A Contextualized Model for Cross-cultural Leadership in West Africa

Servant Leadership Research Roundtable – August 2004

Jeff R. Hale
Regent University

This paper designs and explains a theoretical model of cross-cultural leadership in West Africa. The proposed model is a blending of transformational leadership theory and servant leadership theory with leadership principles derived from the book of Acts. A literature review addressing the current African leadership crisis, African cultural distinctives, African leadership, servant leadership theory, and transformational leadership theory form the groundwork for the model. The result yields a model that non-African cross-cultural leaders can use to interface appropriately within the West African context to exert spiritual, cognitive, and behavioral influence.

This paper proposes to design and explain a theoretical model of cross-cultural leadership in West Africa. It is not a model of African leadership. Rather, it describes a model that a person from a non-African cultural perspective can use to interface appropriately within the African culture to exert spiritual, cognitive, and behavioral influence.

The proposed model is a blending of transformational leadership theory and servant leadership theory with leadership principles derived from the book of Acts. A literature review addressing the current African leadership crisis, West African cultural distinctives, characteristics of African leadership, servant leadership theory, and transformational leadership theory form the groundwork for the model.

The impetus for this paper flows from this author’s personal experience of living and working for 12 years in West Africa. It reflects the best practices learned through research, observation, experience, failure, and success. It addresses the tensions that a leader from a Western cultural orientation will face in the contrasting culture of West Africa and their implications for cross-cultural leadership.

The context of the study is the current leadership crisis in West Africa. It implies that cultural outsiders have a responsibility to model successful leadership that can be the impetus for the creation of effective models of African leadership. The study acknowledges the difficulty of creating a pan-regional approach within a diverse cultural environment; at the same time, it holds that there are sufficient acknowledged universals to warrant a generalized model. Distinctives of African culture and leadership are important variables in designing a contextualized model of cross-cultural leadership in West Africa.

This research relates African culture and leadership distinctives to the variables of servant leadership theory, transformational leadership theory, and concepts of divinely empowered leadership resulting in the proposed model.
model. A narrative explains the graphically represented model. The paper concludes with a research design to test the model.

A contextualized model for cross-cultural leadership in West Africa will stand in contrast to the current leadership crisis in the region. We turn now to an examination of that crisis.

West African Leadership Crisis

The deplorable state of sub-Saharan African leadership, particularly in the political arena, is well documented (Kamara, 2003; Kaunda, 2001; Nyabadza, 2003; Okumo, 2001; Skinner, 1998; Sunwabe, 2004). Okumo and Skinner used the term “afro-pessimism” to describe the demoralizing idea among Western observers and many Africans that African leaders are incapable of correcting the sad state of African affairs.

Despite the existence of mountains of information that their countries are on the precipice of doom African leaders have dithered, waffled and procrastinated and played survival politics. Many of them, with political rhetoric and hyperbole at their hearts, have not only failed to take decisive measures to address these problems but have instead engaged in double-speak and blame games. In African countries, the presidency is the heart and the engine of the state and in most instances the bane of the nation. Whoever is the head of state finds it his manifest destiny to indulge in African leaders' favorite pastime, namely cronynism, nepotism and outright plunder of national resources through the distribution of the national carcass. The national carcass is political lordship, monopoly of state violence and its application, or material and financial benefits. It is because of this that African leaders have been variously and aptly referred to as "Eating Chiefs." An African president is someone with extreme political power but essentially an Autocrat, a Tsar, a Kaiser, a Big Parochial Boss. Instead of serving their people, African leaders have looted and plundered state coffers with impunity and in utter disregard and contempt of the peoples’ needs. (Okumo, 2001, Why is afro-pessimism so pervasive section, ¶ 3)

Many African scholars and commentators believe that the dismal failure of sub-Saharan nations following independence relates directly to their leaders’ choices to ignore traditional styles of leadership and adopt western political and leadership paradigms (Kamara, 2003; Skinner, 1998). With this in mind, it is imperative that a viable cross-cultural leadership model be in contextual harmony with African leadership ideals and the best of African culture.

Understanding West African Culture

"Our first task in approaching another people, another culture . . . is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy" (Warren as cited in Shorter, n.d., Inculturation: The demands of culture section). Shorter points out that “human cultures are vehicles of divine truth and theatres of God’s salvific action” (Inculturation: The demands of culture section, ¶ 1). As such, they deserve reverent respect.

