EXPLORING THE AFRICAN BUSINESS MODEL IN RELATION TO ENTREPRENEURIAL AND BUSINESS LEADERSHIP PARADIGMS FROM OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD

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ABSTRACT

The paper sought to answer the many questions asked of entrepreneurship growth and support in Africa by analyzing different entrepreneurial and business leadership paradigms from America, Europe and Asia. Literature shows that the Americans and Europeans grew their societies as a result of individual creativity and heroism. The Asians placed much emphasis on the family and the worker as espoused in the Kaizen Japanese philosophy. Africans have focused on doing it together, as expressed in the Ubuntu spirit. After discussing the African model in light of these different perspectives, the author concluded that work on advancement of entrepreneurship in Africa should focus on the need to produce local entrepreneurs who are culturally self-thinking and creative. They must use what Professor Rukuni termed, the machobane *principle which postulates that, the best thinking and creative entrepreneurs are those who build their own local assets, construct their own roads and bridges, and dig their own deep water wells, in order to increase the value of their local communities. This is very important for social workers as they endeavour to build the capacities of communities to build their own sources of income as a way of taking themselves out of poverty.*

***KEY TERMS**:* Entrepreneurship, cultural paradigm, leadership, Ubuntu, Zimbabwe

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Leadership and entrepreneurial reality is not absolute; rather, it is socially and culturally determined (Pascale, 1990). Pascale sees people in all cultures and in all societies as global groups who are coming together to perform some different collective acts, encounter common problems which have to do with establishing business direction, life tasks co-ordination and motivation to improve the direction of business, (Pascale, 1990). Business development throughout the world has been shaped by the cultures into which it exists. Literature shows that the Americans and Europeans grew their societies as a result of individual creativity and heroism. The Asians placed much emphasis on the family and the worker as espoused in the Kaizen Japanese philosophy. Africans have focused on doing it together, as expressed in the Ubuntu spirit.

According to Mbigi (2005) people are products of their culture. He observed that the problem for Africa is that it remains within the margins of its

culture and has failed to navigate outside the perimeter of cultural circles. Therefore, in any industrial setting, all managers and employees only see in their organizations what their cultural paradigms allow them to see. According to Mbigi (2005), the clay material of management is subjectivity; it is emotional, social, spiritual, political and rational. Mbigi argues that any approach to understand management and leadership must reflect the complex and diverse state of culture and its potential barriers. Therefore, all the current cultural paradigms are important to look at in as much as they all contribute towards the removal of barriers to progressive management cultures. Progressive cultural management paradigms should become the modern paradigms that can transcend individual cultures and move management science to its broader understanding of business. The discipline of management is culturally biased as it is about the issues of how we organize people and how we manage the work they do. If the management paradigm is to benefit African and

Zimbabwean rural entrepreneurs, it has to venture deep into the theory of self-understanding and the ability to leap out of the cultural circles into the vast world of competitive corporate business.

In any society, therefore, competent successful entrepreneurship and leadership is vital for successful renewal and continuity of each system to enhance successful economic reforms and day to day management of small business. Most of Africa today needs to be reclaimed as a revitalization and rebirth of learning. The political turmoil that characterizes communities in some African countries, all retard the growth of rural entrepreneurship and African business leadership. African business leaders must be willing to try different ideas, contribute and experiment with new ideas. Mbigi (1997) claims African entrepreneurs, the local elite, academics and entrepreneurs have to get rid of the slave mentality and adapt to a royal mind-set and modern thinking. They have to take pride in their cultural heritage and feel the desire to improve business practices by adapting to other

cultural imperatives that are positive. Any nation, according to Mbigi (1997), needs a strong and compelling cultural identity to inspire *confidence, courage* and *creativity*, which are the prerequisites of establishing competitive world-class organisations and products. They need the confidence that is fully grounded in the local cultural roots, courage to meet and mingle with other cultures, roll up different ideas and be willing to test them out. In the process they have to be creative enough to come up with new designs out of old and foreign ideas. The African entrepreneurs *(hurudza, nyanzvi*, as they are known in local language*)* that form the basis of this study have overwhelmingly indicated that they need both the cultural and policy support to develop a positive cultural identity. Any cultural identity should take into consideration the local policy reality, the extended family system and its structures, all embraced in the concept of *ubuntu, unhu, hurudza or mufumi* (personhood and entrepreneurship). African traditional systems thrive much on

collective personhood, morality, integrity and, dignity of the whole cultural system, which in many ways is expressed in a variety of ways such as traditional rituals, singing, funerals, and collective work such as *nhimbe, jangano, jakwara and madzoro* (collective work parties), Mbigi (1997).

