Culture and leadership in Africa: a conceptual model and research agenda

Kuada, John

Culture and leadership in Africa: a conceptual model and research agenda

John Kuada

Department of Business Studies, Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark

Abstract

Purpose – The paper aims at identifying the knowledge gaps in the existing African leadership studies and argues in support of further research in the field with a view to establishing the link between African culture and leadership practices and their implications for economic growth on the continent.

Design/methodology/approach – It reviews the mainstream perspectives in leadership literature in general and African leadership literature in particular as a basis for the development of an integrated goal-behaviour-performance model.

Findings – Previous studies have seen African culture as either defining the uniqueness of leadership on the continent or constraining leadership development. The paper suggests the presence of both types of impact on leadership. It also offers a conceptual framework that integrates the different perspectives on the relationship between culture, leadership and organizational performance.

Research limitations/implications – The paper is based mainly on limited empirical investigations into leadership styles and functions in Africa. The scarcity of studies in the field therefore imposes limitations on the generalizability of some of the arguments.

Practical implications – The paper encourages research in the field and provides some propositions to guide future empirical investigations. Ideas generated in the paper will guide organizational development strategies and poverty alleviation policies in Africa.

Originality/value – It is one of the recent attempts to synthesize existing perspectives on leadership behaviour in Africa and its implications for economic growth and poverty alleviation.

Keywords Africa, National cultures, Cultural studies, Leadership, Organizational performance

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

The last four decades have witnessed a persistent search for explanations for the dismal growth of Sub-Sahara African (SSA) economies. SSA economies have been frequently compared with high growth Asian economies such as those of Malaysia and South Korea which were at similar levels of growth barely five decades ago. While these Asian countries now enjoy the accolade of "economic miracle" (Akyüz and Gore, 2001), the African situation is usually described by such adjectives as "disaster" and "tragedy" (UNCTAD, 2004). Explanations for this dismal performance have included institutional and structural weaknesses (Yeats *et al.*, 1996; Killick *et al.*, 2001), limited attention to private enterprise development (Fafchamps *et al.*, 2001), poor governance (Nwankwo and Richards, 2001), management ineptitude (Kamoche, 1997) and limited staff motivation (Okpara, 2006; Okpara and Wynn, 2007). Other scholars have argued that leadership weaknesses constitute the most important reason for Africa's poor economic performance (Ochola, 2007).

Although limited research has been done on African leadership (Bolden and Kirk, 2009), the general view in the available literature is that African leaders are terribly ineffective and adapt very poorly to the demands of an increasingly complex globalised economic system (Ochola, 2007). Thus, Edoho (2007) declares that until African countries develop the managerial capacities of their leaders (both within the public and private sectors) progress on the continent as a whole may remain illusive.

Leadership development has therefore attracted policy interest during the past three decades, guided by the view that the more African management practices approximate Western practices the more efficient and effective their organisations would be. This view has provided intellectual legitimacy for the unending stream of donor funded management training programmes and organisational development interventions delivered to African organisations by Western consultants.

The relevance of this Western-inspired leader development approaches has been challenged on the grounds that there are wide varieties of successful leadership and management practices throughout the world (Whitley, 1994; Sørensen and Kuada, 2001). In view of these critics, the fact that many African managers have the intellectual capacity to understand the logic underlying Western management principles and practices but revert to their pre-training behaviour after participating in several training programmes indicate fundamental weaknesses in the Western management-oriented training programmes themselves (Kuada, 1994).

The divergent perspectives outlined above invite continual debate and research. Research must improve insight into how Africans behave as leaders, why they behave the way they do, and the implications of such behaviours for organizational and national economic performance. Research is also required to guide the choice of approaches that African leaders may adopt to achieve sustainable improvements in their behaviours. This paper therefore argues in favour of a stronger positioning of African leadership on the management research agenda. It does so by reviewing some of the studies already published in the area and drawing attention to some current knowledge gaps in the literature. With this as a background, the paper provides some guidance as to how scholars can progress the leader development ideas through further empirical and conceptual studies and through the development of usable prescriptions for executives.

The paper is structured as follows. It continues after this introduction with a review of some of the leading thoughts on leadership that management scholars have provided during the last half a century. This body of literature is then synthesized into a goal – behaviour – outcome model that identifies the drivers, behaviours and consequences of current dominant leadership forms in most African countries and organizations. The model is followed by a list of research issues requiring the immediate attention of scholars.

A review of leadership theories

Bolden and Kirk (2009) group theories of leadership into four main categories:

(1) essentialist theories;

(2) relational theories;

(3) critical theories; and

(4) constructionist theories.

The essentialist theorists rely on objectivist paradigm and seek to identify and define what "leadership" is in universal terms –, i.e. focusing on predictable leadership traits and behaviours. The works of leadership scholars such as Blake and Mouton (1964), Fiedler (1967), Stogdill (1974), Hersey and Blanchard (1977) and Bass (1985) are examples of this theoretical perspective. Relational theorists on the other hand, argue that leadership resides not within leaders themselves but in their relationship with others. These theorists therefore call for recognition of the emergent nature of leadership processes and the distributed nature of expertise and influence. Critical theories focus their attention on the underlying dynamics of power and politics within organizations and therefore emphasise the social and psychological processes that characterise the performance of leadership functions in organizations. Finally, the constructionist theorists draw attention to the manner in which the notion of "leadership" is utilized to construct shared meanings that enable people to make sense of their predicaments. Together, these studies have greatly enhanced academic and practitioner understandings of leadership during the last century.

