Exploring Ubuntu and the African Renaissance:

A Conceptual Study of Servant Leadership from an African Perspective

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The uniquely African concepts of Ubuntu and the African Renaissance may provide insights regarding how servant leadership could function on a continent that continues to value its original heritage. The impositions on the traditional way of life, religion, and moral values by Western culture during centuries of slavery, colonialism, and development to the individual independence and democracy of African nations, have left an impact on the inhabitants, particularly the indigenous people. This article aims to investigate Ubuntu, the African Renaissance, and how future partnerships and organizational intervention could be viewed from the perspective of a thorough knowledge and respect for traditional African culture, while advancing a servant leadership approach.

Servant leadership, as first developed by Robert Greenleaf (1977, 1998) in the 1970s, is viewed in literature by leaders of organizations (Snodgrass, 1993; Spears, 1995; Spears & Lawrence, 2002; Winston, 2002) from a Western perspective. The question of whether the principles of servant leadership are applicable in other cultures is an area that might lend itself to empirical research in particular. The events of history illustrate that the traditional African way of life has been misunderstood and compromised in humankind’s quest for development. For this reason, the author explores the African context in this conceptual study, including personal interviews with prominent black South African leaders as a primary resource for uncovering insights into traditional African culture.

The African continent represents 53 nations and 5 islands that are considered low income, developing nations, and other developing nations, such as South Africa. South Africa is characterized by diversity in ethnicity, religion, and culture. Such diversity has the potential for either disharmony or unity. Historically, the heritage, culture, and rights of indigenous people were commonly overlooked and placed at risk by the influence of Western civilization. This has led to considerable disharmony between the ethnic groups in South Africa in the past. While the injustices of history on the continent are being addressed, it is vital that future social and organizational intervention take place with due respect to the values of the pertinent cultures for optimal value to be achieved.

As a citizen of South Africa, the author considers the nation a convenient focus in Africa for conducting the research associated with this conceptual study. South Africa was a colony of the Netherlands and later of Britain for centuries until its independence in 1910. The historical impact of colonialism on the nation’s
indigenous people groups, as well as on other individuals descendent of colonists and slaves, is a perspective that should be considered in the application of typically Western organizational theory. If organizational theory is applied within a framework that includes an understanding of African culture, the potential for unity in diversity as an outcome will be enhanced. Makgoba (1999), Battle (1997), and van der Walt (2003) recognized the role of legislated apartheid in the growing disenchantment of the majority black population being ruled by the white minority in South Africa from 1948 to 1994. Battle noted the contribution of Bishop Desmond Tutu, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, in consistently pointing out the error of apartheid to national leaders and the potential for a “bloody dénouement which is ‘too ghastly to imagine’” (p. xiv). Nelson Mandela in Tutu (1994) noted the “confusion and violence of the ensuing transition to democracy” (p. xxi) in the nation. The achievement of democracy in a post-apartheid South Africa was a goal of ex-President Nelson Mandela since his release from prison on February 11, 1991 (Benson, 1994, p. 226), as he sought to achieve unity in diversity in the nation. This political democracy was achieved in 1994. The nation’s history of “command and control leadership styles” (Winston & Bekker, 2004, p. 1) and influence of a single ethnic group over others, are key issues in exploring the applicability of ideas that might impose on or threaten to replace the values that previously disadvantaged people groups in the nation have held dear for centuries.

While some values that traditional African culture embraces might be foreign to contemporary Western culture, there are significant moral and ethical values that could serve as common ground, as well as admirable values that could be gleaned from traditional African culture. An application of servant leadership in an African context should serve to concentrate on common values that might be explored and developed. Two such concepts are Ubuntu and the African Renaissance.

