

# Navigating Uncertain Times: Perspectives of African Leaders on Key Global Change Drivers over the Next Ten Years

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After encountering a friend at Starbucks who was unhappy about globalization, an American academic (Winston, 2008, para. 2) noted:

I noticed he was drinking coffee from Guatemala in a cup made in Taiwan. His shirt was made in Thailand, and his pants were assembled in Mexico from fabric made in Sri Lanka. His car, a Japanese model assembled in Canada from parts made in America. The gas he put in his car came from Venezuela. The airline tickets..... purchased ...from a call center in India, and the flight ...on a French-made Airbus....the antique clock he bought on eBay from a home-based antique dealer in England, paid for using PayPal. The antique dealer shipped the clock ...by DHL. My friend had, by default, become global!

Not only has the world become global. Friedman (2008) sees the world as, “Flat (globally connected), hot (climate change) and crowded.” O’Hara-Devereaux (2004) insightfully refers to today’s leadership challenge as “navigating the badlands.” Handy, in Hesselbein, Goldsmith and Beckhard terms it is, “unimagined futures.”

This study explores key change drivers, as perceived by selected global leaders in Africa. Each of the interviewed leaders had current or past global responsibilities and their views thus reflect global realities. Implications of, and responses to, change by employing tools of strategic foresight to bring about needed organizational changes, were explored.

## Literature Review

Change is not new. However, an unprecedented pace of change has caused global anxiety and unease. In America, 46% of the Fortune 500 companies dropped off the list in the last decade! Highly dynamic, disruptive, multidimensional, competitive global change, an “extreme future,” is accentuated by the global economic crisis. This requires versatile, foresighted organizations as these challenges and risks affect organizations, communities and nations (Canton, 2006). Canton (2006) further summarizes five factors that define the “extreme future” as high speed; complexity of change; higher risks/threats; radical nature of change; and increasing surprise (good and bad). An experienced futurist, he sees the top ten trends of the future as:

- Post-oil energy crisis
- Innovation-led economy
- A changing workforce
- Greater use of longevity medicines
- Scientific discoveries that will greatly aid (or destroy) human life
- Globalization
- Climate change
- Threats to the individual
- America-China relationship

In a similar way, Dixon (1998) forecasts six change drivers using a FUTURE acronym:

- Fast
- Urban
- Tribal (identity crisis, terrorism)
- Universal (globalization)
- Radical (values, science, climate etc.)
- Ethical (laws, relationships, religions etc.).

Successful companies do a few things extremely well, have a vision exceeding their resource base and have strong future-oriented leaders. This necessitates change, which depends on organizational core competencies and foresight.

Leading change, in view of an uncertain future is one of the most important, yet most difficult leadership responsibilities. Many scholars consider it the essence of leadership and everything else as secondary. Several theories help to explain change processes such as Lewin's (1951) force field model of "unfreeze-change-refreeze." Jick (1993) and Woodward and Bucholz (1987) identified a four-stage reaction pattern: denial, anger, mourning and adaptation. Black, Morrison and Gregerson (1999) posit that global leaders possess four characteristics: inquisitiveness, perspective (varying between cultures), character (strength and consistency that generates trust) and savvy (clear sense of what to do).

### **Methodology**

Dr. Dela Adadevoh, a regional vice president for one the largest non-governmental organizations, was the first to be interviewed for two hours in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire. Next, Dr. Peter Okaalet, the Global Policy Director for MAP International was interviewed for three hours. Thirdly, Mr. David Mureithi, the managing director for Eastern and Southern Africa for a consumer goods company, was interviewed for one hour. Lastly, Mr. Sammy Mwangi, an experienced corporate governance and executive coaching consultant, was interviewed for two hours. The last three interviews were conducted in Nairobi, Kenya.

These selected African leaders were interviewed using the exploratory survey in Appendix 1. The answers were analyzed through codes, themes and quotations for key change drivers. A pragmatic worldview guided this choice as the researcher was open to different worldviews and assumptions. The essence of this research was the actions, situations and consequences the leaders described. The full details of the selected leaders are shown in Appendix 2.