Since the concern in this paper is to explore the extent to which the management literature can inform our understanding of leadership challenges in Africa, the discussions rely largely on the managerial theoretical perspectives that fall under the first category of theories identified by Bolden and Kirk (2009). We will however be guided in the discussions by the understanding that there is substantial overlap between the four theoretical positions.

Early leadership theories (1920-1970)
One of the influential leadership theories of the 1920s and 1930s was the trait theory which posits that successful leaders combine such personality attributes as drive, desire to lead, integrity, self-confidence, intelligence, adaptability, assertiveness and emotional stability, with social attributes such as being educated at the "right" schools and being socially prominent or upwardly mobile to shape their leadership roles in organizations (Yukl, 2010). Extensive empirical studies have, however, failed to establish the generalizability of these traits. Thus, the traits theory came into quick competition with a wide range of other leadership theories during the mid-1950s (Nahavandi, 2009).

One of the competing theories at that time was the situational (or contingency) leadership theory, with roots in studies by (Fiedler, 1967), as well as Hersey and Blanchard (1977). The main thrust of these studies is that there is no one best way to influence people – i.e. different situations call for different types of leadership orientation and action. Scholars subscribing to the contingency theory placed the dominant leadership behaviours on a continuum with task-centred behaviour at one end and employee (relationship) centred behaviour at the other end (Nahavandi, 2009; Yukl, 2010). They argued that task-centred leaders consider it their responsibility to supervise their subordinates closely – telling them what to do, how to do it, when to do it and where to do it. Relationship-centred leaders address the social and emotional needs of their peers and subordinates with emphasis on recognition, work satisfaction and self-esteem. The extent to which a leader is task-centred or employee (relationship) centred in his behaviour would, however, depend on the nature of the task, the degree of urgency with which the task was to be completed and the level of maturity of the employees carrying out the task (Avolio *et al.*, 2009). Maturity is defined in this body of

literature as the willingness and ability of a person to take responsibility for directing his or her own behaviour. People tend to exhibit varying degrees of maturity, depending on the specific task, function, or objectives that are to be fulfilled (Lord *et al.*, 1999).

Newer theories of leadership (1970-2010)

The task and relationship perspectives of leadership have evolved in the 1980s into two new perspectives – transactional and transformational perspectives of leadership. Transactional leadership scholars focus their studies on exchanges of favours that occur between leaders and followers and on reward or punishment for good or poor performance. Fiedler's (1967) path-goal model is an earlier development of the transactional leadership perspective. He argued that leaders motivate their subordinates in the direction of established goals by clarifying the role and task requirements and by offering rewards and/or dispensing punishments that they consider appropriate in a given situation. The model takes its roots in the expectancy theory which holds that an individual employee's motivation to achieve success is a product of the individual's perceived probability of success and the expected rewards from that success (Atkinson, 1957). Similarly, his motivation to avoid failure would be a product of perceived probability of failure and the negative outcome of the failure. A manager can therefore present rewards as goals which his subordinates should aim at. He then specifies what subordinates should do (i.e. show the path) to earn the rewards as well as the consequences of not acting in the desired manner.

Transformational leadership, on the other hand, involves binding people around a common purpose through self-reinforcing behaviours that followers gain from successfully achieving a task and from a reliance on intrinsic rewards. Following Oke *et al.* (2009) transformational leaders act as role models and are able to motivate and inspire their followers by identifying new opportunities, providing meaning and challenge, and articulating a strong vision for the future. They are also enthusiastic and optimistic, communicate clear and realistic expectations and demonstrate commitment to shared visions. Subordinates are encouraged by such leaders to share in the organizational vision, seeing deeper purpose in their work and exceeding their own self-interests for the good of the organisation. They also consider the needs of others over their own, share risks with others and conduct themselves ethically. Transformational leaders also provide their followers with individualized consideration – i.e. they focus on their followers' individual needs for achievement, development, growth and support. They therefore adopt coaching or mentoring strategies in their relationships with subordinates.

Two other leadership theories have emerged in the 1980s – complexity theory of leadership and authentic theory of leadership. Complexity theory of leadership focuses on the idea that leadership is part of a dynamic and evolving pattern of behaviours and complex interactions among various organizational players, producing power structures and networks of relationships (Schneider and Somers, 2006). In effect, no single leader can shape the trajectory of organizations; the power of each leader depends on his/her position within the complex network of relationships within the focal organization and ability to distribute resources and emotional support (Ardichvili and Manderscheid, 2008). Authentic leadership theory draws from both positive psychology and organizational theories. It focuses attention on self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviours of leaders. It argues that authentic leaders tend to

exhibit transparent and ethical behaviours (Avolio *et al.*, 2009). Such behaviours encourage openness and employees' desire to share information with each other and with their leaders. A derivative of the authentic leadership is the servant and coach leadership theory. Servant leadership is based on the devolution of power to follower. That is, leaders see themselves as stewards, serving their followers in a manner that allows them to contribute their very best to fulfilling organizational objectives.