Ubuntu

According to Louw (n.d.), “Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” is translated from Xhosa as “a person is a person through other persons” (p. 1), and forms the foundation of Ubuntu. Ubuntu is a word common to two indigenous South African languages, namely Zulu and Xhosa. This concept of individual significance being achieved through the community, is the basic understanding that has been repeated by many black South Africans. Mbigi and Maree (1995) defined Ubuntu as “a metaphor that describes the significance of group solidarity, on survival issues, that is so central to the survival of African communities, who as a result of the poverty and deprivation have to survive through brotherly group care and not individual self-reliance” (p. 1). Tutu (as cited in Burger, 1996) highlighted the “sharing and caring for each other in adversity—as well as in the good times” (preface) as a central characteristic of Ubuntu. Sindane (1995) supported the complexity of the Ubuntu concept, stating that Ubuntu “does not escape the problem of being differently defined by different people” (p. 8). In practice, Ubuntu is commonly expressed through humaneness that results in entire communities sharing an individual’s joy and pain, as seen in marriages and funerals that whole communities attend as a matter of course.

Sindane (1995) listed a variety of definitions of Ubuntu that include the common characteristics of treating all people with respect, and dignity that encompasses brotherhood (pp. 8-9). Sindane pointed out, “Ubuntu is humanism. It is a belief in the centrality, sacredness, and foremost priority of the human being in all our conduct, throughout our lives” (p. 9). Louw (2002) posited that Ubuntu is African Humanism, since the Ubuntu concept encompasses a deeply spiritual connotation that includes the role of ancestors in an individual’s development (p. 2). Ancestors are regarded as extended family and many rituals include acknowledgement of ancestors. Broodryk (1997) pointed out that many Africans’ belief in God takes place through the mediation of ancestors (p. 15), while Teffo (1994) noted that Ubuntu implies a deep respect for religious beliefs and practices (p. 9).

Ubuntu encompasses sound moral values while simultaneously indicating that humankind is the source and measure of all that matters, pointing to the influence of African Humanism within the concept. The traditional African worldview advances the understanding that the spirit world defines the worldview of the people and their lives. According to van der Walt (2003), “Pervasive, hidden, unexplainable, unpredictable and powerful spirits govern and control everything and everyone and affect the well-being of individuals, families, clans and tribes” (p. 62). The perceived control that the spirit world has over individuals’ lives leads to destructive levels of fear. As a result, individuals seek to placate and manipulate the spirit world, often through intermediaries.
Van der Walt pointed out that “the African never exists in a merely material or visible world,” but combines these in “the way that he interacts with his environment” (p. 63).

The African Renaissance

Boloka (1999) noted that the 1960s in Africa were marked by “massive dethronings of colonial powers succeeded by the formation of the so-called black power or people’s rule” (p. 93). The African Renaissance concept was born following the progressive regaining of power by the indigenous people in the nations of Africa. The African Renaissance is a concept borrowed from the European Renaissance and refers to “the period of cultural and intellectual achievement that followed the era of late scholasticism” (van Niekerk, 1999, p. 70). Boloka noted that the concept of African Renaissance is linked to Thabo Mbeki, “who articulated it as a means to Africa’s empowerment” (p. 93). A significant characteristic of the post-apartheid era in the fledgling South African democracy, is the desire of the nation to redeem itself from its “torrid past” (Boloka, p. 94) of apartheid and colonial heritage and develop new identities of significance. Boloka noted that these new identities are illustrated in the type of symbols, such as the “rainbow nation,” attributed to Desmond Tutu, and the concept of a blossoming of Africa, popularized by Thabo Mbeki as the African Renaissance. As the present president of South Africa, Mbeki is also the leading figure in the African Renaissance. South Africa is used as a model for the attainment of a peaceful democracy and the development of the African Renaissance throughout the continent. In a speech in Japan in 1997, Mbeki (as cited in Boloka) noted that the reason for an African Renaissance

*is the need to empower the African peoples to deliver themselves from the legacy of colonialism and neocolonialism and to situate themselves on the global stage as equal and respected contributors to as well as beneficiaries of all the achievements of human civilization. Just as the continent was once the cradle of humanity and an important contributor to civilization, this renaissance should empower it to help the world rediscover the oneness of the human race. (p. 94)*

According to Mbeki (as cited in Makgoba, 1999), one of the central aims of the African Renaissance is the provision of a better life for these masses of the people whom we say must enjoy and exercise the right to determine their future. That renaissance must therefore address the critical question of sustainable development which impacts positively on the standard of living and the quality of life of the masses of our people.(p.xvi)

Mbeki posited that leadership development is necessary to ensure the advancement of the African Renaissance, as well as the recognition that the new struggle for Africa’s development cannot be won “outside the context and framework of the world economy” (as cited in Makgoba, p. xvii). Van Niekerk (1999) pointed out that by comparison, the European Renaissance developed over a period of at least 150 years, a time frame that is unrealistic given the severity of Africa’s problems (p. 70). Additionally, the European Renaissance had “small beginnings” and “depended on the work of a very small minority” (Van Niekerk, p. 71), whereas Africa needs a widespread impact on its difficulties for the achievement of significant changes.

