12. Cultural mythology and global leadership in Kenya

Fred O. Walumbwa and George O. Ndege

INTRODUCTION

Africa is the world’s richest continent in terms of natural resources. It has 50 per cent of the world’s gold, most of the world’s diamonds and chromium, 90 per cent of the cobalt, 40 per cent of the world’s potential hydroelectric power, millions of acres of untilled farmland, as well as other natural resources. Since the 1960s, more than $400 billion in Western aid and credits have been pumped into Africa and yet many of its problems seem to be as pervasive as in the past. Despite its natural wealth and massive Western aid and credit, Africa is still home to the world’s most impoverished people. A variety of reasons have been given for this state of affairs in Africa, including the legacy of colonialism, neo-colonialism, cultural differences, bio-geographic diversity and many others. Yes, there is no question that colonialism, for example, had a big impact on some of the nagging problems confronting Africa. Yet, in the post-colonial era most of Africa has infrastructures such as roads, railways, bridges, schools, universities, hospitals, and even the civil service machinery that are in worse shape today than they were over 40 years ago.

While all of the above factors significantly contribute to Africa’s problems, many have argued that there has been a pervasive failure of leadership that keeps the African continent from advancing beyond its current state. For decades, African leaders have focused on blaming external factors like colonial legacies, lingering effects of the slave trade, unjust international economic systems, and predatory practices of multi-national corporations, among others, to explain the miserable economic performance of the continent. To be fair, a lot of studies have already been done about the external factors and it is no secret to say that these factors have had their impact on the African continent’s plight. Yet, a big obstacle to economic growth in Africa is the tendency to place blame, failures and shortcomings on outside forces.

Many now believe that to address the current challenges facing the African continent, Africa must improve the quality and capacity of leadership in all sectors and at all levels. Already, African nations are banding together in such
organizations as the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) to take control of their own economic destiny and sovereignty. Some African leaders are calling for African countries to unite under a single government – the United States of Africa or USA so it could compete in a globalized world and to deal effectively with the critical problems on the continent, from the Darfur crisis to dictatorship, human rights, corruption, and poverty that the African leaders prefer not to confront. Africans are also pulling their own military forces together to come into countries in chaos to provide peace keepers and peace makers. Economic activity in countries such as Botswana, South Africa and Nigeria is beginning to show signs of positive growth and change.

In this chapter, the focus is on Kenya. Specifically, since leadership is inexorably intertwined with culture, knowledge of this dynamic is essential for developing and succeeding as a leader in the global business context. Below, we begin first by providing a brief overview of the history of Kenya. Next, we provide a brief description of culture and leadership in traditional society. We then introduce two leadership theories that we believe are applicable to the Kenyan context and the myriad of challenges facing the country. Our hope is that these two leadership approaches may also apply to the rest of the African continent given the similarities of the challenges, such as leadership and economic management issues, governance, systemic corruption, and capital flight. We conclude with some general suggestions on how these two leadership theories could be used to enhance human motivation, behavior, and performance that drive exemplary, sustainable organizational outcomes. In doing so, we also offer some specific suggestions on how such leadership behaviors can be developed and sustained.

KENYA: A BRIEF HISTORY

Kenya as a country is a colonial construct whose genesis dates back to 1895 when it became a British protectorate. The British brought together disparate ethnic groups who had their histories, rituals, myths and symbolisms all of which defined the way authority and power were exercised before the onset of the colonial period. Kenyan communities were forced to submit to British colonial power, which for many of them was after protracted wars of pacification.

Britain exercised power and control over the new colony of Kenya through an appointed special commissioner, later Governor, who was the chief executive authority in the country. He was accountable to Britain on all matters of governance within the country. The citizens were considered as mere subjects whose loyalty to the colonial government was supposed to be absolute. The colonial government embarked on the development of a colonial economy, institutions of governance, and physical infrastructure in the country. In insti-
tualizing colonial governance, a number of legislations were passed by the legislative council to regulate the movement of people, demarcate internal boundaries, and to provide legal basis for the taxation of Africans as well as forced labor (Berman, 1990).

