of research being *sui generis*. The metaphor of Africa being a ‘cultural mosaic’ (Chao and Moon 2005) might be the most appropriate. When teaching in Africa the author came across the abbreviation TIA, meaning ‘This is Africa’ frequently used by Westeners to explain why things frequently didn’t happen as planned.

Europe and North America have traditionally viewed Africa as a ‘business opportunity’ (Jackson 2011:544). This took the form initially in the promotion of the slave trade to provide labour for New World economies developing from the C17th onwards. The second was the landgrab, colonization and division of Africa into ‘spheres of influence’ legitimated by the Berlin Conference of 1884-85 between the leading European nations to exploit its mineral and other resources. By 1902, 90% of the African continent was under European control. The third has been the de colonization movement in the C20th, where African countries, were grudgingly given independence, often as a result of violent indigenous campaigns.

The fourth is the current phase where, according to some commentators, Africa is undergoing an economic and cultural renaissance. Guest (2014:3) reports that: ‘aggregate sub Saharan GDP growth has outpaced the world average since 2001 – often considerably’. Whilst acknowledging that the growth picture is patchy he states there are ‘several universal trends that have driven this economic expansion like population growth, urbanization, and high commodity prices’. One interesting facet of this has been the impact of digital technology. In Africa, still in many cases a pastoral society, the advent of cheap mobile phone technology has enabled a generation to leap frog from isolation to having a window on the world. This has brought about innovative thinking. For example researchers found that, in Kenya and Tanzania, eg people were transferring airtime to their relatives or friends who were then using it or reselling it. This led to the development of M-Pesa, now an international application that allows mobile phone users with a national ID card or passport to deposit, withdraw, and transfer money.

Innovation – an example?

South Sudan, although a new and very poor country has several mobile phone networks in place, and the use of smart phones with pre paid scratch cards has become widespread. The author was told that, in the rural areas of South Sudan, girls have to be married by around the age of fifteen or sixteen. Marriages are generally arranged with the requirement that the man provides a dowry, usually in the form of cows. Cows are key to South Sudanese culture as they provide status for the man and a means of support; cattle rustling is therefore a major source of inter-tribal conflict. The colour of the cows is also important with some colours being valued above others. The woman and the man’s family use their smart phones to exchange pictures of the cows on offer, with the woman’s family rejecting or accepting them as necessary.
Additionally, and a relatively new phenomenon is the growing presence in Africa of the ‘Asian Drivers’: Chinese and Indian capital and nationals. These constitute two major, and in China’s case new, politico-economic partners in many African countries, such as Sudan and Darfur (Mohan 2008). A recent example is Lewis’s report (2014) on China Railway Construction Corporation’s $12 bn deal in Nigeria to construct a1400km coastal railway link between Lagos and Calabar. Raine (2009) reports that the value of bilateral trade between China and African countries rose from $6.5bn in 1999 to $106.8bn in 2010 and China is now Africa’s second biggest trade partner after the US. Of course, both China and India are bringing with them their models of political and business philosophy.

Where Bass and Riggio (2006:224) state that ‘transformational leadership is the best fitting model for effective leadership in today’s world’, Bolden and Kirk (2009:74) suggest that one consequence of the African Renaissance has been a call for a more Afro centric view of leadership, a rejection of Western materialistic cultures and ‘a reconnection with African indigenous knowledge with its emphasis on solidarity and interdependence’.

Band Aid 2014 – push back from Africa?

There has been a critical reaction by some commentators to the re issue of the Band Aid single *Do they know it’s Christmas* to raise funds for the ebola crisis in West Africa. There was a heated exchange on the BBC Radio 4 Today programme on 17.11.14 between a Liberian academic Robtel Neajai Pailey from London University SOAS, and Harvey Goldsmith the record producer, the essence of which was Robtel, and she states other Africans, viewed the initiative as ‘demeaning’ ‘misguided’ and ‘grandstanding’ and the perpetuation of a trope that ‘others’ Africans. She said the project was also insulting to the largely Muslim population in that area of West Africa affected by Ebola: Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone.