Louw (2002) posited that the Christian church should adopt a new mindset and participate in the African Renaissance (p. 82). Louw advised the church to become more pastoral and take “social, structural, and communal issues into consideration when designing a practical theological ecclesiology” (p. 85).

The annual initiative of the Christian church in South Africa to mobilize Christians for a day of prayer for Africa, was held for the fourth consecutive year on May 2, 2004, and extended across the continent. An estimated 30 million people gathered in 1200 stadiums in 53 nations of Africa to pray for the continent. *Die Burger* (Jackson & van Dyk, 2004) noted that the occasion “represented the largest prayer meeting in history and comprised the spiritual foundation of the African Renaissance” (p. 3, translated from Afrikaans). The seven focus areas of prayer comprised HIV/ AIDS, crime, violence, racism, sexism, poverty and unemployment, and the breakdown of families. Such actions by Christians serve to support the transformation in Africa through prayer and illustrate the solidarity of citizens for a preferred future.
**Decolonization**

Boloka (1999) identified the importance of African people regaining independence in their nations after centuries of colonial rule and in the attempt of the continent to “revive itself after the unsavory period under colonial rule” (p. 93). Louw (n.d.) recognized the role of decolonization in Africa as a key to recognizing “the wide variety of religions practicing on its soil” (p. 1). Louw posited that decolonialization overlaps with the Ubuntu way of life and that religious assessment needs to be “explained, motivated or underscored with reference to the concept of Ubuntu” (p. 1).

**Relationship Between Ubuntu, African Renaissance, and Decolonization**

It can be seen from the literature that the concepts of Ubuntu, African Renaissance, and decolonialization are intertwined from an African perspective. Consequently, an understanding of Ubuntu is firstly necessary to appreciate the potential value of the African Renaissance and the impact of decolonialization. The African perspective of these concepts is a necessary prerequisite in exploring how Western organizational and leadership theory might be applied in an African context.

There are pitfalls that result from a superficial appreciation of these concepts, such as the likelihood of romanticizing Ubuntu without taking all the facets of the concept into consideration. In addition, Boloka (1999) pointed out another pertinent pitfall, noting:

> Our approach to cultural phenomena is still contaminated and is well informed by the past that we desperately want to avoid. Indeed, one realizes that like all academic terms, African Renaissance can be taken literally and exploited to serve individuals and sometimes, nefarious ends. (p. 101)

Boloka (1999) warned against possible isolation and elitism created by the African Renaissance, and indicated that the term “African” needs redefining since “it is no longer the black color alone that guarantees one the status of Africanhood” (p. 101). Boloka suggested that the African Renaissance might be a “far-fetched dream, myth, an illusion, a quest for an unattainable past” (p. 101), while Mbigi (2000a) argued that the genius of African management lies in “people management because African cultures emphasize humanism—the interdependence and solidarity of humanity” (p. 21). Mbigi viewed the integration of the African and global perspectives as essential for success in the integration of different regions into an integrated whole.

**Perceptions of Ubuntu by Black South African Leaders**

The author interviewed three prominent black South African leaders to ascertain their perspective of Ubuntu and the role of this concept in the contemporary organizations in which they function. The leaders interviewed were:

- Prof Madoda Zibi, the Vice-Rector of the University of Potchefstroom (personal communication, May 4, 2004);
- Prof Njabulo Ndabele, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town (personal communication, May 5, 2004);
- Dr Khotso Mokhele, the President of the National Research Foundation (NRF) (personal communication, May 5, 2004).