The British government initially envisioned Kenya as a European settler colony (Sorrenson, 1967). The rhetoric, however, was that the colonial government would guarantee African interests until such time that the country would be ready for African leadership. Yet the colonial government was anything but an impartial arbiter in mediating competing European and African interests. The arbitrary alienation of African land and subsequent confining of Africans to various designated areas, reserves, exemplify the partiality and unequal power relations that defined British colonialism in Kenya.

African participation in national politics was curtailed. They were not allowed to form nation-wide political parties. Instead, the colonial government allowed limited political participation at the local level through the Local Native Councils. The councils were tightly controlled by the colonial administration. The purpose of this localization was to ensure that grievances were domesticated and dealt with at the local level. Problems and challenges came to be viewed through the prism of ethnicity (Ndege, 1992). This development suited the state’s divide and rule strategy. However, the strategy failed to forestall the development of African nationalism because Africans interacting in towns, schools, churches and professions. The denominator of frustration united Africans against colonial governance.

The emergent African elite began to challenge the colonial system more aggressively than ever before in the period after World War II. Trade Union leaders, Kenyan World War II veterans, and nationalists began to demand the dismantling of the colonial system. They mobilized the masses in their endeavor to present a unified front against the colonial government. Africans were no longer preoccupied with the reform of colonialism as their agenda was firmly the dismantling of colonialism. This demand reached its explosive high point in the central part of the country in the early 1950s following the outbreak of the Mau Mau uprising (Kaggia, 1975; Kanogo, 1987; Elkins, 2005). Anti-colonial violence rocked the country leading to bloodshed in many parts of the Central and Rift Valley regions.

The colonial government’s counter-insurgency measures proved too formidable for the Mau Mau forces, which were crushed by the end of 1956. However, the government came to the conclusion that the future of colonial rule in Kenya was dim. Forced by the emergent circumstances of resentment against colonial rule and the violent Mau Mau uprising, the government proceeded to heal the nation and to accelerate the process of decolonization by working with the Kenyan elite. In central Kenya, the government embarked on registration of land and issuance of title deeds, both of which were aimed at
rewarding the collaborators and marginalizing the freedom fighters. Most Mau Mau fighters were denied the opportunity to own land for which they were fighting (Sorrenson, 1967; Kitching, 1980). The development left bitterness among the fighters and their descendants who have argued that collaborators worked with the colonial government to disinherit them. The politics of land has continued to be one of the thorny issues in postcolonial Kenya.

Following protracted negotiations in London with the African leadership, representing various political parties, Kenya attained independence in 1963 with Jomo Kenyatta as the Prime Minister. Kenya African National Union (KANU) emerged as the dominant majority party having defeated the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU). Britain bequeathed Kenya the Western style of multiparty democracy. The independence constitution was a compromise document aimed at allaying the fears of the KADU party, which opposed a strong centralized government. It divided the country into eight provinces, including Nairobi the capital city. Kenya became a Republic in 1964 under the presidency of Jomo Kenyatta.

The attainment of independence marked the beginning of experiment in nation building, which included safeguarding the constitutional framework for a multi-ethnic and multi-racial society. Also of enormous significance was how to guarantee economic growth with a view to eliminating poverty, boosting literacy, and providing health care to the citizenry. These were weighty issues viewed against the backdrop of the ideological battles of the 1960s as well as the competing interests of the ruling elite. With the common enemy of colonialism dismantled, the struggle for the control of the state’s resources assumed an ethnic dimension.

Kenyatta wanted a strong and imperial presidency. Thus, within two years of assuming power, he presided over the abolition of the devolved government. Kenyatta instituted an administrative hegemonic regime in which ethnicity and patron-client relationships emerged as key determinants in the control and distribution of resources. His Kikuyu ethnic group came to disproportionately monopolize key positions in government and businesses. Kenyatta made Kenya a de facto one party state. His successor, Daniel Arap Moi, did little to reform the structure of governance. Domestic as well as international pressure forced the Moi government in 1992 to embrace reforms, which included the return to multiparty politics, end of detention without trial, and a fixed two five-year term for the president.

Moi retired in 2002 and the KANU party that had ruled Kenya since independence was defeated. Mwai Kibaki who succeeded Moi as the third president was more of a status quo leader. He has failed miserably on devolving power from the center, eradicating political ethnicity, containing corruption and guaranteeing security. In fact, Kibaki unapologetically returned the country to the dark days of 15 years ago as he elected to be another African despot.
It is against this backdrop that the country faced a catastrophic conflict following the flawed and outright election rigging of the 2007 Presidential elections. Instructively, it is the current Prime Minister, Raila Amolo Odinga, who was in and out of detention during the 1980s fighting for an open, transparent and accountable political system that is leading what has been dubbed the final liberation of the Kenyan people.