BUSINESS LEADERSHIP PERPECTIVES

The European view

The cultural worldview of European has world-wide strategic implications for global leadership, theory and practice. Their cultural worldview is mirrored through the signs of the individual hero, with clear emphasis on development in the fields of science and technology. Europe has taken a ride on heroic developments to create great nations through scientific innovation and technology. The work of individual heroes and geniuses, the likes of Michael Michalko and his thesis on cracking creativity, Charles Darwin and the evolution theory, Galileo and his antics on the structure of the universe and

many more scientists has propelled Europe to what it is today, a prosperous society through heroic innovations. Between 1500BC and 1700BC, there were dramatic shifts in the way people pictured the world and in the whole way of thinking in Europe (Mbigi 2005, in Mbigi 2005). The creativity and innovation in the fields of science and technology of the era pushed and gave European civilization the status of an industrialized economy. That has become the basis of the paradigm that has dominated European culture for the past three hundred years (Capra, 1982). Dominant theory and culture that sustained Europe since 15th century was based on science and technology. It dominated the era of agricultural and industrial revolutions. There was a dramatic shift from cottage industries to industrial development propelled by the innovation and creativity around the discovery of the steam engine, the telephone and wider prospecting into the universe by a lot of Europe's great sons and geniuses. The work of these European individual scholars and geniuses propelled the study of

scientific knowledge and made Europe the center of creativity. The strong and scientific European cultural paradigm has assisted European leaders and entrepreneurs to plan and create a memory of the future which they like, (Mbigi, 2005). It is undeniable that all the achievements of Europe in science and technology have come to be, because Europe went through different phases of cultural transformation, which is necessary for every aspiring and enterprising society.

The Asian cultural perspective

The Asian worldview can be summarized as, *I am because I improve*, (Mbigi 1997). According to the Japanese leadership expert Masaaki Imai, if you learn only one word of Japanese make it Kaizen. Kaizen strategy has motivated the Japanese in the management of their business, and has led them to successful competitive business globally. Kaizen encourages the Japanese to keep on improving and make suggestions for ongoing improvement of their business and everyone has a role to play in the process. This Japanese philosophy encourages the

multiplication of ideas and it means that everyone takes part in the growth of business. The giant Japanese electronics company Matsushita receives some 6.5 million ideas from its employees every year.

Further, according to Naisbitt, (1997) the Asian families take care of themselves above all else, and personal responsibility is emphasized. The Asian culture believes much on self-reliance and that freedom is not just about emancipation, but also hard work. They depend less on the welfare of the state. The idea of taking care of family first is why the savings rate in Asia is 30% or more in almost every country. Asians like family values and self-sufficiency and not only do Asians believe the cost of the welfare state is a heavy burden on competitiveness, they also content that it undermines the importance of family and leads to out-of-wed-lock children (USA -30% of children are born out of wedlock, whereas in Malaysia it is 2%), high divorce rate, crime, loss of self-reliance and lower academic achievement.

The chief assets of an overseas Chinese business are usually its *guanxi* or connections and mostly they are political connections and levels of social embeddedness. Such nimble footed network building has brought quick rewards as overseas Chinese account for half the foreign direct investment in China (Micklethwait & Wooldridge (1996).

The business model from North America

Since it is an adolescent civilization, America believes in what Robert Reich has called the myth of the individual hero. The classic representative theorist of the American paradigm is Adam Smith whose main thesis is that collective social goals are a by-product of self-interest. Adam Smith published his book *The Wealth of Nations* which

became a manifesto of American enterprise. Adam Smith summarized the heart and soul of the American cultural paradigm as follows: It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard for their own interest. This cultural paradigm has a visionary enterprising trait which has inspired American economic development and created the largest and most competitive economy in human history. Mbigi (2005) notes that the American paradigm is the dominant civilization of all the three cultures discussed.

The African cultural business model

The African worldview according to Mbigi (2005) is characterized by a deliberate emphasis on people and their dignity – the emphasis on the collective brotherhood of mankind called Ubuntu, which is the African perspective of collective personhood

derived from *muntu* or *munhu* (a person). Ubuntu is a collective African maxim which defines the collective nature of the African community. African communities pride collective action. The Archbishop Right Reverend Desmond Tutu put sit more clearly Africans have a thing called Ubuntu; it is about the essence of being human, it is part of the gift that Africa is going to give to the world. It embraces the love and affection in the African culture that seeks to help and assist one another. This is exemplified through the Karanga tradition, where for instance, a member of the clan or village experiences death in the family, or has brewed beer for a work party, naturally everyone flocks with funeral gifts or tools for the work party, all in support of and for the sake of another, as a way of village collective community support of another.

Charles Handy, the British guru on management echoes the same sentiments on collective personhood when he wrote that the African leadership structures believe in the spirit of being in

it together. African people have this sense of being connected to each other through their ancestral spirits and have this mutual love for one another bounded by the belief of one common guardian. There is such a high level of connectivity between clans, communities, villages and families. It is based on such connectivity that the Shona or Karanga people, to be specific have a tradition that discourages marrying from a strange community, hence the Shona proverb, *rooreranai vematongo* (marriage within the neighborhood). In essence innovation and ideas outside the family and cultural circles seem discouraged.