West Africa is home to around 265,000,000 persons who form approximately 1500 distinct ethnic groups. These linguistically and culturally diverse ethnic groups span 21 countries (Bullington, 2002). Given such a rich diversity, one must approach any generalization of West African culture with caution. Lassiter (2000) notes that since the 1950s African generalization studies have been “relegated to the dustbin of bad social science” (Background section, ¶ 2). This was due to the fact that many of these studies were used to find out which African ethnic groups were best suited for white collar or blue collar work in the colonial and post-colonial environment. Consequently, in order to avoid generalizations social science research focuses on clearly defined populations, geographic locations, or specific topics (Lassiter).

However, the main point of Lassiter’s (2000) literature review is that since the 1960s African scholars outside of the social sciences maintain that there are identifiable sub-Saharan African cultural characteristics. Through his survey of numerous African thinkers, Lassiter organizes these cultural characteristics in five broad
categories: (a) African psychological characteristics, (b) African society and the individual, (c) the African family and community, (d) the African worldview, and (e) the African response to foreign influences.

The African psychological characteristics discussion advances the idea “that the African way of organizing and cognitively engaging the world derives from a strongly restrictive indigenous sociocultural milieu, and that this approach to social life and the broader world has been negatively effected by Western cultural influences” (Lassiter, 2000, African psychological characteristics section, ¶ 1). It centers strongly on the concept of the “African mind” advocated by Nyasani (as cited in Lassiter). According to Nyasani, throughout sub-Saharan Africa the high value placed on sociality, patience, tolerance, sympathy, and acceptance offer evidence of the African Mind.

In regard to African society and the individual, most scholars agree with John Mbiti that there is little room for an individual’s self determination outside of the context of family and community.

Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.' This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man. (Mbiti as cited in Lassiter, 2000, African society and the individual section, ¶ 1)

Teaching and enforcing the vertical power structures of African community as superior to the individual takes place in the family. Nyasani states that this induces a “natural benign docility generally brought about by years of blind social submission and unquestioning compliance to the mystique of higher authority that reigns surreptitiously yet effectively in all black African societies in varying degrees” (as cited in Lassiter, 2000, African family and community section, ¶ 2).

The African traditional worldview is one that emphasizes “being” and “life forces.” Shute (as cited in Lassiter, 2000) observes that

the most fundamental (feature) in traditional African world-views . . . . is moreover a dynamic system in that the force of everything, at least all living things, is continuously being either strengthened or weakened. Human beings continuously influence each other, either directly or indirectly by way of sub-human forces or through the ancestors. (The African worldview section, ¶2).

The factors discussed above combine to shape the individual African’s response to foreign influence. Characterized by an extension of the strategies the African uses to survive in the family and community context, the response is generally “unquestioning acceptance and conformity” (Lassiter, 2000, African response to foreign influence section, ¶ 1).

In summary, Lassiter (2000) argues that it is possible to identify certain cultural characteristics that span the continent. These include: (a) high values placed on sociality, patience, tolerance, sympathy, and acceptance; (b) the predominance of community over the individual; (c) the role of the family in teaching and enforcing community power structures; (d) a worldview that emphasizes “being” and “life forces,” and (e) a tendency toward conformity in relation to non-African influences. Having heard from the African scholars, we turn now to Hofstede’s (Geert Hofstede Cultural Dimensions, 2003) analysis of West African culture.

Between 1967 and 1973, Geert Hofstede conducted a comprehensive study of the effects of cultural values on the workplace. Hofstede’s (Geert Hofstede Cultural Dimensions, 2003) study identified five dimensions of culture explained below.

Power Distance Index (PDI) focuses on the degree of equality, or inequality, between people in the country's society. A High Power Distance ranking indicates that inequalities of power and wealth have been allowed to grow within the society. These societies are more likely to follow a caste system that does not allow significant upward mobility of its citizens. A Low Power Distance ranking indicates the society
de-emphasizes the differences between citizen's power and wealth. In these societies equality and opportunity for everyone is stressed.

*Individualism (IDV)* focuses on the degree the society reinforces individual or collective achievement and interpersonal relationships. A High Individualism ranking indicates that individuality and individual rights are paramount within the society. Individuals in these societies may tend to form a larger number of looser relationships. A Low Individualism ranking typifies societies of a more collectivist nature with close ties between individuals. These cultures reinforce extended families and collectives where everyone takes responsibility for fellow members of their group.

*Masculinity (MAS)* focuses on the degree the society reinforces, or does not reinforce, the traditional masculine work role model of male achievement, control, and power. A High Masculinity ranking indicates the country experiences a high degree of gender differentiation. In these cultures, males dominate a significant portion of the society and power structure, with females being controlled by male domination. A Low Masculinity ranking indicates the country has a low level of differentiation and discrimination between genders. In these cultures, females are treated equally to males in all aspects of the society.

*Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)* focuses on the level of tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity within the society (i.e. unstructured situations). A High Uncertainty Avoidance ranking indicates the country has a low tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. This creates a rule-oriented society that institutes laws, rules, regulations, and controls in order to reduce the amount of uncertainty. A Low Uncertainty Avoidance ranking indicates the country has less concern about ambiguity and uncertainty and has more tolerance for a variety of opinions. This is reflected in a society that is less rule-oriented, more readily accepts change, and takes more and greater risks.

*Long-Term Orientation (LTO)* focuses on the degree the society embraces, or does not embrace, long-term devotion to traditional, forward thinking values. High Long-Term Orientation ranking indicates the country prescribes to the values of long-term commitments and respect for tradition. This is thought to support a strong work ethic where long-term rewards are expected as a result of today's hard work. However, business may take longer to develop in this society, particularly for an "outsider." A Low Long-Term Orientation ranking indicates the country does not reinforce the concept of long-term, traditional orientation. In this culture, change can occur more rapidly as long-term traditions and commitments do not become impediments to change.

Table 1 compares Hofstede’s cultural dimension scores between the United States and West Africa.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PDI</th>
<th>IDV</th>
<th>MAS</th>
<th>UAI</th>
<th>LTO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Africa</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The comparison in Table 1 illustrates the potential conflicts that a person from the United States culture can experience as he or she exercises leadership in the West African context. The variation in the PDI score is significant. Persons from the US expect a relatively low power distance between leaders and followers. Africans expect a high power distance. This has implications when implementing a participatory leadership style such as servant leadership.

The US culture is highly individualistic (IDV) while in African culture the individual is subordinate to the group. In the researcher’s experience, the great distance in these two cultural values leads to significant conflicts and misunderstandings between Westerners and West Africans.

In general, West African cultures experience a higher degree of gender separation (MAS) than does the US culture. In more traditional West African settings, the gender separation is greater. West Africans generally have a higher degree of tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty (UAI) than persons from the US. West Africans are much more willing to “go with the flow” and often view Western leadership as inflexible and rule bound. For the West African, everything is negotiable. The one area where Hofstede finds a strong compatibility between cultures is in long term orientation (LTO). Based on this researcher’s personal experience, this finding is surprising. In the area of work, which is Hofstede’s focus, there is a basis for this finding. However, in the larger culture there is a great respect for tradition because of the communal orientation to life. Decisions are based primarily on consensus. It takes time to build consensus and therefore in the larger culture change evolves slowly.

One of the weaknesses of Hofstede’s study is its concern only with the work sector. Those persons surveyed were tied to Western orientated industries (Geert Hofstede Cultural Dimensions, 2003). Consequently, the survey sample could have had more exposure to Western culture and leadership than the population as a whole. Therefore, overall cultural differences may be more pronounced than Hofstede’s results indicate.

**Conclusions**

Given the wide variety in West African culture, it is difficult to make generalizations. Yet, there are a number of African scholars that hold to the belief that some generalizations are possible (Lassiter, 2000). Condensing Lassiter and Hofstedte (Geert Hofstede Cultural Dimensions, 2003), one can identify the following generalities concerning West African culture: (a) character qualities of sociality, patience, tolerance, sympathy, and acceptance are highly valued; (b) community is paramount; (c) holistic worldview—a “being” orientation; (d) open to foreign influence; (e) hierarchal power structures; (f) comfortable with uncertainty; and (g) gender role distinctions. With these characteristics in mind, we turn to an examination of West African leadership.

**West African Leadership**

A number of scholars and commentators believe that the way forward for African leadership is a return to the principles embodied in pre-colonial traditional leadership or other distinctively African models of leadership (Banutu-Gomez, 2001; Early, 2003; Gcabashe, 2003; Masango, 2003; Mbeki & Mvuyelwa, 2001; Skinner, 1998). From the literature we can arrive at an understanding of the characteristics of traditional African leadership and the leadership ideals sought by contemporary African society.

**Traditional West African Leadership**

A Kgosi (or traditional leader) is a kgosi ke kgosi ka batho (“a leader which is a leader through his people”), the father of his people, and a binding and spiritual factor that serves as a symbol of the unity of the group. He or she is seen by most people as the embodiment of law and order, the upholder of values, and as provider for the needs of the community and, in some instances, even as an institution created by God (Rugege, 1994, Introduction section, ¶ 5).

The discussion of traditional West African leadership centers on the concept of kingship. Masango (2003) points out the well defined hierarchy in African society with the king at the top of the structure.
However, kingship in pre-colonial times was not the autocratic dictatorship that appeared in the colonial and post-colonial periods (Banutu-Gomez, 2001; Masango, 2003; Williams, 2003). Rather, the king was a servant to the clan, tribe, or community. While royal birth was a necessary pre-condition for kingship in most African societies, it alone was insufficient. Ascension to power also required some form of community approval (Williams). The kingdom was more important than the king. Historical examples document the removal of kings when they became detriments to the kingdom (Banutu-Gomez; Williams).