OVERVIEW OF KENYAN MYTHOLOGY

Kenya’s population of slightly over 30 million is made up of 43 ethnic groups, each with a different language and culture. The ethnic groups are normally determined by language and common culture and customs. The Kikuyu, Embu and Meru communities inhabit Central Kenya, while the Luyia, Luo, Gusii and Kuria are in Western Kenya. The expansive Rift Valley is the home of the Maasai, the Kalenjin, Turkana and the Kikuyu migrants from the central province. The coastal communities include the Mijikenda, Swahili and the Taveta among others. The Somali, Oromo and Borana people are in the northern part of Kenya. Each of these ethnic groups has myths that narrate their origin, religious beliefs, and interactions with their neighbors.

The Kikuyu claim descent from a common ancestor Gikuyu. He was called by the Divider of the universe, Mogai, and given his share of land (Kenyatta, 1962). Mogai took Gikuyu to his abode atop Mount Kenya and showed him the beauty of the country he had given him. Gikuyu was given a wife named Moombi. The marriage was blessed with nine daughters and no sons. Gikuyu sought Mogai’s indulgence in getting men that would marry the daughters with a view to ensuring the continued existence of his community. It is instructive that the Kikuyu still recognize the nine daughters as the basis of their clans. The Kikuyu had by the twentieth century evolved into a patriarchal society. They performed ceremonies and rituals at various times and developmental stages in the life of the individual. One of the most important rites was circumcision, which marked the transition from childhood to adulthood. It was the gateway to marriage, guaranteed access to the community’s secrets, as well as leadership status.

The Maasai who now occupy Rift Valley province are a predominantly pastoral society that believe their supreme being Enkai is the creator of the earth (Kipury, 1983). Enkai is the guardian over rain and fertility. He also gave the Maasai all cattle on earth. This myth of Enkai’s providence explains the centrality of cattle in Maasai cultural, economic and political life. The amount of cattle and children one had determined one’s status in society. Cattle were and still remain the main source of wealth and income among most of the Maasai. Institutionalized leadership among the Maasai was vested in the
Laibon, who was a religious cum political leader. He was invested with vast powers ranging from shamanistic healing and divination to prophecy and insuring success in war.

The Luos are found around Lake Victoria, which is the largest fresh water lake in the world. The Luo claim common ancestry from Ramogi. Belief in a common God, Nyasaye, as well as culture that tended to be communalistic identified them as a single homogeneous community. Leadership among the Luo was chosen based on ability and clear contributions to the community (Odinga, 1967).

The narrative of common heritage or ancestor from whom all members of an ethnic group, as presently constituted, came forth is a myth. There is no pure ethnic group. Kenyan communities have been intermingling and intermarrying for centuries. What is of critical importance in the history of various Kenyan communities is not how homogeneous they are, but rather how they came to assume a given kinship or ethnic identity. Myths therefore give meaning and cement this perceived identity through various rituals that members of the community share. Thus myths not only define social relations, but also are useful during times of political uncertainty and transition. Nowhere is this more evident in Kenya than during the dawn of the British conquest.

Among the Kikuyu, the legendary prophet and seer Mugo wa Kibiru foretold the coming of ‘strangers who would carry magical sticks which would produce fire … very much worse in killing than poisoned arrows … they would later bring an iron snake with as many legs as a centipede, that this iron snake would spit fires and would stretch from the big water in the east to another big water in the west of the Gikuyu country’ (Kenyatta, 1962: 42–3). Similarly, both Mbatian among the Maasai and Kimnyole among the Kipsigis foretold the arrival of the White man and ‘his iron train that would belch smoke and traverse the lands from east to west’ (Odhiambo, 2000: 5). The Gusii prophet Sakawa echoed similar prophecy (Ochieng, 1974). These narratives represent anxiety and tension during colonial invasion, as well as how traditional leaders exhibited uncanny ability to make predictions and optimal decisions during such times.

