

BUILDING A CORE LEADERSHIP SKILLS SET FOR AFRICA'S TRANSFORMATION: THE ROLE OF BUSINESS SCHOOLS IN AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

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SYNOPSIS

The main objective of this discussion is to determine the extent to which Business Schools in African Universities can play significant role in producing the leadership skills needed for Africa's transformation. To understand such skills-set for the continent requires a comprehensive enumeration of what constitutes good leadership for results. This discussion has revealed a set of leadership skills-set that public and private sectors would need to maximize development results for Africa. Integrity and political will are leading attributes in making these skills, among a range of attributes enumerated. The Business Schools in universities are ultimately required in the production of these attributes, but it goes beyond these institutions in building leadership. Since the complex contexts involved in transformational processes require leadership training beyond the classroom, the role of states and non-state actors in producing leadership skills were also explored. In addition to the need to increase investment in the University and Business Schools includes recommendation for increased advocacy for a change of mind-set that brings about integrity, commitment and political will, as leading leadership attributes in the delivery of results. This discussion took place from 5th to 19th October 2015, and a total of seven AfCoP members from various countries shared their views, experiences and insights.

Introduction

The transformation of Africa demands effective leadership embodied in strong and skilled champions (the leaders) and a healthy workforce equipped with knowledge and competence to ensure optimal production of public services. Effective leadership is the nucleus of an organization to ensure increased and sustained

productivity involving generation of innovations and new technologies, processes, products and services. However, Africa is facing enormous challenges in meeting these qualities in its leadership, a fact demonstrated by the continent's continued backwardness in socioeconomic transformation and development. This is a concern that needs a greater and

immediate response from all relevant stakeholders in the region and beyond.

In particular, the lack of strong political leadership is an impediment to development. The recent conflicts in several African nations such as Central African Republic and Burundi are part of the evidence of compromised leadership that needs a serious turnaround. A rethink of the regional leadership is needed if the continent should take advantage of renewed international commitment to supporting its transformation as evidenced by the recently launch of the Sustainable Development Goals aimed at eradicating all forms of poverty by 2030. Hopes are also expressed in the African Union Agenda 2063 calling for an industrialization strategy for effective transformation of the continent. But all this requires prompt development of human capacity, including leadership capabilities to formulate, implement, and monitor development policies and programmes. African universities and business schools have a significant role to play in providing core leadership skills to drive the transformation processes. Unfortunately, these institutions also lack adequate and necessary human capacity to produce capable and effective leaders in Africa.

Lessons from the African Capacity Building Foundation's interventions in these areas, however, show that, while institutional, political, demographic, and resource challenges exist, many African universities today are exceptionally positioned to enhance institutional leadership and positively contribute to Africa's transformation. This is informed by the advancement of information and communication technology, increased public-private partnership models, and the generally increasing trend of globalization that many African Universities are leveraging in building informed regional societies.

Against this background, AfCoP had decided to launch an online discussion on the aforementioned topic as a means of sharing knowledge and documenting perspectives as to how Africa's leadership can be strengthened, and what could be the role of the University and Business Schools in the process. The guiding questions for the discussion revolved around the following:

- Exploring the greatest leadership skills-set needed in Africa in order to speed up its development agenda
- Identifying and documenting the role African universities and business schools could play in building core leadership skills-sets—exploring the challenges encountered by these institutions in the process
- Determining the short and long term opportunities for these institutions to provide core leadership skills for African's transformation
- Determining what different stakeholders—governments, development partners, civil society, training institutions, private sector—can do to support African universities and business schools in addressing leadership skill challenges in a sustainable manner

The following sections present results of the discussion, summarized around the issues and ideas identified during the process, supported by relevant research works reviewed (see Annex 1 for discussants).

Qualities of Effective, Capable and Successful Leadership for Africa

The online discussants (and AfCoP members), **Christine Ochieng, Ebbah Gadaga and Simbarashe Mangwengwende** perceive leadership as the accumulation and display of integrity at work; that the greatest leadership skills-set that needs more

attention is “Ethical Corporate Governance,” in that a lot of failures are the result of lack of credibility, integrity, and sincerity of human behaviour; “the number one enemy, if not cancer of all, being CORRUPTION.”

Mr Jeewansing Ramlugun, another discussant, sees effective leadership beyond possession of executive and technical excellence. To him, “leaders in Africa should exemplify and embody highest degree of probity and supreme commitment to the endeavours they are engaged in and the responsibilities enjoined upon them....They need to rank high in their moral DNA make-up, and be guided by clear and consistent values, so that in the business context, doing well is consonant with doing good....They need to exercise and exert power with people, not over people; be collaborative, not controlling; enabling and empowering, not exploitative; be humble and inspire greatness and distinction....supreme leaders need to possess a high intelligence quotient (Implementation Quotient!), and leave a leadership legacy, by making a positive difference.”