In sum, leadership theories have matured through an intellectual journey starting with an emphasis on the unique traits of individuals to an emphasis on the uniqueness of individual employees who must be transformed through serving and coaching in order for their potentials to blossom for the great good of their organizations. They also suggest three key areas in which leadership role is critical to organizational performance:

(1) management of organizational and employee goals;

(2) leader – employee relationship management; and

(3) management of resources (including human resources) to increase learning, creativity and innovativeness in organizations (Gluck *et al.*, 1980).

Furthermore, the diversity of thoughts that has emerged over the years provides some intellectual support to the view that leadership styles and behaviours in Africa may be distinctly different from those in other parts of the world without necessarily being ineffective. Explanations for the apparent ineffectiveness of African leadership must therefore be sought not from its defiance of the cannons of Western leadership forms but elsewhere. One potent source of explanation is African culture (Montgomery, 1987; Leonard, 1987; Kuada, 1994; Jackson, 2004).

Culture and leadership

Parallel to the leadership theories outlined above, a cohort of studies in the 1980s have suggested that culture provides a frame of reference or logic by which leadership behaviour can be understood (Dorfman *et al.*, 2006). For these scholars, culture represents the shared values and norms that bind members of a society or organization together as a homogenous entity (Roberts, 1970). That is, people living within a particular culture have their conduct regulated through a collection of consensual aspirations (i.e. central values) and universal orientations (i.e. patterns of behaviour). Social structures that develop through the processes of regulated behaviour are perceived to be orderly, patterned and enduring.

This perspective of culture has been popularised in the research works of such scholars as Hofstede (1980), Redding (1980), Adler (1991), Martin (1992) and Sackmann (1992, 1997). Most of these scholars have found it purposeful to describe national (macro) cultures in dichotomies such as individualism-collectivism (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1994), vertical-horizontal (Triandis, 1994), masculine-feminine (Hofstede, 1980), active-passive (Triandis, 1994) and universalism-particularism (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997). Other typologies are emotional expression or suppression (Triandis, 1994; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997), instrumental-expressive (Triandis, 1994), ascription-achievement (Triandis, 1994; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997) and sequential-synchronic with respect to time (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997). The central argument in many of these studies is that leadership styles and behaviours are culture-bound. Furthermore, culture provides a frame of reference and guide for behaviour of employees in work organizations. Cultures of some societies endorse autocratic

leadership behaviours while others demand that their leaders must exhibit participatory leadership behaviours. Autocratic leaders may, however demonstrate benevolent dispositions towards subordinates that are very close to them (Kuada, 1994).

Leaning on Hofstede's cultural dimensions Muczyk and Holt (2008) argue that an autocratic leadership style may be appropriate in cultures that are high in power distance, collectivism, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance and that are characterized by external environmental orientation. Also, autocratic leadership might be more appropriate for societies whose members have a high regard for hierarchy and are reluctant to bypass the chain of command. Conversely, relationship-centred or democratic leadership styles are more effectively practised in cultures that are low on power distance, high on individualism and femininity, low on uncertainty avoidance and characterized by internal environmental orientation.

Theoretical arguments advanced in the two streams of research – cultural theories and leadership theories – have influenced available studies on management in Africa. But the arguments have not been synthesized into a coherent framework that can guide empirical investigations in the field. A review of the current discourses on the link between African culture and leadership suggests that scholars are divided on the issue of how culture impacts leadership on the continent. Some scholars use culture to justify the uniqueness of African leadership styles – i.e. culture serves as a unique descriptor. Others project African culture as an inhibitor of effective leadership practices.

Scholars who argue in support of the view that African culture is largely responsible for the unique leadership practices on the continent include Leonard (1987), Jackson (2004) as well as Bolden and Kirk (2009). For example, Leonard (1987, p. 901) argued that:

> [. . .] many of the differences in organisational behaviour between Africa on the one hand, and the United States and Europe, on the other, are not due to managerial failures but to fundamental dissimilarities in the value priorities of the societies that encapsulate them.

Similarly, Jackson (2004) found from his study of leadership practices in several African countries that African managers tend to be highly skilled in many aspects of management and leadership. They deal efficiently with cultural diversity and multiple stakeholders and enact "humanistic" management practices. Drawing a distinction between "an instrumental view of people in organizations, and a humanistic view of people," he argues that while the Western approach to management focuses on instrumental view of man (perceiving human beings as resources) the African perception focuses attention on human beings as having values in their own right. From this perspective leadership and management practices in Africa may be described as predominantly humanistic with an emphasis on sharing, deference to rank, sanctity of commitment, regard for compromise and consensus, and good social and personal relations. Building on this understanding Bolden and Kirk (2009) see leadership practices in Africa as complex and multi-layered and shaped by centuries of cultural values and historical events.

The view that African culture mainly inhibits effective leadership practices in Africa has been advanced in studies of such scholars as Jones (1986), Montgomery (1987), Kuada (1994, 2008) as well as Nwankwo and Richards (2001). Jones (1986), for example, showed that Malawian workers basically have instrumental orientation

towards work; they expect their jobs to bring substantial benefits to themselves but show very little (if any) loyalty and commitment to the organisation. Similarly, Montgomery (1987) observed in his analysis of the management practices of African executives in Southern African countries that African leaders fail to treat organisational goals with the importance that these goals deserve and are frequently engaged in the search for personal power and privileges – typically seeing their positions in their organisations as personal fiefdoms. Their personnel policies are influenced by patronage, resulting in limited organizational commitment by African employees. Public and organizational properties are therefore treated with indifference and irresponsibility by many employees:

> Even arguments and negotiations over public vehicles, housing and equipment centred about the convenience of the individual user more than about the mission of the organisation to which they were assigned (Montgomery, 1987, p. 917).