Leadership was a group phenomenon. The king used influence to build consensus (Banutu-Gomez, 2001; Masango, 2003; Williams, 2003). Finally, the king was the religious leader and guardian of the kingdom’s religious heritage (Masango; Rugege, 1994). In addition to these traditional leadership values, the literature is replete with aspirations and ideals for leadership in contemporary African society.

Contemporary West African Leadership Ideals

West Africans want strategy and goal directed leadership, especially as it relates to the ability to address social and economic issues (Jones, 2002; Masango, 2003; Okumo, 2001, 2002; Sunwabe, 2004). One earns leadership through demonstrating good character, competency, compassion, justice, and wholeness (Jones; Masango; Okumo, 2002). Vision and charisma are desirable qualities for a leader (Okumo, 2001, 2002; Sunwabe). Decision making should be participatory (Jones; Masango). Leadership should provide spiritual and moral guidance (Anyaoku, 2004; Jones; Okumo, 2002; Masango; Nyabadza, 2003). Mentoring and encouraging are important leader behaviors (Okumo, 2002; Masango). African leaders build community (Jones; Masango; Sunwabe) through service (Anuyaoku; Jones; Masango; Nyabadza). It is necessary to formulate a synthesis of traditional and contemporary leadership ideals and West African cultural values in order to have a clear understanding of leadership in the West African context (see Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideal Characteristics of African Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual in essence and practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elevated from but chosen by the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earns credibility through character, competence, and social justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visionary and charismatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy and goal oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring and encouraging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Builds community through service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We turn now to the exploration of transformational leadership and servant leadership as viable constructs in a leadership model that responds to the West African cultural and leadership context that has been established in the preceding discussion.

Transformational Leadership Theory in the Cross-cultural Context

Transformational leadership is “a process that changes and transforms individuals. It is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals. . . . Transformational leadership . . . moves followers
to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them” (Northouse, 2004, p. 169). Bass and Avolio (1990) state that “transformational leaders elevate the desires of followers for achievement and self-development, while also promoting the development of groups and organizations” (p. 22). There is ample documentation of the development, definitions, and variables for transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1990, 1997; Bass & Avolio; Northouse; Shamir, 1999; Yukl, 2001). The aspects of transformational leadership theory most pertinent to this discussion are its theoretical variables and the theory’s viability in a cross-cultural context. It is to these aspects that our attention turns.

**Transformational Leadership as a Theoretical Model**

Transformational leadership theory developed through the writings of Burns, Bass, Bennis and Nanus, and Tichy and DeVanna (as cited in Northouse, 2004). However, Bass and his associates developed the model most widely associated with the theory. This model forms the basis of the following discussion.

Bass (1997, 2000; Northouse, 2004) refers to this model as a “full range” leadership model. By this, he means that the model encompasses the full range of leadership behaviors from the least to the most effective on a continuum as illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Full range of leadership behaviors continuum.**

Laissez-faire leadership behaviors are the least effective. In essence, these are non-leadership behaviors. “The leader abdicates responsibility, delays decisions, gives no feedback, and makes little effort to help followers satisfy their needs” (Northouse, 2004, p. 179). Bass’s model subdivides transactional behaviors and transformational behaviors. Bass (1997) offers the following explanations of theses behaviors:

**Transactional behaviors.**

- Contingent Reward—Leaders engage in a constructive path-goal transaction of reward for performance. They clarify expectations, exchange promises and resources for support of the leaders, arrange mutually satisfactory agreements, negotiate for resources, exchange assistance for effort, and provide commendations for successful follower performance.
Active Management by Exception—Leaders monitor followers' performance and take corrective action if deviations from standards occur. They enforce rules to avoid mistakes.

Passive Management by Exception—Leaders fail to intervene until problems become serious. They wait to take action until mistakes are brought to their attention.

**Transformational behaviors.**

- Idealized Influence (Charisma)—Leaders display conviction; emphasize trust; take stands on difficult issues; present their most important values; and emphasize the importance of purpose, commitment, and the ethical consequences of decisions. Followers admire such leaders as role models who generate pride, loyalty, confidence, and alignment around a shared purpose.

- Inspirational Motivation—Leaders articulate an appealing vision of the future, challenge followers with high standards, talk optimistically with enthusiasm, and provide encouragement and meaning for what needs to be done.

- Intellectual Stimulation—Leaders question old assumptions, traditions, and beliefs; stimulate in others new perspectives and ways of doing things; and encourage the expression of ideas and reasons.