DISCUSSION: THE AFRICAN VIEW IN PERSPECTIVE

African cultures stand Adam Smith's premise on its head and is an anti-thesis to his theories. According to Greenleaf (1991) in an African society, the systems approach becomes true to its very meaning, that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It translates to the fact that no individual member of the community is greater than the whole

community. It means the community is stronger and bigger than the individual, therefore the African system does not subscribe to the individual self-interests theory. The characteristics of the African paradigm of leadership are best articulated by Robert Greenleaf (1991). These are discussed below.

Listening

This encompasses paying special attention and to listen to the inner voice of Ubuntu, and the reality of the discussion. It includes paying attention to the body language and the non-verbal cues, the things that people say to you without speaking their voice: listening with regular periods of reflection is essential to the growth of the servant leader.

Empathy

The spirit of the African leadership and community management feels for others and tries to go an extra mile for the sake of another. This is in line with the basic tenets for human nature in that no one wants to be ignored but appreciates to be recognized in

their own right and dignity. The most successful servant leaders are those who have become skilled empathetic people and who go out of their way to feel for others.

Persuasion

Persuasion is the clearest distinctions between the conventional authoritarian leadership style and that of servant leadership. Good leadership instils unity, cohesion and builds group focus. The emphasis on persuasion rather than consensus is the heart and soul of African leadership because it is embedded in the ancient African philosophy of Ubuntu. According to President Nelson Mandela, then our people lived peacefully, under the democratic rule of their kings, the Chief and subject, warrior and medicine man, all took part and endeavoured to influence decisions.

Healing

Most African people have emerged out of colonial rule and oppression. They have not gone through the process of healing and self-esteem building that

is necessary for them to function adequately. Servant leaders should recognize that they have an opportunity to help make whole those with whom they interact. According to Greenleaf (1991) the servant as a leader, there is something subtle communicated to one who is being served and led if, implicit in the compact between the servant leader and the led, is the understanding that the search for wholeness is something they share.

Servant leadership

Greenleaf (1991) developed a new paradigm shift on leadership when he invented what is universally known as the servant leadership model.

Greenleaf says, the servant as a leader is a strong persuader and powerful 'bargainer'; the leader does not belief in force and coercion. The leader is pre-occupied by nurturing his abilities and dreaming great dreams, in order to bring to the fore great and new ideas that will improve the structure and assets of the local community. They serve as the local heroes to lead the community by gathering ideas

locally, playing around with them and using them to create new community ideas and taking leadership in creativity, innovation and community improvement. In the Masvingo survey, these are the local entrepreneurs, community leaders who lead the community to develop and improve local infrastructure, by supporting the digging of water wells, building local roads in a move to improve local infrastructure. Servant leaders are called upon to seek a delicate balance between conceptual thinking and a day-to-day focused approach.

Consciousness

 In terms of the African leadership paradigm, leaders have to be sharply awake and reasonably disturbed. They think productively, that is putting together many ideas as is possible from which they create, innovate and collate their wisdom. They have a high degree of personal consciousness. High consciousness can only be attained through a personal spiritual journey, by reaching into the depths of our spiritual inner resources to transcend our self-interest and attain a high level of personal

transformation to be able to focus on the common good in service of society and the enterprising organizational ability. This is the highest level of self-transformation that enables leaders to overcome the limitations of their historical circumstances. For this to happen, leaders have to have a sense of connection with both the past and the future. In the African worldview, leaders are the custodians of culture and a particular civilization. They have to have a high sense of personal destiny (*dzinza*) by knowing who they are, to become what they know they can become, by knowing their personal and family history, as well as tribal and national history to serve as a compass and a reference point in order to find their paths in a changing world.

CONCLUSION

These cultural models are not fixed, complete and cast in stone. Hence the need to borrow from each other's cultural models (European, American, Asian or African) to create a global brand of a business model that is characterised and backed by science and technology. Therefore, Pascale (1990) was right

in saying that leadership reality is not absolute; rather, it is socially and culturally determined.

Realizing the epi-centre of industrial growth in the North and Asia has been the family enterprise, which in the African community, the family is the center of connectivity to each other through the ancestral spirits, creating the extended family full of mutual love for one another and bounded by the belief of one common guardian. Social workers find themselves extremely involved especially during the periods of transition from one revolution and from one culture to the other. In dealing with issues of culture, social entrepreneurship and business development between the different cultures of the world, there is going to be bound numerous casualties of the different systems. These are people who fall by the way-side both in North America and European systems whose emphasis is the myth of the individual hero. In the Asian and African systems which focus on collective and family action, there are casualties of the system and there will always be the need of the social work role.

Through the knowledge and understanding of human behavior and social systems and the skills to intervene at the points where people interact with their environments in order to promote social well-being, Social Work in Zimbabwe in particular and in Africa in general must incorporate training in innovation, science and technology for development to be able to empower and impact on rural industrialization.

The best thinking and creative social entrepreneurs and successful business entrepreneurs are those who build their own local assets, construct their own roads and bridges, dig their own deep water wells, in order to increase the value of their local communities. Social work and its empowering role, liberating of people to enhance well-being is based on the capacity to create and generate local wealth.

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