In the same vein, Nwankwo and Richards (2001) argue that post-independence leadership styles in Africa have hitherto remained autocratic, dictatorial and incompetent in both public and private organizations. African employees tend to be inspected (i.e. closely supervised) rather than expected (i.e. motivated) in an age when other societies advocate for and practice employee empowerment and encourage independent thinking and creativity that ensures organizational agility (Kuada, 1994). African employees therefore tend to act with extreme caution while at work in order not to invite the anger of their superiors for any mistakes that they may make in the course of their work. In Kuada's view, the principal function of the loyal employee in Africa is to serve as a buffer for the immediate superior. If anything goes wrong, the loyal subordinate must do anything to blame all others, including himself, in order to protect his boss. A variation of this kind of behaviour plays up in situations where several employees are aware of something that is a problem of mutual concern but they choose to act as if they do not know of it and therefore cover up the errors. Argyris (1990, 1993) coins the term "skilled incompetence" to describe this type of defensive behaviour. The consequence is that employees become very reluctant to question existing practices in their organisations even if this would help rectify operational inefficiencies.

A culture-based conceptual model of African leadership

Carefully considered, the two perspectives on the link between African culture and leadership behaviour are not contradictory. Leaning on the complexity theory of leadership, it can be argued that there are elements of African culture that promote unique and positive leadership behaviours (as suggested in Jackson's study). But some of the cultural rules of behaviour tend to act as drags on effective leadership and management practices and thereby constrain entrepreneurship and economic growth (Kuada, 2008, 2009). The understanding of this complexity is important to the success of any leadership development initiative on the continent and future research should seek to provide us with that knowledge. This observation underlies the conceptualization of leadership proposed in this paper (Figure 1). The conceptual model emphasises the importance of three dimensions of leadership – i.e.:

(1) management of organizational and employee goals;

(2) leader – employee relationship management; and

(3) resource allocation and management.

Figure 1.
A conceptual model
of African leadership
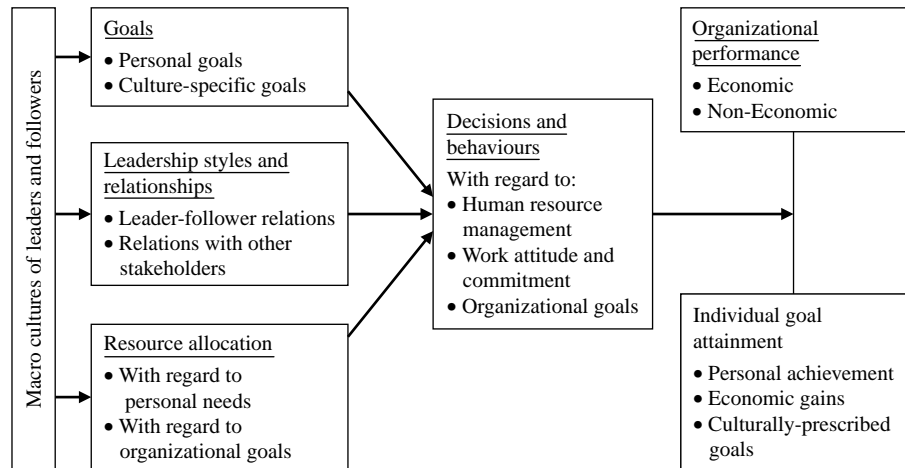
The three dimensions are derived from the review of the extant leadership literature and previous studies on African leadership and management.

Expectations, goals and leadership behaviours
Employees' goals have been found to have direct and strong impact on their behaviour and performance in work organizations (Ashford and Cummings, 1983). Goals are defined by individuals' self-identity. Following Lord *et al.* (1999) an individual's self-identity comprises both personal and social identities. Personal identity defines a person's sense of uniqueness as an individual while his social identity is defined in terms of the individual's relations to others or in terms of membership in social groups. An understanding of the goals of African employees is therefore an important first step in designing strategies that facilitate the convergence of personal and organizational goals. Such goal-alignment strategies are necessary for the promotion of employee commitment and motivation (Okpara and Wynn, 2007). Drawing on the empirical evidence from studies on African management (Jones, 1986; Montgomery, 1987; Kuada, 1994; Jackson, 2004), it is justifiable to argue that African leaders and their followers would tend to derive their personal goals from a complex set of sources. For the sake of conceptual brevity, the sources may be collapsed into two main ones and the goals classified as follows:

(1) Self-induced goals which are derived from the individual's personality, ambitions and expectations in life with regard to his welfare, social mobility and achievement.

(2) Culture-induced goals which derive from the demands and expectations from institutions such as the family (immediate and distant), clan, ethnic communities, associations and colleagues.

The two goal-sets feed on each other and are therefore mutually reinforcing. For example, an African leader's initial career success elevates his status within the family and clan. This, in turn, raises the expectations of the near and distant family members.

His first assistance to any member of the family (e.g. finding a job or scholarship for a nephew through his contacts), activates all latent demands for assistance. The first reaction of many African leaders in such situations is to scale down their personal (self-induced) ambitions, devoting greater resources to fulfilling the culture-induced goals. Job-fixing and the pursuit of greater financial rewards (through fair and foul means) may be considered. But the unending chain of demands may compel some managers to resort to several types of coping behaviour, including possible de-linkage from the family.