### **Significance**

This study, of first importance, benefited those who participated as they gained greater insights. This is the ethical responsibility of all research. The study also provided useful insights on change "accelerators" that will help Africa (in a global context) in its significant challenge: transformation from degrading poverty to proper stewardship of its vast natural resources.

Past related research has mostly been performed in Western contexts. However, cultural differences influence a leader's understanding and execution of change, as well as the utility of research. This article explores perspectives from Africa that would be of use to all global leaders.

### **Observations and Interpretation**

Each of the participants had observed virtually all the change drivers predicted by literature on strategic foresight. This was expected due to their global exposure and involvement. Below is a summary of their insights that will benefit the global community:

- Okaalet argued: "Global leaders need to focus on ending greed and not just poverty. Greed triggered the global economic crisis. This is a very different starting point, in contrast to popular views, for solving Africa's problems."
- "We need to continually discuss our uncertain future and especially the fear of loss of identity in a global world," posited Adadevoh.
- "Preparedness brings greater differentiation from one's competitors during times of crisis' and also, might this be an opportunity to rethink not just global business but attempt to rebalance finances globally?" commented Mureithi (this was also inferred to by the others).

Maintaining hope will be a critical future leadership responsibility. We need to celebrate small wins to survive this crisis. This, along with altruistic love, vision and faith is the essence of spiritual leadership. The church in Africa and globally is well positioned for this foundation of its faith (1 Corinthians 13: 13). Okaalet saw this as a, "prophetic responsibility."

Strategic global leadership was exhibited by each of the leaders interviewed, as well as integrated (and often concurrent) use of strategic thinking, acting and influencing. They demonstrated a good long-term (versus short-term) grasp of their global organizations, focus and insights on significant changes, strategic change drivers and the relatively few key success factors or value propositions that determine the sustainable competitive advantage of their businesses and leadership strategies.

The leaders appreciated the need for sweeping, radical changes as a way to sustain their organizations (and market share) and had participated in both successful and failed organizational change efforts. Each of the leaders had contributed to their global organization's "enduring success."

However, the interviews showed a general lack of preparedness by Africa in light of the global economic crisis, even though they appreciated its far-reaching effects and magnitude. They agreed with the World Bank's (2000) rhetorical question "Can Africa Claim the 21st Century?"

### **Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Work**

African (and global) organizations need to become continual learning engines of ongoing formulation, implementation, reassessment and re-visioning with the key competencies of strategic thinking, acting and influence practically measured. Their individual leaders also need to be empowered so that they can take charge of their own development as strategic leaders, and in the process transform their teams into learners, regardless of the inertia by the larger organization. Block (1987) advocates, "giving up innocence and a sense of powerlessness and empowering oneself through courage and taking responsibility."

Sampson (2002) notes, that the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI), developed by Cameron and Quinn (2006), is very useful when an organization is deliberately seeking to re-define itself and its culture. The OCAI identifies cultural elements, which best support its mission and those which would hinder change efforts. It has proven useful in diagnosing organizational capacity to improve global strategy competitiveness.

This recommendation agrees with Denison's (2000) argument that the major distinguishing feature that differentiates extraordinarily successful firms from others, their most important competitive advantage, is their organizational culture. He posits that only change in organizational culture creates lasting change. Changes will otherwise not be long-term or even be translated into action. Further, successful companies were observed to have developed something special that superseded corporate strategy, market presence or technological advantage: a distinctive culture.

Bass and Steidlmeir (1998) showed that values clarify who authentic transformational leaders are. Even though character development is largely neglected in contemporary leadership training,

strong values stood out in all four participants. This was in contrast Araujo's (1993) comment that Christian leaders had largely failed to, "anticipate the next age" or to "retool for the future," but in agreement with Hickman and Silva (1984) who posited that, "individual leaders, not organizations, create excellence...from pacesetting levels of personal effectiveness and efficiency." Further investigation is recommended to harmonize these contrasting views.