The magical sticks refer to the rifles, which were weapons of choice widely used by the British during conquest. The iron snake and/or iron train symbolized the locomotive train, which was evidenced by the construction of the Uganda Railway from the coastal port of Mombasa in the east to Kisumu in the west. There were no words in the languages of the communities for rifles or locomotives. The rifles and locomotives were instrumental in not only subduing the indigenous populations, but also opening up areas that were hitherto inaccessible to Europeans. The narratives are thus instructive of the dawn of a world of vulnerability and unequal power relationships that defined the colonial order.
In traditional society, especially chiefly societies, like the Maasai or Nandi, the central authority of the chief was reinforced by several factors that included control of the warriors, his powers of appointment and removal, and the mystical qualities associated with his office. Besides, there were several other officials, his council of elders, diviners, seers, who had a decisive voice in the chief’s investiture. The arrogation of royal power and authoritarianism was abhorred. Dissatisfaction with an authoritarian leader would lead to sanctions as prescribed by the society, or in some cases, migration by sections of the community to other areas thereby reducing the number of the governed under the chief’s jurisdiction.

Leadership whether at the kinship, clan, or community level had inbuilt mechanisms of ensuring accountability to the governed. Decisions were reached through participation of the community members present and by consensus. Leaders were chosen on the basis of their ability to provide good and moral leadership. Leadership outside of the family at the clan and community level invariably went to those who had proved themselves as reliable, confident, brave and impartial. Effective leaders were creative and imaginative people. They knew that leadership is a responsibility and service.

Traditional leaders were invariably wealthy. They were generous with their wealth because of the communalistic nature of most traditional societies. They assisted the less privileged members of society. It was a way of showing compassion for one’s kinsmen, clan and subjects. This endeared people to their leadership because they desired the most good for the greatest number. Trust and truth were cherished. Leaders were bound to keep their word. Power stemmed from people who gave it royal sanction through their rituals, symbolisms, and most important of all respect for the office.

The British undermined traditional leadership by unilaterally appointing chiefs, who were accountable to them, without reference to the preexisting context and situation. Emphasis was put on loyalty to the British Crown rather than the governed. The newly appointed colonial chiefs were from the communities, but governed with authority from outside the community. They had enormous powers bestowed on them to control the people they governed. The office of chieftaincy was elevated to an authoritarian institution. It represented colonial despotism at the local level. The result was the split between colonial leadership and their subjects. The colonial discourse on governance was framed in terms of ‘them versus us’. Africans distrusted not only the chiefs, but the appointing authority as well. In essence, the destruction of consultative leadership and the subsequent introduction and enhancement of imposed leadership eroded people’s confidence in the new local leadership styled to suit the purpose and mission of colonial government.
OVERVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY KENYAN LEADERSHIP

There is no single theoretical or comprehensive definition of culture that is widely accepted. Alternative perspectives exist for diverse academic disciplines that have used the concept of culture. For example, anthropologists use the concept of culture to refer to customs and rituals that societies develop over time. Organizational researchers focus on the practices that organizations develop to handle their employees and the relationships between such practices and organizational outcomes. Ambiguity aside, culture has been linked increasingly with the study of leadership. Schein (1992) points out that culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin and neither can be understood in isolation. He observes that while cultural differences may hinder or aid leadership effectiveness, it is also through leadership that cultures are changed and formed.

Although there may be many cultural influences on a person’s life, our focus here is primarily on the subcultures or what we call ‘microcultures’ within one given country – Kenya. This is because past research dealing with the impact of national culture on leadership and various work-related attitudes and behaviors often assumes national culture is fixed and invariant within a given country. Yet there might be multiple ‘microcultures’ within a given country. For example, according to culture-fit theory (e.g., Kanungo et al., 1999), the socio-cultural environment such as societal subcultures can influence individual behavior to the extent that internal individual values are shaped by the larger subcultures or societal values in which individuals are embedded, which in turn would affect individual perceptions, attitudes and behaviors. Indeed, Walumbwa et al. (2007) found that the extent to which leadership style affects follower work-related attitudes varies as a function of individual cultural orientations, defined in their study as either ‘allocentrism’ (that is, viewing oneself in terms of the in-groups to which one belongs) or ‘idiocentrism’ (that is, viewing oneself as the basic social unit where individual goals have primacy over in-group goals).