- Individualized Consideration—Leaders deal with others as individuals; consider their individual needs, abilities, and aspirations; listen attentively; further their development; advise; teach; and coach. (p. 133)

Despite the popularity enjoyed by transformational leadership over the past few decades, a number of authors point out significant weaknesses in the theory (Harvey, 2001; Keeley, 1998; Northouse, 2004; Shamir, 1999). The weaknesses can be divided into two categories: philosophical (Harvey; Keeley) and theoretical (Shamir).

Both Harvey (2001) and Keeley (1998) appeal to historical figures to underscore the philosophical weakness of the transformational paradigm. Based on the principles espoused by Machiavelli, Harvey contends that the ideals of transformational leadership will not ultimately hold up in the real world pressures of organizational leadership. He asserts that at some point, the transformational leader will find it impossible to satisfy all the ideals and values of transformation and will have to make compromises to those ideals and values in order to adequately address a current reality.

Keeley (1998), appealing to James Madison, points out the dangers inherent in charismatic leadership and mobilizing majorities around common visions and shared goals. The leadership of Hitler and Mao Zedong provide ample evidence of those concerns. Keeley argues that without proper checks and balances to power, charismatic leaders and mobilized majorities will naturally override and abuse the rights of the minority.

Shamir (1999) provides a thorough examination of the conceptual weakness in transformational theory. Table 3 summarizes Shamir’s observations.

In addition to asserting transformational leadership theory as a full range leadership model, Bass (1997) vigorously defends the model’s universal application across cultures. The weaknesses in the theory may influence the adaptability of the model in a cross-cultural context.
Table 3
A Summary of Shamir’s Conceptual Weaknesses Found in Transformational Leadership Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguity about Underlying Influence Processes</td>
<td>The theory would be stronger if the essential influence processes were identified more clearly and used to explain how each type of behavior affects each type of mediating variable and outcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overemphasis on Dyadic Processes</td>
<td>The major interest is to explain a leader’s direct influence over individual followers, not leader influence on group or organizational processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguity about Transformational Behaviors</td>
<td>The identification of specific types of transformational behavior seems to be based mostly on an inductive process (factor analysis), and the theoretical rationale for differentiating among the behaviors is not clearly explained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguity about Transactional Leadership</td>
<td>Transactional leadership is defined as a process of leader-subordinate exchange, but the theory fails to make a strong link between this process and each of the transactional behaviors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omission of Important Behaviors</td>
<td>That so many important behaviors are missing from the MLQ² casts doubt on the validity of the research conducted to evaluate the two-factor taxonomy of transformational and transactional leadership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient Specification of Situational Variables</td>
<td>To identify situational moderator effects, more accurate measures of leader behavior should be used (e.g., observations, diaries) instead of relying so much on behavior questionnaires.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient Identification of Negative Effects</td>
<td>The theory does not explicitly identify any situation where transformational leadership is detrimental.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroic Leadership Bias</td>
<td>There is little interest in describing reciprocal influence processes or shared leadership.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The explanations are direct quotes from Shamir (1999, Transformational leadership section).

Transformational Leadership as a Cross-Cultural Model

Bass (1997) states:

There is universality in the transactional—transformational leadership paradigm. That is, the same conception of phenomena and relationships can be observed in a wide range of organizations and cultures. . . . The paradigm is sufficiently broad to provide a basis for measurement and understanding that is as universal as the concept of leadership itself. Here, universal does not imply constancy of means, variances, and correlations across all situations but rather explanatory constructs good for all situations. (p. 130)

In order to apply the term “universal” it has to be carefully defined. Bass (1997) and Hartog et al. (1999) go to great lengths to define what they mean by “universal.” In doing so, they use a number of different universals: simple, variiform, functional, and systematic. It could be that because the term has to be so precisely defined in order to apply it to the theory, that it loses the common and straightforward understanding of “universal.” This, in turn, calls into question the appropriateness of the term’s application to the theory.
Bass (1997) offers seven reasons why transformational leadership is universal: (a) “leadership is a universal phenomenon,” (b) leadership qualities may be inherited and are therefore culture free, (c) “knowledge work will dominate the 21st century,” (d) “the socially oriented transformational leader engages in moral uplifting of followers,” (e) “the transactional—transformational leadership paradigm can be extended to describe teams and group effects as well as how whole organizations differ,” (f) “pop culture and its fads sweep across the world. Worldwide webs of communication, trade, and travel and the international transfer of technology contribute to the convergence of requirements and role models for leadership,” and (g) “the United States provides important sources of communalities in the postindustrialized world. English has become the world’s language of business, and much of American management practices and management education have been adopted universally” (pp 131-132).