The culture-induced goals derive from a peculiar form of collectivist orientation found in African societies. Kuada (1994) describes this collectivism with the concept of familism. As used in sociology, the term familism describes a form of social organisation in which all values are determined by reference to the maintenance, continuity and functioning of the family group. Within such a social framework, all purposes, actions, gains and ideals of individual members are evaluated by comparison with the fortune of the family as a whole. Said differently, individual members of the family are bound to one another by the collective moral rules and obligations of the family.

Familism, as explained above, also influences cultural transmissions, attitudes to knowledge acquisition and personality development. For example, children brought up within such family structures are hardly encouraged to take individual initiatives over and above those required for doing daily routine chores. As Assimeng (1981) observes, "conformity and blatant eschewing of individual speculations" as well as "unquestioning acquiescence and accommodationism" are dominant characteristics of the behaviour of young Ghanaians. This, he argues, is due to the collectivist social structure that strongly encourages the maintenance of status quo and avoidance of any serious disruption of the specific social order. Such modes of upbringing seriously limit the possibilities of successful delegation of authority and responsibilities in work organizations, as suggested in Western management literature. Thus, leadership behaviours described by Montgomery (1987) and Kuada (1994) may be explained in terms of African leaders' response to culturally induced goals.

Leader-follower relationships

Another important factor in understanding Africans' leadership behaviour is the manner in which leaders build their relationships with their followers. There is widespread agreement among leadership researchers that leadership is a relationship (Lord *et al.*, 1999; McLaurin, 2006; Maak, 2007). Leaders must have followers and the nature of their relationship with their followers is a key determinant of their performance as leaders and the performance of their organizations.

Leader-follower relationships have in-built psychological contracts. That is, they imply promises of future behaviour from leaders, contingent on some reciprocal actions of followers (Rousseau, 1990). The promises need not be made explicitly. They may be based on inferences and observations of past behaviours in leader-follower interactive processes (Robinson and Rousseau, 1994). Thus, Rousseau (1990) argues that when followers believe that they are obligated to behave or perform in a certain way and also believe that their leaders have certain obligations towards them, these beliefs constitute a psychological contract. The dominant leadership style in an organization defines the nature of this psychological contract between leaders and followers.

For example, while organizations characterized by transactional leadership emphasise task performance, organizations in which transformational leadership forms dominate find leaders actively engaging themselves not only in creating an environment in which followers grow, but also emphasise the inner feelings of the followers. In the latter types of organizations followers are seen as human beings that they are rather than sheer resources whose talents and physical capacities should be exploited by the organizations.

The available empirical literature suggests that the behaviours of African leaders are far from those attributed to transformational leadership. They appear to adopt relationship management strategies that patronise their followers rather than encourage their inner motivation to show commitment to organizational goal attainment. Kuada (1994) coined the term autocratic-benevolence to describe this form of relationship. His study suggests that although most African leaders exhibit autocratic attitudes towards their followers, they tend to provide those closest and subservient to their interests with special opportunities and privileges. These privileges include selecting them to attend overseas training programmes, advancing their promotion, approving their loan applications and providing them with other services that partially cushion them from the rough edges of life. It is this reciprocity of support and benefit that sustains superior-subordinate relationships, individual and organizational performance being of secondary importance. Furthermore, aspects of the humanistic leadership styles reported in Jackson's (2004) study may be partly explained through the patronage-based leadership practised by most leaders.

The dependency relationship between leaders and their followers in African organizations may lead some people to think that followers will be honest in their relationship with their leaders for fear of reprisals if any dishonest behaviour on their part is subsequently brought to light. Ironically, the fear of the repercussions for mistakes combines with the strong desire to be in the "good books" of the leaders to create the opposite effect. Followers hide their true feelings on matters they are displeased about or distort information for the sake of maintaining harmonious relationships with their leaders. That is, the primary concern of followers is to be seen by their leaders as being "honest" without necessarily being so. These observations legitimize the view that the leader-follower relationship in Africa serves more to constrain than to advance organizational performance.

Leadership and resource allocation

Scholars of leadership generally agree that resource allocation decisions in organizations are predominantly made by leaders. Furthermore, people generally expect leaders to be fair, effective and responsible, also in their allocation of organizational resources. But, de Cremer and van Dijk (2008) argue that leaders do not always act in an organizationally or socially responsible manner when allocating resources. Some of them behave in egocentric ways, allocating more resources to themselves than to followers. Again, the available literature suggests that the only types of leaders that may be expected to display self-sacrifice in their resource allocation decisions are transformational leaders (Blanchard, 2007). Thus, leader selection decisions of management are critical to the manner in which resources are allocated at various levels (and in different departments) of an organization. These observations are consistent with the Montgomery's views on the manner in which

African leaders allocate resources, giving priority to their personal (or culturally
induced) goals rather than overall organizational goals. When leaders' resource
allocation decisions disregard organizational needs and goals inefficiencies become
rampant, thereby creating a de-motivated workforce in the organizations.