From the insights shared by these African global leaders, the global community needs to:

- Deal with abject poverty and political instability for globalization's success. Without this, global security and progress will be hampered in a "flat world."
- Promote life-long learning in an affirmative way so that the two-thirds world is not perpetually left behind.

As Denison (2000) argues, for effective culture change, research results should be in the, "native's point of view," that is, an understanding of the meaning of the situation from the insider's perspective. This necessitates a re-interpretation of these findings by the leaders in their contexts, affecting the interpretation of research.

In summary, African leaders and organizations must wake up to Hamel's (2002) guideline: "Rule-busting, profit-producing 'revolution' is the only way to survive in turbulent times – not 'more of the same', incremental change but a radical change that results in corporate renewal and create new wealth." Kouzes and Posner (1987) argue that strategic leaders should spend more of their time focusing on the future. To influence a challenging global future, they will need a clear future vision, a sound strategy to get there and tools to persuade key people to go along.

### **About the Author**

Timothy Mwangi Kiruhi earned a B.Sc. in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Nairobi (Kenya). Since 1989, he has served in various senior leadership positions for LIFE Ministry (Campus Crusade for Christ), based in Kenya and Zimbabwe. In 2000, he earned an M.A. in Organizational Leadership from Azusa Pacific University (USA). After returning to Kenya, he was assigned as the LIFE Ministry Kenya national director, working on leadership development in Africa and the Middle East region. Currently, he is coordinating an executive leaders' network that seeks to spearhead Kenya's holistic transformation. Timothy is working toward a Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership at Regent University's School of Global Leadership & Entrepreneurship.

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## Appendix A

### Interview with Global Leaders on Key Change Drivers Over the Next Ten Years in Their Sector/Globally

#### Introduction

Radical changes (“extreme future”) are taking place in every facet of society (gave examples). Communicated the researcher’s desire to gather information that will empower African leaders to pro-actively position organizations (and nations) favorably in the “extreme future.”

#### Interviewee selection

The interviewees were chosen because they distinguished themselves in leading change, in strategic foresight and in providing leadership to their sector, with global influence.

#### Focus

Focus was on key change drivers at the macro-level (not those internal to an organization).

#### Interaction on key macro-level (external) change drivers

1. Of each of these change drivers, please answer the following:
2. What will most significantly affect your sector/ globally? How?
3. What are you/ your organization/ industry doing to mitigate the negative impact?
4. Does this change present any new opportunities?
  - Social Forces
  - Technological Forces
  - Environmental Forces
  - Economic Forces
  - Political Forces
  - Any other factors/ change forces you’d like to share about

## Appendix B

### Profiles of the African Global Leaders Interviewed on Key Change Drivers

Table 1

*Profiles of the Global Leaders Interviewed on Key Change Drivers*

No	Name	Title/ Position	Nationality	Organization	Area of global expertise	Other comments
1	Dr. Peter Okaalet (O)	Global Policy Director	Ugandan (lived in Kenya for 19 years)	MAP International (based in USA)	Health policy HIV AIDS prevention	TIME Magazine's Global Health Hero Award in November 2005
2	Dr. Dela Adadevoh (A)	Vice President (Africa, Middle East and Central Asia)	Ghanaian (in USA). Has lived in Kenya, Zimbabwe and Nigeria	Campus Crusade for Christ	Transformational & cross-cultural leadership	Researcher's organizational leader
3	Mr. David Mureithi (Mu)	Managing Director (Eastern and Southern Africa)	Kenyan (Lived in Cote d'Ivoire and UK)	Unilever	Consumer goods Manufacturing and Distribution	
4	Mr. Sammy Mwangi (Mw)	Executive Coach, former Corporate Governance Director	Kenyan (lived in Tanzania and UK)	Saman Associates (Formerly World Vision)	Corporate Governance Microfinance	Consulted in Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia with World Vision for 20 years