These “reasons” do little to offer an empirical understanding of “why” transformational leadership is a universal phenomenon. While comments could be made to show the weakness of each of Bass’ (1997) reasons, for the sake of illustration we will consider only one. Bass’s assertion that transformational leadership is universal because leadership is universal is logically weak. An analogy would be: “Music is universal, therefore all cultures understand, value, and perform jazz.” This statement, to anyone familiar with world music cultures, represents the height of absurdity. Now consider the following: “Leadership is universal, therefore all cultures understand, value, and practice transformational leadership.” This statement should cause concern for a leadership scholar with a background in cross-cultural leadership.

To emphasize the theory’s flexibility and adaptability across cultures, Bass (1997) goes on to say, “Transformational leadership may be autocratic and directive or democratic and participative” (p. 136). When a theory becomes so broad and flexible that it can be anything in any context, it may lose its clarity, its descriptive and prescriptive capabilities, and the ability to be accurately measured. If everything is transformational then what is not transformational? In short, the claim to universality may invalidate the theory. Despite the weaknesses in transformational leadership theory, there exists a body of research that indicates its viability as a cross-cultural leadership model.

Some studies indicate that certain characteristics associated with transformational leadership enjoy universal appreciation (Gibson & Marcoulides, 1995; Hartog et al., 1999; Pillai, Scandura, & Williams, 1999). Gibson and Marcoulides do not specifically address transformational theory. Their work centers on a model to “determine whether there is or is not a difference in the structure of an American leadership model across managers from different countries. If the model is not similar, to what degree does it differ and how?” (Results section). Their study of four countries—the United States, Australia, Sweden, and Norway—found little statistical difference in the model across the countries studied. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the developed nations operating from a Western European worldview comprised the sample. Results could have been different if developing countries operating from a non-Western worldview had been included.

Hartog et al. (1999) represents the most significant, comprehensive, and supportive study regarding universality of transformational theory across cultures. This study tested the hypothesis that attributes associated with transformational leadership are recognized as contributors to excellence in leadership across cultures. The Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) Research Program tested this hypothesis in 62 cultures. Table 4 summaries the characteristics of charismatic/transformational leadership identified as universal indicators of outstanding leaders. It also lists culturally contingent characteristics of charismatic/transformational leadership. Culturally contingent characteristics are positive contributors to leadership effectiveness in one culture, but detract from leadership effectiveness in another culture.
Table 4

*Universal and Culturally Contingent Characteristics of Charismatic/Transformational Leadership (GLOBE)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Universal Characteristics</th>
<th>Culturally Contingent Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motive arouser</td>
<td>Risk-taking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foresight</td>
<td>Ambitious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging</td>
<td>Self-effacing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicative</td>
<td>Unique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
<td>Self-sacrificing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dynamic</td>
<td>Sincere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Sensitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational</td>
<td>Compassionate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence builder</td>
<td>Willful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* More universal and contingent leadership characteristic were identified. However, the characteristics presented in Table 4 are the characteristics explicitly identified with charismatic/transformational leadership in the discussion section of the study. It is unclear if these characteristics are intended by the authors (Hartog et al., 1999) as an all-inclusive list.

Table 5 illustrates a possible association with the GLOBE’s universal characteristics and the “4 I’s” of transformational leadership.

Table 5

*An Association of the GLOBE’s Universal Characteristics of Transformational Leadership with Bass’s Factors of Transformational Leadership*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Characteristic(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspirational motivation</td>
<td>Dynamic, Positive, Motivational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idealized influence</td>
<td>Foresight, Motive arouser, Trustworthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idealized consideration</td>
<td>Encourager, Confidence builder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Stimulation</td>
<td>Communicative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* The authors (Hartog et al., 1999) give no indication of how they would distribute the identified universal characteristics across the range of transformational leadership factors. Table 5 illustrates one approach. Of course, other interpretations and applications are possible.

These findings indicate that some of the characteristics normally identified with transformational leadership have universal application. Therefore, they could be appropriate variables in the construct of a cross-cultural leadership model.

To summarize, Bass's (1997, 2000) full-range model of leadership has become a widely accepted model for the expression of transformational leadership theory. Building on a foundation of transactional leadership behaviors (contingent rewards, active management by exception, and passive management by exception), it extends the leadership behavior continuum to include inspirational motivation, idealized influence, idealized consideration, and intellectual stimulation.