In sum, the model presented in Figure 1 shows that macro culture in which African
leaders are raised impact their individual goals as well as their choices of leadership
styles and relationships with their followers. It also influences their resource allocation
decisions in organizations. These in turn determine their overall leadership behaviours
and thereby their contributions to organizational performance. The underlying logic
here is that culture plays a major role in shaping each of the three defining dimensions
in the model. The model therefore endorses the argument that effective leadership in
Africa requires an initiation of change in certain aspects of African culture.

As argued earlier, culture is a dynamic social construct. As such, African
management culture is capable of changing. Fortunately, human beings are not blank
sheets on which culture writes its scripts. People draw on their cognitive endowments
to develop their own internal rules of behaviour that mediate the cultural prescriptions,
modifying them where exigencies demand it. In other words, cultures provide
individuals with frames of reference and opportunity sets within which they can act.
Their creativity, courage and emotions influence the actions that they take in any given
situation. This means, as individuals, African leaders are capable of shaping the
evolution and dynamism of national cultures on the continent, producing new set of
rules for managerial behaviour.

Agenda for future research
Initiating change within African leadership and management culture requires
additional knowledge that future research must seek to provide. Research work is
needed in many areas. Three of these areas are listed here for immediate attention:

(1) leadership and organizational performance;

(2) leadership development strategies; and

(3) leadership, learning and creativity.

Leadership and organizational performance
A great deal of the empirical literature on African leadership and management
reviewed in this paper is based on studies conducted 20 or more years ago. If leadership
is to help halt Africa's economic decline and place it on a consistent path of growth and
poverty alleviation, we need some more current knowledge to determine the extent to
which the existing leadership practices influence efficiency and effectiveness of
decisions and activities in both private and public sector organizations in Africa.
For example, we need to know whether African organizations are still characterized by
centralized power structures, high degrees of uncertainty, and bureaucratic resistance
to change. We also need to know whether extended family orientations noted by Kuada
(1994) as well as Blunt and Jones (1997) or the assertions that African leaders sacrifice
organisational goals for their personal and family gains (Montgomery, 1987; Nwankwo
and Richards, 2001; Kuada, 2008, 2009) are still valid and still exert dominant
influences on leaders' behaviour and organizational performance.

The issue of what types of leadership styles improve organizational performance
in Africa also deserves research attention. Would the humanistic orientations of

leadership identified by Jackson (2004) and Bolden and Kirk (2009) be the most suitable for African organizations or would variants of transactional and transformational leadership be more preferable and effective? These questions cry for further investigations.

Leadership development

We also need guidelines from researchers on what kind of leader development strategies to adopt on the continent. The concepts of cross-vergence introduced by Jackson (2004) or hybridization introduced by Kuada (2006) must be studied in terms of organizational performance. The understanding of these scholars is that African leadership development must not depend exclusively on practices imported from the West, but must be built on ideas and methods from non-Western cultures in combination with selected African cultural values. This perspective is consistent with Bolden and Kirk's (2009) argument that appropriate management constructs and models must be developed and couched within culturally relevant languages and concepts. These scholars' recent study shows that the influence of differing religious beliefs and associated practices combine with gender, age and ethnic networks to shape emerging African leadership practices. They also noted some evidence of change and tension between past experiences and future aspirations for leadership with a growing emphasis on the need to situate leadership practices in the communities and organizations in which the leaders are located. These emergent perspectives require more elaborate and cross-national empirical investigations.

Leadership, learning and creativity

Its is also imperative for African leaders to design systems that facilitate learning from the multiple sources of management ideas and integrate them into new and appropriate tools that would enhance the quality of management deliverables at all levels of society. A weak-learning process would mean that other resources within the continent would remain fragmented and their potentials left untapped. Conversely, a dynamic learning process would raise the dynamic capabilities of African employees and enhance their creative potentials. This will help change the socially acquired state of inaction and perpetual helplessness prevailing on the continent.

Furthermore, scholars of organizational learning see employee empowerment as one of the prerequisites for knowledge development and creativity. In this regard, granting that the autocratic leadership styles still dominate African organizations, this will impinge the development of learning cultures in these organizations. As noted above, the current understanding is that African employees exhibit a higher propensity to follow instructions that their superiors give them than to adopt critical attitude to the tasks that they are required to perform, and carrying them out to their individual satisfaction. These observations justify comprehensive empirical investigations. We need insight into how learning is encouraged in African organizations and the roles that leaders can play to facilitate the process.

Summary and conclusions

One of the factors frequently omitted from studies of leadership in Africa is a consideration of the potential significance of the cultural context within which leadership and management is practised. Recent studies have shown increasing

awareness of this important factor. The discussions in this paper seek to reinforce the importance of this line of research for better insight into current leadership failures on the continent and to generate guidelines for effective leader development interventions. The conceptual model presented in the paper is a first step in providing a coherent framework for future research. It sees macro cultures of African societies as informing the goals, expectations, relationships and resource allocation decisions of African leaders. These in turn shape their decisions and behavioural patterns within organizations and their overall contributions to organizational performance. The model helps throw further light on the nature of leadership in African organizations and the potentials for leadership changes that can improve organizational performance and economic growth on the continent.

The awareness that all cultures are constantly subjected to pressure for change from both internal and external factors provides African leaders with opportunities to facilitate cultural change processes in the organizations that they lead. Thus, a key message of the paper is that leader development agents in Africa must exhibit an attentiveness that is grounded in existing cultural values. We have argued that some aspects of African culture may constrain effective leadership. There may be the need to unfreeze some of these established traditions and contest assumptions that have remained unexamined for centuries. But not all aspects of African culture act as constraints to effective leadership. Comprehensive empirical investigations into the impact of dominant African cultural attributes on leadership and organizational performance are urgently required to guide leader development interventions on the continent.