Thomas Theisoohn, also an online discussant, looks at leadership as embodiment of skills that address the realities of transformational processes, which of course draws from the attributes aforementioned. He stresses the acquisition of leadership qualities necessary to confront the complex and multi-stakeholder nature of the transformational processes that societies require to prosper with diverging interests. Thus, it is not as much the economic or other technical expertise that matters, but rather whether change agents understand the dynamic of change and have the softer skills of facilitating related processes, mindful of politics and power issues; and truly these qualities are not really taught at universities and business schools—at most not well addressed in learning institutions, he argues.

Two Leading Examples of Good African Leadership

These examples are taken from Bangura (2015, pp.49&141), Boschini *et al.* (2003, p.3), and Glencorse (2010, p.9) regarding effective leadership seen in Botswana and Rwanda. Even though Botswana was subject to indirect rule and turbulent times during the British colonial reign, the traditional kings and chiefs of Bechuanaland (now Botswana) including the Khama lineage were able to outmanoeuvre imperialism through applied efforts. They maintained plural rule and just social order inherited from their forefathers in their kingdoms; protected property rights of their subjects; and interacted with colonial masters such that their precolonial values were not eroded. The success of the traditional rulers in preserving their precolonial democratic values is believed to have been the main reason for Botswana’s distinguished postcolonial prosperity in Africa (Bangura 2015, p.49). The country is a success story in escaping the resource-curse that has gripped and crumbled the economies of the vast majority of resource rich African nations. Botswana emerged top in institutional quality driven economic growth among a sample of 10 leading resource rich countries in the world in 2003, recording an average GDP growth of about 5 percent during 1975-1998 with an institutional quality index of 0.70 (on a scale of zero to one) compared to negative GDP growth of -1.45 percent for Niger, -1.94 percent for Zambia, -2.05 percent for Sierra Leone, and -5.39 percent for DR Congo, with institutional quality indices of 0.52, 0.43, 0.41 and 0.23, respectively (Boschini *et al.* 2003, p.3).

Rwanda: This country is particularly an excellent case review because, despite the critical challenges it has faced in the last two decade losing nearly a million Rwandans in her genocide in 1994, it has become an international spotlight as an emerging African country in effective leadership and service delivery to the poor. It has reduced under-five mortality rate from 299 deaths per 1000 births in 1994 to less than 55 by 2014; life expectancy

increased from 28 years in 1994 to 59; HIV/AIDs stemmed from 13.9 percent in 1994, to 3.0 percent; poverty headcount reduced from 78 to 45 percent by 2009; and net primary school enrolment currently near to 100 percent, with negligible disparity between boys and girls (Bangura 2015, p.141). This is against the backdrop of a leadership that secured deep sense of citizenship that has allowed for peace and a collective sense of ownership over development outcomes. It has pursued its own development model drawing on factors leading to the genocide, while grappling with how best it could leverage its significant assets to support national regeneration and self-reliance (Glencorse 2010, p.9).

The Role that African Universities and Business Schools Can Play in Building Core Leadership Skills-Sets

The leading AfCoP online discussants here were *Christine Ochieng, Jeewansing Ramlugun, Thomas Theisohn and Ebbah Gadaga*. They pointed out that universities needed to come up with leadership development courses for continuous adult learning, providing opportunities for networking and dialogue; courses with well-researched practical case studies. That, practical curricula should be implemented, tailoring courses to train leaders, young and old, noting that the ultimate objective of schooling is not just receiving pass mark with a focus on theories, but the transfer and diffusion of knowledge leading to the determination of how much potential transformation skills trainee have acquired to change societies for the better. As demand for good leaders mounts up in the region, it is crucial to accurately define what good leadership is and what skills need to be taught, transferred, and acquired.

They emphasized that, the process of generating effective leadership for any institution requires active interaction between demand for knowledge (end users of skills such as the corporate and public

sector—labour market) and its supply (generator of skills such as the universities/business schools). This interaction aids effective resources allocation in human resource development, minimizing mismatch between demand and supply of skills thereby maximizing spending towards the production of the right leadership training needs.

Christine Ochieng specifically commented on the need for customized pedagogical models in training institutions involved in building leadership skills to allow the participation of individuals in full time employment; she currently being a student pursuing MSc in Leadership and Governance in the Jomo Kenyatta University in Kenya. She said, “This course is packaged in short modules delivered to provincial “government officials through makeshift pilot classes, taught early in the morning before these officials report to work.”

Thomas Theisohn noted that there is a scope to enrich mainstream technical curricula with modules that concern reality skills, related to change management brokerage, process facilitation and the like. Such content should be integrated into mainstream graduate courses in economics, public sector management, or business administration. Looking at leadership as embodiment of skills that address the realities of transformational processes in a complex and multi-stakeholder context with diverging interests, he further argued that such skills are not really taught at universities and business schools or if anything these institutions are not enough. A viewpoint supported by Ebbah Gadaga, that additionally, more learning platforms need to be created “like one of ours—AfCoP—for knowledge generation and sharing which brings together students, professionals from various universities and backgrounds to learn and share using online interfaces as instrument to reach out to broader audience.