Despite the theory's wide range of popularity, a number of authors (Harvey, 2001; Keeley, 1998; Shamir, 1999) identify philosophical and theoretical weaknesses inherent in transformational leadership theory. These include: a lack of conceptual clarity, the validity of the MLQ instrument, over-emphasis on the trait characterization of leadership, tendencies toward elitist and antidemocratic behaviors, insufficient quantitative studies, and the potential to be abused (Northouse, 2004).
Nevertheless, transformational leadership is said to be universal across cultures (Bass, 1997). There are studies that support this claim, such as Gibson and Marcoulides (1995) and most importantly Hartog et al. (1999). The study conducted by Hartog et al. included 62 cultures. The results identified the following universal characteristics of transformational leadership: motive arouser, foresight, encouraging, communicative, trustworthy, dynamic, positive, confidence builder, and motivational.

These findings provide a sufficient incentive to include aspects of transformational leadership theory in the development of a contextualized model of cross-cultural leadership for West Africa. Our attention now turns to another aspect of that model: servant leadership theory.

**Servant Leadership Theory in the Cross-cultural Context**

Marcariello (2003) and Senjaya and Sarros (2002) emphasize the biblical grounding of the theory. Both authors point out that Jesus taught servant leadership 2000 years ago. These authors use Mark 10:42-45 as the foundational biblical reference to servant leadership. Marcariello points out:

> Christ's approach to leadership and the approach he commended to his disciples is one that glorifies God and serves the welfare of others. It does not seek personal glory for acts of service or manipulate subordinates to achieve the leader's self-interest. (Perils of leading by serving section, ¶ 4)

Marcariello continues to point out the “dark side” of servant leadership: it cannot be understood by those operating from power motives, and the servant leader may suffer from those who attempt to undermine the service motive of his or her leadership. On that basis, he offers a variable of servant leadership that is not discussed in other literature: opposition management.

Marcariello (2003) astutely points out the weakness of servant leadership when it is divorced from the power of God.

> Greenleaf’s work admirably grasps and applies the biblical model of leadership. However, it is developed in a way that strips it of its biblical roots and the comprehensive narrative in which it is embedded-God's glory, Christ, the cross, and redemption. The secular version of servant leadership also ignores the warfare that godly leaders . . . encounter as they pursue missions of service. (Management literature on servant leadership section, ¶ 1)

The academic study of servant leadership has been fueled primarily by Greenleaf’s (2002) writings. Aside from Greenleaf’s central axiom “the servant-leader is servant first” (p. 27), he does not provide a succinct definition of the concept. Rather, he weaves a descriptive tapestry in which scholars observe the threads of its theoretical construct.

**Servant Leadership as a Theoretical Model**

From a conceptual point of view, the works of Spears (1998) and Farling, Stone, and Winston (1999) stand out in importance. Spears proposes 10 characteristics (variables) of servant leadership. Farling et al., in their review of the literature, have identified five servant leadership variables. Table 6 provides a comparison between these two sets of variables.

Farling et al.’s (1999) primary objective is to make a clear connection between servant leadership and transformational leadership. In their narrative they elucidate their variables through the literature from both theories. However, they do not attempt to succinctly illustrate the relationship of their variables to those previously established in Greenleaf’s (2002) work or to the four factors of transformational leadership. Such clarity would be helpful in understanding how to build on their work to construct other models involving the variables of these two theories. Figure 2 illustrates one interpretation of how Farling et al.’s variables may stand in relation to the work of Spears (1998) and Greenleaf and those of transformational leadership (Bass, 1997).
Table 6
A Comparison of Servant Leadership Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spears</th>
<th>Farling, Stone, and Winston</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening: understanding and clarifying the will of the group, seeking to understand what one's body, spirit and mind are communicating.</td>
<td>Vision: knowing the unknowable, foreseeing the unforeseeable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy: recognizing special traits, talents, assuming good intentions even when behavior or performance is unacceptable.</td>
<td>Influence: forces and factors having significant impact on the thoughts and behaviors of individuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healing: tending to broken spirits, emotional hurts, helping persons become “whole.”</td>
<td>Credibility: consistent and observable correlations between actual behaviors and stated intentions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness: an integrated, holistic view of situations.</td>
<td>Trust: a multidimensional construct including competence, reliability, openness, and concern.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion: convincing others, building consensus.</td>
<td>Service: the idea, realization, and actualization of serving others as the highest motivation to leadership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptualization: thinking beyond day-to-day realities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foresight: The ability to foresee the likely outcome.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewardship: commitment to serving the needs of others in a non-controlling manner.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to the growth of people: acknowledging the intrinsic value of persons and nurturing their personal, professional, and spiritual growth.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building community: identifying means for building community in the work environment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Farling et al. (1999) state, “Servant leaders are indeed transformational leaders, and as such, possess the same variables” (p. 53). If servant leaders are transformational leaders, then the converse would also be true. Bass (2000) in his comments on Farling et al.’s work does not appear willing to go that far. He acknowledges that Farling et al. have identified “parallels” between servant leadership and transformational leaders. However, he asserts that servant leadership “goes beyond transformational leadership in selecting the needs of others as its the highest priority” (Servant leadership section). Bass may have insightfully identified the watershed difference between servant leadership and transformational leadership. In servant leadership, service is the highest goal—the end. In transformational leadership, the realization of the organizational vision is the highest goal—service is a means to that end. Further research is needed to verify this hypothesis.
The need for further research has been one of the main criticisms of servant leadership (Bass, 2000; Farling et al., 1999). To date, little empirical research has been undertaken to explain or verify the theoretical construct of servant leadership theory. Another criticism centers on the theory’s emphasis on discovering the group will. Critics propose that a group will may not exist, and that what people really want is a strong leader with a vision and a plan (Pollard, 1997). Proponents of the servant leadership theory point out that discovering the group will is actually the process of consensus building. Building consensus is important in West African culture. How will servant leadership fare in a cross-cultural setting?