References

Adler, N.J. (1991), *International Dimensions of Organizational Behaviour*, PWS-Kent, Boston, MA.

Akyüz, Y. and Gore, C. (2001), "African economic development in a comparative perspective", *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, Vol. 25, pp. 265-88.

Ardichvili, A. and Manderscheid, S.V. (2008), "Emerging practices in leadership development – an introduction", *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, Vol. 10 No. 5, pp. 619-31, available at: http://adh.sagepub.com (accessed 5 April 2009).

Argyris, C. (1990), *Overcoming Organizational Defensive Routines*, Allyn & Bacon, Needham, MA.

Argyris, C. (1993), *Knowledge for Action*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.

Ashford, S.J. and Cummings, L.L. (1983), "Feedback as an individual resource: personal strategies of creating information", *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, Vol. 32, pp. 370-98.

Assimeng, M. (1981), *Social Structure of Ghana*, Ghana Publishing Corporation, Accra.

Atkinson, J.W. (1957), "Motivational determinants of risk-taking behaviour", *Psychological Review*, Vol. 64, pp. 359-71.

Avolio, B.J., Walumbwa, F.O. and Weber, T.J. (2009), "Leadership: current theories, research, and future directions", *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 60, pp. 421-9, available at: www.arjournals.annualreviews.org (accessed 4 May 2009).

Bass, B.M. (1985), *Leadership and Performance beyond Expectations*, The Free Press, New York, NY.

Blake, R.R. and Mouton, J.S. (1964), *The Managerial Grid*, Gulf, Houston, TX.

Blanchard, K. (2007), *Leading at a Higher Level*, FT Press, Upper Saddle River, NJ.

Blunt, P. and Jones, M. (1997), "Exploring the limits of Western leadership theory in east Asia and Africa", *Personnel Review*, Vol. 26 Nos 1/2, pp. 6-23.

Bolden, R. and Kirk, P. (2009), "Cultural perspectives: African leadership surfacing new understandings through leadership development", *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 69-86, available at: http://ccm.sagepub.com (accessed 24 April 2009).

de Cremer, D. and van Dijk, E. (2008), "Leader-follower effects in resource dilemmas: the roles of leadership selection and social responsibility", *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, Vol. 11 No. 3, pp. 355-69.

Dorfman, P., Howell, J., Hibino, S., Lee, J., Tate, U. and Bautista, A. (2006), "Leadership in Western and Asian countries: commonalities and differences in effective leadership practices", in Pierce, J. and Newstrom, J. (Eds), *Leaders and the Leadership Process*, McGraw-Hill, New York, NY.

Edoho, F. (2007), "State-corporate alliance: ramifications for corporate social responsibility and sustainable livelihood", *African Journal of Business and Economic Research*, Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 96-113.

Fafchamps, M., Teal, F. and Toye, J. (2001), "Towards a growth strategy for Africa", REP/2001-06, Centre for the Study of African Economies, University of Oxford, Oxford.

Fiedler, F.E. (1967), *A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness*, McGraw-Hill, New York, NY.

Gluck, F., Kaufman, S.P. and Wallach, S. (1980), "Strategic management for competitive advantage", *Harvard Business Review*, July/August, pp. 154-61.

Hersey, P. and Blanchard, K.H. (1977), *The Management of Organizational Behaviour*, 3rd ed., Prentice-Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ.

Hofstede, G. (1980), *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-related Values*, Sage, Beverly Hills, CA.

Jackson, T. (2004), *Management and Change in Africa: A Cross-cultural Perspective*, Routledge, London.

Jones, M.L. (1986), "Management development: an African focus", *Management Education and Development*, Vol. 17 No. 3, pp. 202-16.

Kamoche, K. (1997), "Competence-creation in the African public sector", *The International Journal of Public Sector Management*, Vol. 10 No. 4, pp. 268-78.

Killick, T., White, H., Kayizzi-Mugerwa, S. and Savane, M.-A. (2001), *African Poverty at the Millennium: Causes, Complexities and Challenges*, World Bank, Washington, DC.

Kuada, J. (1994), *Managerial Behaviour in Ghana and Kenya – A Cultural Perspective*, Aalborg University Press, Aalborg.

Kuada, J. (2006), "Cross-cultural interactions and changing management practices in Africa: a hybrid management perspective", *African Journal of Business and Economic Research*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 96-113.

Kuada, J. (2008), "Social resources and entrepreneurial activities in Africa", *International Journal of Social Entrepreneurship*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 27-55.

Kuada, J. (2009), "Gender, social networks, and entrepreneurship in Ghana", *Journal of African Business*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 85-103.

Leonard, D.K. (1987), "The political realities of African management", *World Development*, Vol. 15 No. 7, pp. 899-910.

Lord, R.G., Brown, D.J. and Freiberg, S.J. (1999), "Understanding the dynamics of leadership: the role of follower self-concepts in the leader/follower relationship", *Organizational*

Behavior and Human Decision Processes, Vol. 78 No. 3, pp. 167-203, available at: www. idealibrary.com (accessed 27 August 2009).