The three leaders were interviewed separately and were given advance notice of the subject and the questions that would be asked, to facilitate their preparation. The questions that were asked are the following:

- How do you understand Ubuntu?
- Do you think that the Ubuntu concept is still relevant to South Africa today?
- Do you still apply the Ubuntu concept and/or want to apply it in your role as a leader?
- How do you perceive that Ubuntu could be applied in contemporary organizations?
There was consensus over the meaning of Ubuntu, but the perspectives of the three leaders differed regarding how Ubuntu might influence their leadership or play a role in their organizations. Zibi (personal communication, May 4, 2004) illustrated a traditional perspective of Ubuntu, noting that the recognition that individuals give to the community for personal achievements is attributed to Ubuntu, since the community plays a role in molding individuals. Zibi referred to Nelson Mandela’s consistent remarks that give credit to collective input for his achievements as an example of Ubuntu. Zibi pointed out that Ubuntu makes a significant contribution to moral support for individuals from communities, and that “people sharing grief with you goes a long way in making you strong” (personal communication, May 4, 2004), thereby alluding to the social-cultural dynamics of Ubuntu.

With reference to the present-day relevance of Ubuntu, Zibi posited, “Our uniqueness as Africans will make us stand the test of time in globalization” (personal communication, May 4, 2004). Zibi referred to the “Proudly South African” marketing concept for the export and local sales of goods, based on individuals taking pride in the goods produced in the nation. Zibi also referred to the establishment of national pride and symbols of the uniqueness of the nation, such as those embodied in the “Rainbow nation of God” identity, established by Bishop Desmond Tutu (Battle, 1997, p. 183). Zibi noted the need for organizations to recognize traditional African values, such as a profound respect for older people and the wisdom that accompanies advanced age. Zibi recommended that these values should function alongside Western management concepts, rather than a strong focus on goals and profits. Zibi pointed out that these principles were already being practiced by some local organizations, such as Eskom and the Wellness Program operating at the University of Potchefstroom. Zibi stated that he was convinced that Ubuntu would stand the test of time by being practiced more broadly in this way by corporate organizations. Zibi believes Ubuntu should be harnessed and managed, such as by allowing the humaneness associated with Ubuntu to function with efficiency. Zibi expressed the concern of many black people when he noted that South Africa is governed by Western values, whereas African beliefs and practices need to be given proper recognition, such as the recognition of traditional healers.

With reference to the African Renaissance, Zibi stated that the concept should not be used against other people groups like Christianity has been used. According to Zibi, the concept that Christianity came to the continent to save people from heathenism, is applied in relation to African traditional values. The outcomes are that African values have been eroded and the inferiority of African values is communicated. Africans should not have to emulate Western concepts, but the culture offers unique qualities that even black Africans need to rediscover. Zibi noted that Ubuntu should be practiced to achieve consensus as traditional Africans do, by continuing talks until agreement is reached. While this time-consuming approach to solidarity is not efficient by Western standards, the principles have served traditional African leadership well for centuries.

Ndabele (personal communication, May 5, 2004) embraces a nuance-radical perspective, refusing to adopt Ubuntu as a philosophy. Ndabele claimed not to be an authority on Ubuntu and that he has never embraced the concept as a style. However, Ndabele noted that if Ubuntu is interpreted in terms of its inherent humane characteristics, he continues to be in support of these aspects of the concept. He stated that he believes that the concept is being over-interpreted, that Ubuntu doesn’t represent a concept that is unique, since every society has ethical standards. Ndabele noted that humaneness and resolving problems should be achieved without vengeance and revenge, such as by the humane approach of reconciliation through conflict resolution that is reflected in Ubuntu.