A word of caution is necessary before we proceed. Although we focus here on national subcultures and leadership, it is also important to recognize that there are also other factors other than leadership that might influence both sub- and national cultures. Hofstede (1998) found that economic development is strongly associated with cultural changes. That is, as people become more affluent, they are able to act more independently and do not require the support of an extended family or some sort of patron to whom they must be loyal and deferential.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership theory has received more conceptual and empiri-
cal scrutiny than all other leadership theories over the last two decades (Lowe and Gardner, 2000). Over the last two decades, transformational leadership has been found positively associated with a number of important organizational outcomes in many different types of organizations and situations, across different levels of analysis, and across cultures (Avolio, et al., 2004a).

Transformational leaders appear to be effective because they motivate followers to identify with the importance of their work, encourage followers to think critically and take independent action, seek new ways to approach their jobs, enable them to take on greater challenges, and stress the importance and values associated with desired outcomes in ways that are more easily understood by followers, while simultaneously setting higher performance standards (Bass and Avolio, 1994; Walumbwa et al., 2008a). By getting followers to think through more deeply the obstacles confronting their success, they enable them to develop a better understanding of what needs to be done to be successful and therefore are considered more empowering (Bass and Avolio, 1994).

**Authentic Leadership**

Although the concept of authenticity (that is, owning one’s personal experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, preferences or beliefs, processes captured by the injunction to know oneself) has its roots in ancient Greek philosophy, ‘to thine own self be true’, a theory of authentic leadership has just emerged in the last five years from the intersection of the leadership, ethics, and positive organizational behavior and scholarship literatures (Avolio et al., 2004b; Cameron et al., 2003; Cooper and Nelson, 2006; Gardner et al., 2005; Ilies et al., 2005; Luthans and Avolio, 2003).

Walumbwa et al. (2008b) defined authentic leadership as a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development. Although a relatively new construct, it has been suggested that authentic leadership may positively affect employee attitudes and behaviors (Avolio et al., 2004b; Gardner et al., 2005; George, 2003; Ilies et al., 2005). Avolio and colleagues (for example, Avolio et al., 2004b; Gardner et al., 2005) argued that more authentic leaders promote employee engagement and well-being by more often recognizing and valuing individual differences and talents, thus helping followers convert their talents into job-related strengths.
Application of Authentic and Transformational Leadership Theories to Kenya

We need to discuss explicitly the transferability of authentic and transformational leadership theories into the Kenyan culture (Walumbwa, 1999). On the surface, it might seem that the notion of authentic and transformational leadership may not be compatible with Kenyan culture. For example, in Kenya, individual achievements frequently are much less valued than are interpersonal relations (although this is changing). Moreover, because hierarchical societies like Kenya tend to generate very top-down leadership practices, it is possible that such cultures may not be compatible with authentic and transformational leadership styles, which stress inclusiveness and empowerment of followers to make independent decisions.

Several other African leadership and management scholars also have argued that the Western theories of leadership may not apply to the African context. Taken together, proponents of this school of thought argue that Western leadership theories are inadequate because leadership challenges in Africa are embedded in very different cultural, economic, historical, political, and social contexts (Jackson, 2004). For example, Blunt and Jones (1997) argued that it is unrealistic to think that the Western paradigms of leadership apply to Africa, which has a totally different cultural and economic context. Nyambegera et al. (2000) argued that most managers in Africa (and Kenya is a good example) still practice leadership styles that are largely authoritarian, which they argued, are responsible for lowering employees’ social status, engagement, and motivation while demanding unquestioning personal allegiance to the manager. Others (for example, Mbigi, 2005), in reacting to the domination of Western-oriented leadership theories have argued for a rejection or a limitation of Western leadership theories. Indeed, such reactions would be expected given that in an extensive review of the leadership literature, House and Aditya (1997) revealed that about 98 per cent of leadership theory emanates from the United States.