McLaurin, J.R. (2006), "The role of situation in the leadership process: a review and application", *Academy of Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 5, pp. 97-115.

Maak, T. (2007), "Responsible leadership, stakeholder engagement, and the emergence of social capital", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 74, pp. 329-43.

Martin, J. (1992), *Cultures in Organizations: Three Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Montgomery, J.D. (1987), "Probing managerial behaviour: image and reality in southern Africa", *World Development*, Vol. 15 No. 7, pp. 911-29.

Muczyk, J.P. and Holt, D. (2008), "Toward a cultural contingency model of leadership", *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, Vol. 14 No. 4, pp. 277-86.

Nahavandi, A. (2009), *The Art and Science of Leadership*, 5th ed., Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.

Nwankwo, S. and Richards, D.C. (2001), "Privatization: the myth of free market orthodoxy in Sub-Saharan Africa", *The International Journal of Public Sector Management*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 165-79.

Ochola, S.A. (2007), *Leadership and Economic Crisis in Africa*, Kenya Literature Bureau, Nairobi.

Oke, A., Munshi, N. and Walumba, F.O. (2009), "The influence of leadership on innovation processes and activities", *Organizational Dynamics*, Vol. 38 No. 1, pp. 64-72.

Okpara, J.O. (2006), "The impact of personal characteristics on the job satisfaction of public sector managers in a developing economy: implications for personnel development", *African Journal of Business and Economic Research*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 10-33.

Okpara, J.O. and Wynn, P. (2007), "The effect of culture on job satisfaction and organizational commitment: a study of information system managers in Nigeria", *African Journal of Business and Economic Research*, Vol. 2 Nos 2/3, pp. 9-36.

Redding, S.G. (1980), "Cognition as an aspect of culture and its relation to management processes: an exploratory view of the Chinese case", *Journal of Management Studies*, May, pp. 127-48.

Roberts, K.H. (1970), "On looking at an elephant: an evaluation of cross-cultural research related to organizations", *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 74, pp. 327-50.

Robinson, S.L. and Rousseau, D.M. (1994), "Violating the psychological contract: not the exception but the norm", *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, Vol. 15, pp. 245-59.

Rousseau, D.M. (1990), "New hire perceptions of their own and their employer's obligations: a study of psychological contracts", *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, Vol. 11, pp. 389-400.

Sackmann, S.A. (1992), "Culture and subcultures: an analysis of organizational knowledge", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 37, pp. 140-61.

Sackmann, S.A. (1997), *Cultural Complexity in Organizations*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Schneider, M. and Somers, M. (2006), "Organizations as complex adaptive systems: implications of complexity theory for leadership research", *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 17 No. 4, pp. 351-65.

Sørensen, O.J. and Kuada, J. (2001), "Institutional context of Ghanaian firms and cross-national inter-firm relations", in Jacobsen, G. and Torp, J.E. (Eds), *Understanding Business Systems in Developing Countries*, Sage, New Delhi, pp. 163-201.

Stogdill, R.M. (1974), *Handbook of Leadership: A Survey of Theory and Research*, The Free Press, New York, NY.

Triandis, H.C. (1994), *Culture and Social Behavior*, McGraw-Hill, New York, NY.

Trompenaars, F. and Hampden-Turner, C. (1997), *Riding the Waves of Culture*, Nicholas Brealey, London.

UNCTAD (2004), "Enhancing the contribution to development of the indigenous private sector in Africa", available at: www.afrasia.org/cmsupload/_1188676352_AABC_ UNCTAD (accessed 10 July 2008).

Whitley, R. (Ed.) (1994), *European Business Systems: Firms and Markets in their National Contexts*, Sage, London.

Yeats, A., Amjadi, A., Reincke, U. and Ng, F. (1996), "What caused Sub-Saharan Africa's marginalization in world trade?", *Finance & Development*, No. 38, pp. 41-5.

Yukl, G. (2010), *Leadership in Organizations*, 7th ed., Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.

Further reading

Barnard, C.I. (1938), *The Functions of the Executive*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Blunt, P. and Jones, M.L. (1986), "Managerial motivation in Kenya and Malawi: a cross-cultural comparison", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 165-75.

de Cremer, D. (2003), "How self-conception may lead to inequality: effect of hierarchical roles on the equality rule in organizational resource-sharing tasks", *Group & Organization Management*, Vol. 28 No. 2, pp. 282-302.

Gabarro, J.J. (1987), "The development of working relationships", in Lorsch, J.W. (Ed.), *Handbook of Organizational Behavior*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, pp. 172-89.

Gullestrup, H. (2006), *Cultural Analysis – Towards Cross-cultural Understanding*, Aalborg University Press, Aalborg.

Miller, D. and Toulouse, J.-M. (1986), "Strategy, structure and EEO personality and performance in small firms", *American Journal of Small Business*, Vol. 10 No. 3, pp. 47-62.

Roberson, L. (1989), "Assessing personal work goals in the organizational setting: development and evaluation of the work concerns inventory", *Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes*, Vol. 4, pp. 345-67.

Stogdill, R.M. (1963), *Manual for the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire*, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH.

About the author

John Kuada holds Grundfos Chair Professorship in International Business & Intercultural Management at Aalborg University, Department of Business Studies, Denmark. He is the Coordinator of the Master's degree programmes in International Business Economics and International Marketing at the university. John Kuada can be contacted at: kuada@business.aau.dk