Dr Khotso Mokhele (personal communication, May 5, 2004) represents the perspective of the Black Consciousness Movement, noting a profound respect for the community from which an individual emanates, and that “the strong and the weak of the community define who you are.” Mokhele defined Ubuntu as embracing courage, humility and wisdom, sharing burdens, and sharing rewards to achieve greater synergy. Mokhele stated that Ubuntu is the only concept he still applies in leadership, embracing the idea that communal consultation is beneficial for achieving the most efficient and wise result. Mokhele commented that leaders should consider the wisdom contained in the practises of Ubuntu and that these concepts should be inserted into leadership training for greater effectiveness. Mokhele also expressed his understanding that “more is not necessarily better.” Mokhele noted in this regard that unless the principles of Ubuntu were incorporated into South African universities, the materialistic spirit that is so prevalent in the corporate world would become a model for the nation’s young leaders. Mokhele pointed out that in the application of Ubuntu in
his own organization, the concept provides him with a wise understanding of the use of power. The humane approach and deep sense of respect resulting in the sharing resources is an African value that contrasted sharply with the “greedy approach” (Mokhele, personal communication, May 5, 2004) that has recently led to corruption in some multi-national organizations, such as Enron. Mokhele indicated the responsibility of his generation to impart the values represented by Ubuntu to the younger people in the nation.

Each of the three leaders communicated the importance of retaining and imparting traditional values to the future generations. The three leaders recognized the importance of development through Western influence, but not at the cost of traditional values that are held dear in the African cultures. The leaders stressed that the strength of traditional values should be used to complement Western leadership approaches.

**Traditional African Religion and the Interpretation and Application of Ubuntu**

It is notable that while there is a clear common understanding regarding the basic meaning of Ubuntu, there are differences in the way and degree to which individuals interpret the concept and apply Ubuntu in their organizations. Mbigi (2000a) recognized and credited the role of the African Spirit Religion in his understanding and application of his cultural and philosophical values that are rooted in African wisdom and in Ubuntu in particular. Mbigi noted,

*I am convinced that the African spirits and their virgin form of creativity, which is psychic visioning, can be applied to give birth to the African Business Renaissance in the areas of industrial espionage and market intelligence gathering, strategy as well as product and service innovation.* (p. vii)

Mbigi (2000a) made use of the African Spirit Hierarchy to provide a framework for organizational transformation and lists the nine spirits in their English translation in order of significance as God, Rainmaker Spirit, Hunter’s Spirit, Innovative Spirit, Divination Spirit, Clan Spirit, War Spirit, Avenging Spirit, and the Witch Spirit (p. x). Mbigi claimed that he has always sought guidance from his guardian spirits and acknowledged the role of his ancestors and great spirits in his life. Mbigi noted, “As Africans, our guardian and ancestral spirits can assist us to control our destiny in a hostile global world” (p. xi).

Louw (n.d.) used the Ubuntu concept synonymously with African Humanism (p. 2). According to van Niekerk (1994, p. 2), the definition of Ubuntu in Zulu, *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (i.e., “a person is a person through other persons”) (Louw, n.d., p. 2), is only possible through an ancestor. Ancestors are regarded as extended family, and while the living care for one another, “the living and the dead depend on each other” (van Niekerk, p. 2). It is clear from this background that Ubuntu is closely linked with the spirit world and the spirits of deceased family members. Louw (n.d.), O’Donovan (1996), and van der Walt (2003) noted the significant role that these spirits play in the lives of the people and in the practice of Ubuntu.

Archbishop Tutu (as cited in Battle, 1997) believed that Ubuntu “provides a corrective hermeneutic for Western salvation theology that focuses on the individual” (p. 4). Battle noted that Tutu’s “theology must be viewed through the lens of Ubuntu” (p. 5). Tutu (as cited in Battle) pointed out that “unlike Westerners, Africans have a synthesizing mind set, as opposed to the occidental analytical one” (p. viii) and the African mindset affects their theology and perspective of all of life.

The spiritual connotations expressed by the aforementioned authors contradict a Biblical Christian Worldview. According to Dreckmeyer (1997), a Biblical Christian Worldview presupposes that the Bible “serves as a filter that helps us to screen out what is wrong and as a lamp that gives direction to all we do” (p. 18). The emphasis of African Traditional Worldview (O’Donovan, 1996; van der Walt, 2003) on the supernatural and mystical, contradicts the First and Second Commandment (Exodus 20:3-5), and the common practice of necromancy as a way of life in the African Traditional Worldview is forbidden in Leviticus 19:31. Leviticus 20:6 illustrates God’s response to necromancy. In support of the dilemma of necromancy, O’Donovan highlights Isaiah 8:19, which states: “And when they say to you, ‘Consult the mediums and the wizards who whisper and mutter,’ should a people not consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?” (p. 231).