However, there is evidence of a demand for the teaching leadership development in Africa. A search on Google Scholar using the search terms African/leadership/Centre/Institute produced a set of over twenty Leadership Centres and Institutes; a sample is shown below. The work of Mo Ibrahim and Thabo Mbeki is particularly important. The Mo Ibrahim Foundation awards an annual leadership prize for the African Head of State, who has left office when their term was over, and whose leadership has most closely aligned with their model of leadership. It is claimed to be the largest annually awarded prize in the world worth $5m over ten years and $200K pa thereafter. The Foundation also operates the Ibrahim Index of Governance, developed by the Kennedy Institute of Public Management to track the performance of African states against the democratic ideals in the model.
Table 1- selected African Leadership Institutions

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<th>Title</th>
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<td>Young African Leaders Initiative</td>
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<td>Mo Ibrahim Foundation</td>
<td><a href="http://www.moibrahimfoundation.org/">http://www.moibrahimfoundation.org/</a></td>
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**Academic research on Leadership and Governance**

There has been concern for some time in developing countries that a requirement to conform to the norms of US management styles is misplaced, and damaging. Blunt and Jones (1997:7) comment that ‘the prescriptiveness and in many cases dysfunctionality of Western views when applied uncritically in developing countries, will become more evident’. One area where this is an issue is the provision of development aid to African countries. Of course given the size and scale of sub Saharan Africa, there are major differences in the economic condition of different countries, and whilst some are prospering, others remain desperately poor and subject to poor governance, poverty and disease.

There are major development and aid programmes in Africa delivered either by Bretton Woods Institution like the World Bank and IMF, or the UNDP, or bilaterally by donor countries such as the UK and US. Still others are delivered by the NGO community including many US faith based NGOs. Omoyefa (2008:19) in a critique, argues that these aid programs to Africa had, as a pre-requisite, a requirement for Public Sector Reform (PSR), based largely on neo classical economic theory. He argues that the donors’ purpose in PSR was not to encourage improvements in governance, but rather to protect their loans and credit facilities. African leaders then defined PSR largely in terms of the privatization of government enterprises, which because of the capital required, were bought up by Western multi national companies. The technical and financial management skill gaps in Africa was then exploited so that ‘multinational companies have total control of all sectors of African economy’ He sees this as a ‘subtle form of neo-colonialism’(Omoyefa 2008:20).

Call (2010) argues that this plays into a neoconservative and neoliberal Western discourse that labels states not conforming to Western norms as ‘failed’, ‘failing’, and ‘fragile’ and with a single remedy: ‘strengthening state capacities’.

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discourse tends to legitimate intervention, often armed, to secure national interests but ‘under the pretence of ‘altruism’ (Call 2010:304) The governance of donor organisations requires that Western style controls are in place to ensure projects are delivered and funds not misappropriated; these means in turn the requirement to comply with often inappropriate US management theory. Below is a small case study.

**Small Case Study: Business Process Re-Engineering (BPR) in Ethiopia**

The author had personal experience of PSR when working with several Ethiopian Ministries in the period 2008 – 2013. The World Bank and other donors had, as part of their terms for aid and development grants, required these Ministries to implement Business Process Re-engineering (BPR), a transformational change process developed by Hammer and Champy (1993). This concept, which was adopted by leading US organisations such as Ford Motor Co and Walmart has only achieved low success rates of around 30%, because of its problems in communication, organizational resistance, its complex nature, and difficulty in implementation and sustainment (Majed 1999). Attempting to implement BPR in relatively undeveloped government bureaucracies in Ethiopia, which barely have processes in the first place, would appear inappropriate.

Interestingly China’s approach to development requires no such compliance. China frequently gifts large infrastructure projects such as the $200m African Union HQ building in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, opened in 2012. These projects, which include roads, dams, soccer stadia and mosques, are built largely with Chinese labour and materials, then gifted to the government, in exchange, for example, for mineral extraction rights. In Ethiopia⁵, many jobs have been created through Chinese-funded projects. Chinese cars are being made in Ethiopian factories and China is also building a light railway mass transit system across the capital Addis Ababa. There is no intrusion by China into the governance style in place, whatever stripe it may be.

**Leadership concepts in Africa**

Any discussion of global differences brings into play the concepts of cultural relativism. Key figures in this debate would be Hofstede (2010), Trompenaars and Hampden –Turner (1998), and the GLOBE study, (House et al 2004), that examined leadership models using Hofstede’s schema of national cultures.

Jackson (2011:537) argues that there are three approaches to cultural relativism. One he terms *convergence* based on the teleological stance that all societies are on the same trajectory and late entrants such as Africa will, when they industrialise and urbanise, follow the same path as the US. An example of this approach is Walumbwa et al’s comparison study (2005) of transformational leadership in the

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US and Kenya. They comment (2005: 237): that ‘there is evidence of shifting values and perceptions especially among younger workers towards more typical Western cultures’. Muchiri (2011) hints at some of the tensions that result from this approach when he states:

[...] locally founded organizations and Multi national Corporations (MNCs) operating in sub-Saharan Africa already replicate leadership and management practices from the West, and only temper some managerial practices to accommodate contextual and cultural influences

Muchiri (2011:????)