## Appendix C

### Findings of Interviews with Global Leaders on Key Change Drivers

Table 2

#### Findings of Interviews with Global Leaders on Key Change Drivers

Name	Social	Technology	Environmental
O	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Breakdown of marriages</li> <li>- Greater “idol worship (things e.g., sports, violence, etc.)</li> <li>- Negative impact of abortion and stem cell: ethics/spirituality</li> <li>- Prophets: godly people listen</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Slow to adapt: lost opportunities e.g., telemedicine</li> <li>- Mobile technology: 17-&gt;300m</li> <li>- Raised \$2mil. through website</li> <li>- Errors due to inferior equipment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Oil over-dependence</li> <li>- Waste disposal poor</li> <li>- Forest management</li> <li>- Prof Maathai: impact</li> <li>- Large populations: a burden or resource?</li> </ul>
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Holistic response to crisis</li> <li>- Fear of identity loss (globally)</li> <li>- Many changes confuse staff</li> <li>- Theological/moral crisis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Flattening of organization</li> <li>- Global measurement possible</li> <li>- Value/Kingdom driven</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discuss uncertain future: learning organization</li> <li>- Charismatic vs. strategy leadership</li> </ul>
Mu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Secondary impact to adversely affect Africa</li> <li>- Urbanization positive for business (even urban poor)</li> <li>- Need for business principles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information leads to higher expectations/choice</li> <li>- Radical changes to ways of doing business, e.g., online market research/more info</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Depletion of water, forests and climate change (over time)</li> <li>- New products (e.g., using less water)</li> </ul>
Mw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CEO compensation</li> <li>- New/greater board needs</li> <li>- Poverty increased by collapses</li> <li>- Hope: celebrate small wins</li> <li>- Poorer countries forgotten?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information flow (ICT)</li> <li>- Fiber optic cable to increase linking economies/nations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Global warming</li> <li>- Carbon credit incentive</li> <li>- “Green” businesses</li> </ul>
Name	Economic	Politics	Others
O	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Scaling down salaries/projects</li> <li>- Need for local resource development</li> <li>- End greed (not poverty)</li> <li>- Trade (not aid) as solution?</li> <li>- African experts bribed away</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- War and instability: brain flight</li> <li>- Africa unification: ill advised?</li> <li>- Aid: takes more from Africa</li> <li>- Visionary(long-term) leaders</li> <li>- Access to justice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Link with China/India and research</li> <li>- Warped values</li> <li>- One faith, political and economic system?</li> </ul>
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Funding and its influence</li> <li>- Global financial crisis impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Structures to follow mission</li> <li>- North-South Christianity shift</li> <li>- Diversity of thought/styles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Long history/funds</li> <li>- China and Korea lead</li> <li>- Fewer entrepreneurs?</li> </ul>
Mu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cost control and relevant goods</li> <li>- Need to rethink business</li> <li>- Less diaspora inflow and fewer exports (global recession)</li> <li>- Global competition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rebalance global finances</li> <li>- Regional/global trade blocks</li> <li>- Political risk: 30 year (long-term view) - monitor protectionism vs. globalization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Preparedness brings more differentiation (whether business rides wave of change or fails/weaker)</li> </ul>
Mw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Investor confidence loss (stocks) and shareholders fears</li> <li>- Performance-based comp.</li> <li>- Reduce legal/regulatory issues</li> <li>- Disclosures/better governance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Will to realize Kenya’s Vision 2030 (vs. corruption)?</li> <li>- Leadership/cohesion crisis?</li> <li>- More regulations/try criminals</li> <li>- Debt forgiveness for Africa</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Kenya crisis:7-&gt; 2%</li> <li>- Collapse: Way forward</li> <li>- Capitalism healthy?</li> <li>- China: 3<sup>rd</sup> economy - Africa looking “East”</li> </ul>