While the Ubuntu concept comprises admirable values relating to community, relationships, caring, and humaneness, the spiritual connotations cannot be separated from the concept. Winston and Bekker (2004)
noted aspects of the spiritual connotations of Ubuntu, however the authors do not recognize the contradictions with a Biblical Christian Worldview (pp. 2-3).

Nelson (2003) provided a summary of Ubuntu that focuses only on one level of the concept and does not take the deeper spiritual issues into consideration (pp. 32-35). Nelson posited, “African Humanism, unlike the European approach to humanism, has the God principle in it” (p. 34). The dilemma in taking “the God principle” (Nelson, p. 34) at face value, is that the different perspective of God is overlooked. Anecdotal evidence indicates that urbanized black African converts to Christianity no longer adhere to the African Traditional Worldview, but that there is a tendency to adapt “Christianity to traditional religion” (van der Walt, 2003, p. 115) by some rural black Africans. Van der Walt (2003) expounded the perspective of God from an African Traditional Worldview, noting that God, the Supreme Being, is viewed in the following way:

- The Supreme Being is the Creator, who withdrew after creation, rather than continuing to sustain;
- The Supreme Being is used, not worshipped, individuals seldom approach Him in prayer;
- The Supreme Being doesn’t have personal relationships with humankind, nor is gratitude extended towards Him;
- The Supreme Being does not reveal Himself in Creation, Scripture, or in Christ;
- The Supreme Being does not provide laws governing humankind’s conduct, the community does;
- The Supreme Being does not regard humankind as responsible or accountable to Him;
- The Supreme Being does not show love to humankind or require love;
- There is an absence of faithful trust between humankind and the Supreme Being. (p. 65)

It follows that the perspective of God from an African Traditional Worldview contrasts sharply with that of Biblical Christianity. Consequently, “the God principle” (Nelson, 2003, p. 34) is unreliable as a starting point for building a foundation for servant leadership in an African culture. In addition, the Zulu phrase, Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu, refers not only in the positive sense to the contribution of the community, but also to the contribution of the spirit world in the life of individuals who embrace the African Traditional Worldview. The dilemma facing the application of Ubuntu principles lies in the question of whether the positive physical aspects of the community-related humaneness can be separated from the spiritual aspects relating to the religious spirits and the belief in the spirits of deceased individuals, both of which control the people.

**Servant Leadership**

Greenleaf (1998) clarified the priorities present in servant leadership:

**The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The best test is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? (p. 1)**

The Biblical perspective of servant leadership is based on an individual being “a servant to both God and others” (Farling, n.d., p. 2) as seen in Isaiah 41:8 and in Isaiah 42:1. Jesus stated in reference to Himself, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). According to Snodgrass (1993), Christians understand their role of being servants “on account of” Jesus (p. 14). Individuals “do not become servant leaders by choice or desire; nor can servanthood be conjured up by disciplines or special acts” (Snodgrass, p. 13), thereby illustrating that servanthood is the result of an individual’s personal relationship with Christ, as the character and purposes of Christ become pre-eminent in an individual’s life.

Greenleaf (1997) placed an emphasis on leaders prioritizing being servants first, and then leading (p. 13). Greenleaf pointed out the following:
Natural servants are trying to see clearly the world as it is and are listening carefully to prophetic voices that are speaking now. They are challenging the pervasive injustice with greater force and they are taking sharper issue with the disparity between the quality of society they know is reasonable and possible with available resources, and, on the other hand, the actual performance that exists to serve society. (p. 9)

Greenleaf (1977) did not attribute his concept of servant leadership to a Biblical source. Snodgrass (1993) argued that true servant leadership is only possible through an individual’s thorough understanding of the person of Christ and a growing relationship as a follower of Christ. Blanchard, Hodges. And Blanchard (2003) stated that Jesus “sent a clear message to all those who would follow Him that leadership was first and foremost to be an act of service” and “for a follower of Jesus, servant leadership isn’t just an option; it’s a mandate” (p. 12).