Research work using the transformational leadership model, often authored or co-authored by US or Indian academics such as Walumbwa et al (2005), Shibru and Darshan (2011) and Bogale et al (2009) would fit this approach. Walumbwa et al (2011) however do make a serious case for a pan African research agenda for leadership and management, claiming that Africa’s ‘economic performance since independence has been generally abysmal’ (2011:426). They claim however, and channeling Kotter, that this is due to ‘a systematic failure of leadership from the first level to the top levels of organizations’. They attribute this in part to a lack of strategic thinking, and human resource management not being given ‘the pride of place it deserves (2011:433).

The second approach Jackson terms divergence, where cultural norms are so embedded that they will remain distinct and different, despite globalizing forces and industrialization (Jackson 2011:537). He argues that Hofstede’s work (2010) and the GLOBE study on leadership norms (House et al 2004) would be evidence for this approach. Blunt and Jones (1996) reported on a study to assess managerial perceptions of leadership and management in the Ministry of Local Government Lands and Housing in Botswana. The study found that Kotter’s claimed distinction between management and leadership (Kotter 1990) was not evidenced; what concerned managers was the quality of the relationship with their boss, and internal interpersonal issues rather than the Ministry’s performance. The authors state that terms like ‘teacher’ and ‘father figure’ embody the qualities desired from their relationships and deference to authority figures was high. They abstracted a model from their research of differing leadership and cultural norms in Africa and Asia; the section on African norms is given below in Fig 2:
Regarding the theme of ethnicity, Rainer and Trebbi (2012:10,) in their analysis of political power in Africa, are quite clear that: ‘African politics more or less directly, can be parcelled into ethnic issues and demands’. They argue that only a handful of countries conform to the democratic classification in the Polity IV analysis framework and that ‘autocratic personal rule with a concentration of powers in the leader’s position is a common feature in African politics’(2012:4). In a reflection of Blunt and Jones’s model of African leadership, they also argue that rents are attached to political position and these rents ‘can be either appropriated by the ethnic elites themselves, or redistributed to the general population in each ethnic group’ (2012:6).

**Fig 2 African paradigm of leadership. Blunt and Jones (1996:19)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influences on leadership practices</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Highly centralized power structures. High degrees of uncertainty.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emphasis on control mechanisms rather than organizational</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual concern for basic security. Importance of extended family</td>
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<td>and kin networks.</td>
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<th>Managing authority</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Authoritarian/paternalistic leadership patterns Centralization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureaucratic controls. Preoccupation with rules and procedures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reluctance to judge performance.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Managing uncertainty</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• High degrees of conservatism. Change resistant organizational</td>
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<tr>
<td>hierarchies, re-inforced with rules. Social networks crucial to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provide individual security.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Managing relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• High concern for the quality of relationship; politeness respect for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age deference to status and authority, social rituals very important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consensus valued high levels of tolerance of individual weaknesses</td>
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<td>and mistakes</td>
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**A small incident**

The author was delivering a module in the UK to an ethnically diverse group of Masters students, mainly from East Asia but also including students from both East Africa and West Africa. He overheard two delegates, one from East Africa and one from West Africa, discussing their respective cultures. The student from West Africa was explaining that, when he travelled in his tribal homeland and needed to rest for the night, he would simply pull into the nearest village, and introduce himself. He would be made welcome, given food and a bed for the night, then sent on his way in the morning. He asked the East African whether he did the same, but they had moved away in conversation, and the author didn’t hear the answer.

Bolden and Kirk (2009), reporting on the results of a Pan African British Council funded leadership development programme, found that there were ‘multiple
concepts and experiences of leadership’ and the intervention of the course had caused some delegates to reframe leadership from being negative, intimidating and inaccessible, to a positive concept. Bolden and Kirk (2009:80) summarise that as: humanistic principles, desire for a more inclusive and participative that value individual differences authenticity and serving the community. Importantly, they recognize that European researchers are limited in the extent to which they can capture the psychology and sociology of African leadership, and recommend more work is done by African scholars into leadership in Africa.

The African academic community has started to work in this area to define better traditional African concepts of leadership. Mbigi (1997 and 2005:) writes that, in ancient African communities and institutions the key task of leadership was to look after cultural renewal and preservation, so as to ensure political social and economic progress. In essence this resonates quite clearly with the servant leadership concept developed by Greenleaf (1996). However, any researcher on leadership in Africa will, quite quickly, encounter the concept of ubuntu.