Challenges faced by these Learning Institutions and Opportunities

To ensure the availability of adequate leadership-skills set requires overcoming a gamut of challenges facing African learning institutions. The summary challenges enumerated during the online discussions—facing African Universities and Business Schools—include under-funding of programmes and limited infrastructural development in the continent including energy supplies, incapacity to take advantage of the opportunities presented by globalization and global technologies that aid learning and customization of curriculum to fit different needs and demands. Political will leaves a lot to be desired in providing institutional incentives for the training of leaders; the lack of institutional independence from the national politics.

Mr **Jeewansing Ramlugun**, a discussant, particularly outlined some opportunities: There are relatively better institutions in training leaders and providing leadership skills than others. Thus, weak institutions should forge alliances with strong institutions—promoting affiliations—across African countries. Inter-institutional collaboration is imperative in terms of sharing of expertise, resources and facilities and best practices. He further noted: “In 1980’s-1990s, I served as a National Research Co-ordinator, for the Dar-es-Salam-based Eastern & Southern Universities’ Research Programme, where there was, amongst other objectives, a focus on establishing a data base of all participating institutions to profile their technical education provisions, for the purpose of building and sharing regional capacity. A similar exercise may be undertaken with regards to leadership development institutions on an Africa-wide basis.”

They further mentioned that African institutions should be capacitated to seize the growing global opportunities supporting transfer of knowledge and replication of leading-edge models of leadership from across the world, including from newly-emerging countries, with arrangements for

scholarly collaboration and exchanges. At the same time, models and methods that consistently and predictably prove unworkable must be questioned and challenged. Africa must invest substantially in international-standard research and refereed publications, with strong policy and practice underpinnings.

The Role of Different Actors

The public sector, corporate entities and civil society organisations should be able to identify the leadership skills-set they need and ensure that these needs are effectively communicated to learning institutions through forged out networks and partnerships. Learning institutions should be flexible to customize curricular to supply these skills. Existing African Institutions offering courses in leadership, such as the Jomo Kenyatta University in Kenya, could be leveraged.

The discussion emphasized the need to encourage retired public sector servants and experts including those in international organizations to teach in Universities and Business School. The experiences brought to higher learning institutions by such individuals are crucial to the supply of the leadership skills needed for Africa’s transformation.

The discussion acknowledged the great efforts made by African governments and donor communities at supporting capacity building in the region and infusing leadership skills into workplaces and management. However, **Simbarashe Emanuel Mangwengwende**, a discussant, pointed out a counterproductive experience with external assistance in the electricity industry he has worked in one of the African countries: Development agencies had paid millions of dollars to "management contractors" to turn around utilities in this sector while training locals to take over at the end of their contract, but “these contracts have generally failed - I can’t quote a single success story,” he noted. Basically, success could have been recorded if the local/permanent managers had

been trained by doing the job themselves, with the external contractor only serving an advisory role, he argued.

Mr. Jeewansing Ramlugun, a discussant, argued: Top level leaders would need to play a direct and active part in mentoring, coaching, and nurturing upcoming and aspiring leaders, both in work settings and in formal learning environments. Leadership talent development on an ambitious scale would require demonstrable and sustained commitment at the national strategy level to set the bold course in motion; and development actor, state and non-state must join forces in the process.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This discussion has been instrumental in generating ample understanding of what constitutes good leadership for results. The first step in building leadership for an organization or society is to start by identifying the attributes (skills-set) needed by that entity. It is clear from this discussion that various organisations in the public and private sectors would need a continuum of leadership attributes to deliver desired results. Thus, the discussion has been able to generate the following recommendations:

- Capacitate the universities and business schools for them to be able to impart the required leadership skills sets. Regional cooperation and learning from the successful countries is also important. And constantly review the curriculum to meet the dynamic leadership needs.
- Increase advocacy for change of mind-sets of Africans and African leaders for results. Civil society should continue to mount pressure in this direction, and AfCoP could strengthen its partnership with those organisations involved in carrying this out.
- African leaders should increase their political will; and integrity institutions such

as anti-corruption grafts and parliaments alongside the civil society should step up effort in inducing good leadership in the powers that be.

- Indeed, the classroom can be a source and platform for the creation of leadership spirit and visioning that could be put into action in the field. Thus, financial, human and technological support should be provided to African Universities and Business Schools to acquire the wherewithal to train leaders. Alliances should be forged between leadership training institutions across the continent and beyond.
- Encourage experienced people in the public and private sectors to teach in the University and Business Schools.
- AfCoP could institute a detailed survey on the existing leadership training institutions in Africa to encourage peer learning among them, determining their levels of success and strengths and weaknesses, and disseminating to them some of the recommendations coming out of this discussion such as the need to engage public and private sector experts to teach in the University and Business Schools.

Annex 1: List of discussants

The online participants were Ms Aimtonga Amani Makawia, Jeewan Ramlugun, Christine Awuor Ochieng, Ebbah Gadaga, Annette Kirenga, Thomas Theisoht, Simbarashe Emanuel Mangwengwende; and *moderator*, Sheka Bangura

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