However, to argue for a rejection or a limitation of the so called ‘Western leadership’ theories, in our view, misses the point and as a matter of fact, is to deny reality. Yes, we need African management approaches (such as Ubuntu), but at the same time we must accept evidence of the influence of globalization and the fact that Africa is a multicultural and multi-ethnic continent. Considered carefully, we believe there are certain leadership theories that are very compatible with Kenya’s culture and Africa in general. Of course, this is not to deny there are no differences; such differences are bound to exist even in Western or Asian cultures. Below, we advance several reasons to explain why we believe authentic leadership and transformational leadership could have similar positive effects in this part of the world.
First, in Kenya like many African countries, there are multiple, and sometimes, conflicting forces at work shaping Kenyan management systems: bureaucracy rooted in the legacy of British colonial rule, Kenyan traditional values rooted in subcultures, communism or the extended family, and a hybrid conventional Western business values (promoted by Western multinationals and Kenyan managers born in Kenya and educated in the West). Moreover, the distance between leaders and subordinates is very deferential to superiors; but the superior’s authority is rooted not just in position, but moral integrity. Africans like any other group of people also expect their leaders to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses as well as to have high ethical standards. Thus, the overall belief of the working men and women in Kenya is that leaders should provide care and affection to subordinates, as well as provide balance, challenge, guidance and inspiration. These are the core elements of both authentic and transformational leadership theories (Bass and Avolio, 1994; Avolio et al., 2004b; Gardner et al., 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008b). For example, Avolio and Walumbwa (2006) argued that authentic leaders positively impact followers’ performance by helping them understand how awareness of their own and others’ beliefs and values facilitates the development of skills, attitudes, and behaviors required to optimize performance. The influence of transformational leadership is also based on such leaders’ success in connecting followers’ self-concept to the mission of their organization so they become self-expressive or what has been referred to as, ‘an absolute emotional and cognitive identification’ (Bass, 1988: 50). Such leaders influence followers by activating an identity-based organizing construct in their working self-concept that serves to shift followers’ conceptions of their identity in line with the goals, mission and vision of their organization.

Second, the nature of paternalistic leadership is complex and multifaceted. Linquist and Adolph (1996) argued that African societies tend to be egalitarian within age groups, but hierarchical between age groups. The implication here is that although top-down leadership is commonplace, the culture also incorporates leadership techniques that are rooted in benevolence, team work, and moral example, which are aspects of authentic and transformational leadership theories. Moral, ethical, and challenging leaders such as more authentic and transformational motivate subordinates through exemplary and virtuous behavior, while benevolent leadership involves care and consideration for the welfare of subordinates. Those exercising moral and benevolent leadership techniques would seem to be employing authentic and transformational leadership perspectives (that is, providing inspiration, intellectually stimulating, individualized consideration, balanced processing, internalized moral perspective, ethical leadership, self-awareness).

There is some evidence to support the above arguments. Walumbwa et al. (2005), using data collected from several bank institutions in Kenya reported
that transformational leadership has a strong and positive effect on followers’ organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Similarly, Walumbwa et al. (2008b), using data drawn from 11 diverse companies in Kenya found that authentic leadership was positively related to supervisor rated performance. Thus, it appears that the theories of authentic and transformational leadership, although originally conceived and developed in the United States tend to result in positive employee attitudes and behaviors in Kenya. Note, however, that our point of discussion here is not to claim that authentic and transformational leadership is necessarily commonplace in Kenyan organizations; clearly it is not. Rather, there are aspects of idealized notions of leadership in Kenya that are indeed quite compatible with authentic and transformational leadership behaviors and thus are more likely to make workers presumably receptive to such leadership perspectives.

GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS

We believe that authentic and transformational leadership has several implications for businesses in Kenya. Kenyan leaders are still faced with daunting challenges, including how to deal with adverse labor relations and ethnicity in the workplace. Breaking down these misconceptions and mistrust among the several ethnic groups and replacing them with positive expectations may not only raise the expectations that leaders have of their followers, it may also change the way they behave with each other. Such changes may not only enhance work engagement, commitment and performance, it may also help prepare Kenyans to take on increased leadership responsibilities. Therefore, managers must be able to come up with new ways of thinking about how to engage and transform the multi-ethnic Kenya’s work force to enable employee empowerment and to develop more effective leadership at all levels of organizations – see Commentary box.

COMMENTARY BOX

Dr Bani Orwa, Business Consultant, Nairobi, Kenya

Kenyan leadership style has changed over time. It is no longer the question of which style of leadership and management is best for you. A key to success is to empower employees and utilize every available talent to meet the expectations of both internal and external customers. Given the diversity, the style of leader-
ship best suited for a particular leader in Kenya depends upon the particular group a leader is trying to influence. I think managers should use the style of leadership that works best for the organization’s objectives taking into account the uniqueness of Kenyan cultures. Managers should also strive to build a good relationship with their employees to create a healthy working environment.