Ubuntu

Ubuntu has been described by Desmond Tutu (1999) as one of Africa’s gifts to the world. Although difficult to define, it is an indigenous African philosophy whose essence is that a person is a person through other people and so represents a collectivist and humanist philosophy. No one can be self sufficient and interdependence is a reality for all. One maxim embedded in traditional African political philosophy says that the king owed his status, including all the powers associated with it, to the will of the people under him (Samkange and Samkange 1980). It is consistent as well with what is termed the African’s ease of forgiveness. Although it seems originally to be South African in origin (van der Colff 2003, Nussbaum 2003, Poovan et al 2006), it has been discussed both in publications focused on Africa for example Mbigi (1997), Tambulasi and Zomba (2005), but also Western centric journals and publications eg Ncube (2010), Lutz (2009) and Bolden (2014).

Ubuntu - a small incident

The author was delivering a course on leadership and change management to public sector managers in South Sudan during March 2013. The group comprised about twenty delegates, mainly men but including four women. The delegates were all Dinka – a Nilesian tribe, which dominated most of the Government at that time. He noticed that each morning as the delegates arrived, they would embrace each other, shake hands, the men would slap each others’ backs exuberantly and laugh and joke as though they had not seen each for weeks. He would stand near the screen and projector, maybe saying hello to those closest. Eventually the class would settle down and he would proceed with the day’s session. By the Wednesday he was feeling that he must cut a very aloof figure so, that morning, before starting the lesson he went round the group, shaking each person’s hand, and bidding them salaam or welcome. The appreciation in the group was tangible, so he did the same each morning until the end of course. On the final morning, one delegate, a senior police officer said to him: ‘You came to tell us about change management, but we have changed you.’
Finally Jackson posits the development of a third approach, *crossvergence* where the interface between two differing cultural norms will lead to a blended third: Hong Kong and Singapore might be existing examples of this approach where the norms of Western commerce and industry have fused with the Confucian and Legalism norms of Asiatic society (Graen 2008). We might argue that such a crossvergence is happening in the UK, in the wake of the large increase of immigration particularly from the Indian sub-continent, during the Labour Government’s period of office 1997 – 2010. One consequence has been mainstream schools’ promotion of the key religious festivals of non-Christian religions such as Eid, Dhiwali, Hanukkah and Day of the Dead. It is also changing the character of the traditional Christian Nativity play.

**The End of Nativity Plays in the UK?**

Various media reports (eg Mills 2014) describe how, in 2014, the tradition of schools holding nativity plays is in sharp decline with only a third planning traditional nativity plays showing the Mary and Jesus story. These plays are being replaced with productions devoid of religious references and feature additions, such as punk fairies, aliens, lobsters and spacemen and Elvis.

The ‘cultural mosaic’ of Africa is currently being subjected to a series of both internal and exogenous shocks. We can anticipate that mature national economies will have a continuing requirement for Africa’s mineral and metal reserves. We might also anticipate that the pharmaceutical industry, will make progress in containing other major diseases such as malaria, and dengue fever. This will contribute to the already anticipated high population growth of sub Sahara Africa. The impact of China and India will continue as they identify not only further opportunities for extraction of commodities, but also that populous African countries, such as Nigeria, will urbanise and develop as mass consumer markets. Large numbers of Chinese and Indian businesses and nationals have already physically relocated to Africa (Raine 2009) and more will follow. Western nations, Bretton Woods institutions, and the UN will continue to develop their presence in Africa for the same reasons, so African governments will be presented with choices they did not have previously have. However, to fully exploit them, will require change on their part. For example, Jackson (2011) reports that African staff (in, one assumes, a Western style enterprise) feel that, ‘when they went to work in the morning they were stepping outside their culture, and when they returned home at night they were stepping back into their culture’ (2011:545)

**Conclusion**

Two challenges to examining the subject of leadership in sub Saharan Africa are to avoid making generalizations, and to keep focus. The conclusions from this development paper are that sub Saharan Africa appears to be in transition from a ‘those poor Africans’ trope (Jackson 2004:544) to a renaissance that may see it
emerge as a significant economic power bloc, potentially rivaling China in its scale of achievement (Walumbwa et al 2011). To achieve this renaissance, it seems reasonable to envisage that Africa will have to abandon the cultural practices that are currently restraining this growth, and to absorb and acculturate the positives from the Western and Asian traditions that are contesting before them for access and influence. The difficult part of the transition will be to retain the characteristics of humanism and forgiveness that differentiate sub Saharan Africa, certainly from Western cultural norms. The work of leadership scholars will be to focus on Africa, track this process, and harvest and disseminate the crossvergent leadership and management practices that will surely emerge.

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