Servant leaders have a high regard for their followers (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2003), and Winston (2002) noted that this high regard is termed agapao love, which forms the motivation of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 (p. 4). In the theory of servant leadership, Patterson (2003) lists agapao love as the first of the seven constructs of servant leadership (p. 3). Winston and Patterson both list these constructs as agapao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service. According to Winston, the servant leadership model commences with agapao love (p. 4). As a leader practices the seven beatitudes, his levels of humility and altruism towards his followers increase. According to Winston, this results in:

an increased focus by the leader on a vision for the followers as well as trust in the followers that, together, causes the leader to increase the level of empowerment to the followers that results in a greater level of service to the follower. (p.4)

The Application of Ubuntu and the African Renaissance in Servant Leadership

The anecdotal evidence derived from this research and the interviews with prominent black leaders in South Africa indicate that in general, the principles of Ubuntu provide values that could be effectively applied in an African context. The principles of servant leadership provide a useful platform connecting Ubuntu and servant leadership (Winston & Bekker, 2004). Winston and Bekker highlighted the similarity of values and characteristics identified by Patterson’s (2003) model and Ubuntu. Winston and Bekker elaborated the common values and characteristics, namely a collectivist rather than individual focus, a focus on the follower rather than the organization, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, commitment to the leader, and service (p. 3). The extent and importance attributed to values shared by Ubuntu and servant leadership are significant. Nelson’s (2003) findings overlap with the constructs noted by Winston and Bekker (p. 3) and in conclusion Nelson noted that the black South African leaders who participated in the qualitative research he undertook, “stated that practicing and/or adopting all of the servant leadership constructs is challenging among black leaders in the current organizational environment in South Africa” (p. 92).

The “struggle” in South Africa commonly refers to the efforts of the previously disadvantaged majority to oppose and bring an end to apartheid. The attainment of the goals of the African Renaissance in the present is referred to as the “new struggle” (Makgoba, 1999). President Thabo Mbeki in Makgoba referred to the rebirth of South Africa as a result of the country’s transition to democracy, noting with reference to the future that we want to see an African continent in which the people participate in systems of government in which they are truly able to determine their destiny and put behind us the notions of democracy and human rights as peculiarly ‘Western’ concepts. (p.xv)

Mbeki (as cited in Makgoba, 1999) urged individuals to recognize that “we cannot win the struggle for Africa’s development outside the context and framework of the world economy” (p. xviii). The achievement of the goals of the African Renaissance are not possible without the support of First World nations in providing aid for immediate needs, but more importantly, in assisting in the development of African leadership to contemporary effectiveness and the ability to reproduce leadership across the continent that will assist followers to harness the potential of the continent. This potential can be harnessed by helping people to help themselves through the application of the principles of servant leadership. To this end, leaders should model servant leadership
principles to developing leaders in Africa and in this way the values of servant leadership will gain momentum and become part of Africa’s new heritage that will serve to compliment the values of Ubuntu and the African Renaissance.

Mbigi (2000b) noted:

The Western genius in management lies in technical innovation, planning and control because its cultures are strong in rational analysis. The Asian genius in management lies in process improvement because Eastern cultures emphasize perfection. It can be argued that the African genius in management lies in people management because African cultures emphasize humanism—the interdependence and solidarity of humanity. The challenge of global management thinking in this millennium is to integrate all these elements in both management thinking and practices from different geographical regions of the world, into an integrated whole. (p. 21)

Mbigi (2000b) put the need for global collaboration into words and effectively called for international cooperation to achieve the necessary development in Africa. The African Renaissance potentially provides a bridge for the application of the African concept, Ubuntu, in conjunction with servant leadership. A concerted, wise application of servant leadership should be practiced through training and development by Westerners willing to serve the destiny of the continent. The contradictions of Traditional African Religion and Ubuntu with Biblical Christianity should not be overlooked, nor should the latter be imposed as a repetition of history. Jones in Burger (1996) noted in reference to the diversity in the nation that “unity is not referring to tolerance of division but to a harmonious diversity” (p. 2), thereby supporting the nation’s motto, “unity in diversity.” Within this diversity, great potential exists for individuals in Africa to be influenced towards Christ through the example set by servant leadership in action.

References
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