LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT STUDIES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

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ABSTRACT

This short lead article provides a brief introduction to the articles comprising this special issue, Leadership and Management in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Keywords: Overview, Leadership, Management, Sub-Saharan Africa

INTRODUCTION

This special issue of the journal provides interesting and useful insights into leadership and business in Sub-Saharan Africa with a selection of papers from the Leadership and Management Studies in Sub-Sahara Africa (LMSSSA) conferences. As guest editor I have selected some representative work in consultation with the editors of APJBM from which I hope you will find benefit and enjoyment. As background, I will describe the global projects contributing to the establishment of LMSSSA. In 1997 a research project was initiated in central China to identify preferred managerial leader behaviour of mainland Chinese and expatriate managers and supervisors as a basis for developing a leadership and management development programme for a hotel group in Zhengzhou City, Henan Province. At the time I was the deputy human resource manager in a local-expatriate counterpart plan intended to lead to localisation of the management cadre. In searching for recent leadership research in the Mainland as a basis for the programme, I found little. Since then I see that we were at the leading edge of the avalanche of business research in China. In my search I located Jan Selmer's work (1996 and 1997) in Hong Kong using the Leader Behaviour Description Questionnaire XII (LBDQXII) in Hong Kong investigating subordinates' opinions of local and expatriate managers. I contacted Prof. Selmer, and after a few email exchanges and further literature search, decided upon using the LBDQXII to develop the leader behaviour dimension preference bases for our training programme. From this start the research project evolved into regional studies in China and then to a global consortium of collaborators engaging in studies over most continents.

About the author

Assoc Prof. Romie Littrell (Romie.Littrell@aut.ac.nz) has been Associate Professor of International Business at the AUT Business School, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand since 2002. He has a PhD in Business Administration from Kennedy College in Zurich, Switzerland, and a second PhD in Applied Psychology from Auckland University of Technology. Dr. Littrell has worked in industry for 34 years in the USA, the Caribbean, Latin America, and China. He has also taught and been a visiting professor at many universities across the world. Dr. Littrell is facilitator of the Preferred Leader Behaviour and Values Across Cultures global research project since 1996, and is facilitator of the Leadership and Management Studies in Sub-Sahara Africa biennial conferences. He has published numerous journal articles and book chapters, most recently in the *Journal of World Business* and the *International Journal of Intercultural Research*.

From that beginning collaboration and publications expanded, and in 2004 I was invited by the late Jim Meindl to present our work in Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe at the First Conference on Cross-Cultural Leadership and Management Studies at Korea University in Seoul, South Korea (see Littrell and Baguma 2005). Jim Meindl is the father of the Romance of Leadership approach (1985), and the godfather of the Sub-Saharan Africa conferences.

From that beginning Prof. Peter Baguma of Makerere University in Uganda encouraged development of a similar conference focussing on leadership and management in Sub-Saharan Africa, and urged me to take on the role of organising and chairing the conference. I accepted the task, and we held the first conference in Stonetown, Zanzibar, in 2006. The conference produced some good quality work, which is published in Littrell and Ramburuth (2007). Conferences were organised at the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration in Accra in 2008, and at the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business in 2010. We rotate east, west, and South Africa, and the 2012 conference is scheduled for November in an east African location.

Four papers have been selected from the conferences to include in this special issue of this journal. I will briefly summarise them. The four articles are not on a theme other than the general topics of the conference, and were selected to demonstrate the eclectic spread of interests amongst the attendees:

- "Communal vs. Individual Modalities of Work – A South African Investigation" by Kurt April and Kai Peters
- "The Lived Experience of the Strategic Leader: What Effective CEOs Do, How They Do It and an Exploration into How They Think About It" by George Wangirayi Nyabadza and Stella M. Nkomo
- "Prospects for Ethnic African Products in the European Union" by Tidings P. Ndhlovu and Leopold Lessassy
- My article, "Contemporary Sub-Saharan African Managerial Leadership Research: Some Recent Empirical Studies", brings together work from the Preferred Leader Behaviour across Cultures Project (Littrell and Baguma 2005, Littrell and Nkomo 2005, Littrell, Wu and Nkomo 2009) and the Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness (GLOBE) project (Wanasika, Howell, Littrell and Dorfman 2011).

April and Peters present a review of South African Modes of Leadership (AMLs), in comparison to European and North American models and discuss how the AML model can be implemented within organisations. Emphasis is placed on the *ubuntu* paradigm. Their work is field survey research based, and a factor analytic model is generated. Their results indicate that no significant overall differences emerged between males and females. However, at an ethnic level, large differences were noted in leadership behavior preferences. Their results suggest though *ubuntu* values are deemed important in the workplace, there is a lack of expression of the values in practice.

In a similar vein, Nyabadza and Nkomo present a case study of the lived experience of a sample of CEO strategic leaders in South Africa to answer the question, "What do CEOs do and how do they do it?", and further, how they think about what they do. A multi-pillar model is developed from interviews expressing eleven themes common amongst the philosophies of their CEOs. Additional analyses produce a set of requisite opinions, attitudes, and beliefs these successful CEOs express as contributing to their success. A leadership model described as the pure leadership spider web model is developed and propositions are

put forward of parallels between the steps in spider web construction and how successful CEOs cocoon an organization with their own philosophy.

In his writings about charismatic authority Max Weber identifies it as "a certain quality of an individual personality, by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader..." (Weber, 1924/1947, p. 358). Nyabadza and Nkomo observed this phenomenon in their study, realised by CEOs' deliberate use of language, meta-language, and body language to create an aura of magic in their organisations. They labelled this phenomenon the "Magic Language Box" as it was so extraordinarily powerful in achieving results.

My contribution to this issue consists of analyses and comparisons of recent studies of businesspeople in Sub-Saharan Africa I have been involved, based upon two projects, the Global Leadership & Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness project and the Preferred Leadership across Cultures project. Results are based upon Black businessperson samples in Uganda, Ghana, Kenya, Namibia, Zambia and the Republic of South Africa's Black and White samples. The results indicate that evidence of a pan-Sub-Saharan African convergence of managerial leadership practices and preferences around the *ubuntu* movement does not appear in the preferred leader behaviour expressed by the samples. My conclusion is that the highly publicised *ubuntu* movement may be an inspirational goal promulgated by elites to encourage a more humane, community-oriented set of values for Sub-Saharan Africans. Study results also indicate the managerial leadership behaviour preferences of Black and White South Africans is very similar, with evidence of general acceptance of what are termed "Western" attitudes toward business leadership practice. The studies found few gender differences amongst preferred leader behaviour for employed businesspeople in Sub-Saharan Africa.

To demonstrate the eclectic nature of the participation in the LMSSSA conferences, I have selected the work by Ndhlovu and Lessassy focusing on importing ethnic African products into the European Union (EU) market, specifically France and the UK. Their study carries out a Eurocentric investigation of importing, wholesaling, and retailing operations that should be useful knowledge for exporters in Africa, identifying complex relationships in the socially and culturally heterogeneous EU. They offer insights into these structures and processes, noting that the relationships between ethnic producers and retailers and their distribution channels are often volatile and irrational in a business sense.

Hopefully we can establish a programme of special issues for each LMSSSA conference. I invite you to investigate LMSSSA at http://crossculturalcentre.homestead.com/lmsssa.html.

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