We suggest that authentic and transformational leadership styles may play critical roles in motivating diverse work groups and the multi-ethnic Kenyan society. In particular, transformational leadership style has been described as having greater relevance in situations where significant change is needed (Bass and Avolio, 1994). For instance, being aware of the subcultural differences may help managers to identify individual and organizational contexts where authentic or transformational leadership is more (or less) likely to enhance organizational commitment, satisfaction and job performance. Helping leaders to be more aware of their impact on individuals with different orientations and backgrounds, would help them to best adjust their leadership style to the individual values of their followers, organizations and societies in which they are leading.

Finally, given sweeping concerns regarding corruption, ethnicity, ethics and management issues in organizations in Kenya, we suggest that authentic leadership (Walumbwa et al., 2008b) and transformational leadership (Bass and Avolio, 2004) measures can serve as practical means through which organizations seeking to provide authentic and transformational leadership development training can begin to design programs and interventions. That is, the scales offer organizational human resource professionals reliable and valid instruments for examining the level of authentic and transformational leadership exhibited by its managers and their subordinates. In addition, the conceptual models of both theories offer the content that training should focus on in order to ‘create’ authentic and transformational leadership. More importantly, given that both authentic and transformational leadership have been found to be positively related to a variety of follower outcomes, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment and performance, suggests that training leaders to be more authentic and transformational may provide substantial returns on the investment and thus spur socioeconomic and political developments. This is especially critical as Kenyans seek ways to improve their productivity and competitiveness in the global economic arena. However, we must emphasize that for such training programs to be effective and successful, they must be appropriately designed to reflect the multi-ethnic and racial complexity of the Kenyan culture, and where appropriate
use a balanced combination of authentic/transformational and traditional local leadership styles to avoid potential possible conflict and resistance.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Based on considerable research on authentic and transformational leadership theories, we suggest a number of practical guidelines that can be used to develop authentic and transformational leaders in Kenya. First, the development of authentic and transformational leaders can start with human resource development (HRD) interventions aimed at individuals (direct reports, leaders, and so on) or teams (that is, collective leadership) as well as organization development processes. We recommend that leaders and their direct reports be allowed to set stretch goals that are specific and challenging, and yet achievable and realistic. Such goals could be broken down into manageable sub-steps that will mark progress and enable at least small wins and success. However, for such training interventions to be effective in enhancing authentic or transformational leadership, we recommend that they must be appropriately designed to reflect the complexity and uniqueness of the Kenyan culture and history. By integrating local cultural context into the leadership development processes, there is greater opportunity for authentic and transformational leadership behaviors to be sustained, while also potentially altering the work context itself to make it more favorable to the further development of authentic and transformational leaders and followers. In addition, management from top to bottom must provide strong support for such developmental efforts. That is, they must act as role models and take the first step in ‘walking the talk’ of an authentic and transformational leadership.

Second, leaders and their direct reports can be exposed to discussion and considerable self-reflection. In particular, leaders and their associates can be sensitized to the extensive nature of the consequences of authentic and transformational thoughts. Moreover, leaders’ and associates’ perspective-taking abilities can be enhanced through exposure to and discussions of authentic or transformational situations with role models they respect and relate to. In addition, training in different models of authentic and transformational thoughts can also expand organizational leaders’ capacities to think about issues in alternative ways.

Third, authentic and transformational leadership behaviors can be further developed by coaching and mentoring high ethical standards and challenging strategies. This can be done through participation in leadership development programs designed to incorporate high ethical standards. In particular, the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) (Walumbwa et al., 2008b) and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Bass and Avolio, 2004)

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measures can be used to help assess the most appropriate tactics needed to enhance overall authentic or transformational leadership.

Finally, the authentic or transformational leadership development can use rehearsals and experiential exercises. Such standard training and development techniques can be used to build skills of when and how to take authentic actions or how to deal with challenging situations. That is, the leader and/or the individual empowered employee must know, for example, when persistence toward a goal is no longer feasible.

REFERENCES