**Servant Leadership as a Cross-Cultural Model**

Given the parallels established between servant leadership (Farling et al., 1999) and transformational leadership (Bass, 2000), the universal characteristics of transformational leadership (Hartog et al., 1999) are easily associated with servant leadership (see Figure 3 and reference Table 4). If one accepts these characteristic as evidence of transformational leadership theory’s validity as a cross-cultural model, one necessarily must accept servant leadership as a valid cross-cultural model.
In the cross-cultural sphere, Bordas (2001) illustrates the appropriateness and application of servant leadership in Latino culture which shares many characteristic with West African culture. Anyaoku (2004) and Nyabadza (2003) embrace servant leadership from an African point of view. Upon this basis, one can endorse servant leadership as a viable construct in the development of a cross-cultural model of leadership in West Africa.

The preceding discussion of servant leadership theory presents its biblical foundations and the necessity of connecting the biblical understanding of servant leadership with the contemporary management model (Macariello, 2003; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). A comparison of the primary conceptual studies highlights parallels between servant leadership and transformational leadership. (Bass, 2000; Farling et al., 1999; Spears, 1998). Finally, the connections between the universal characteristics of transformational leadership (Bass, 1997; Hartog et al., 1999) and servant leadership (Farling et al.; Spears) establish servant leadership as a viable model for cross-cultural leadership.
Divinely Empowered Transformational Servant Leadership: A Contextual Model for Cross-Cultural Leadership in West Africa

The preceding discussion establishes the viability of transformational leadership theory and servant leadership theory as appropriate constructs for cross-cultural leadership. Figure 4 harmonizes the characteristics of West African leadership (see Table 2) with servant leadership and transformational leadership. The harmonization of these three constructs strengthens the validity of servant leadership and transformational leadership as theoretical constructs in the West African context. There are two notable exceptions.

The West African leadership characteristics of “elevated from but chosen by the community” and “spiritual in essence and practice” have no clear association with servant leadership and/or transformational leadership. In order to account for these variables in a cross-cultural model, one must look outside the constructs of servant leadership and transformational leadership.

“Elevated and chosen” refers to hierarchical leadership structures which are often downplayed in Western applications of these theories. In regard to “spiritual in essence and practice,” it may be argued that servant leadership and transformational leadership have spiritual foundations or factors. This can be true depending on the individual leader. However, there is no explicit spiritual variable in the constructs of servant leadership or transformational leadership. Spirituality is integral to the traditional concept of West African leadership, and that underlying spirituality continues to bear influence in contemporary society.

Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament. Although many African languages do not have a word for religion as such, it nevertheless accompanies the individual from long before his birth to long after his physical death. (John Mbiti as cited in Hale & Hale, 2000, p. 11)

Elevated leaders and spirituality cannot be divorced from West African leadership. How can one account for these two characteristics in a cross-cultural model of leadership in the West African context?
Figure 4. A harmonization of West African leadership characteristics with servant leadership and transformational leadership.

West African Leadership

- Visionary & Charismatic
- Credibility through character, competence, and social justice. Strategy & Goals
- Encouraging Mentoring Participatory decisions
- Builds Community through Service
- Elevated and Chosen
- Spiritual in Essence and Practice

Servant Leadership

- Vision
- Influence
- Trust
- Service

Transformational Leadership

- Inspirational motivation
- Idealized influence
- Idealized consideration
- Intellectual stimulation
- ?
- ?
- ?
- ?
Divinely Empowered Leadership

Spiritual principles in Acts 2 offer a possible solution. Acts 2 establishes, through appeal to the Old Testament Scriptures and meticulous argument, the Divinity, Lordship, and Messiahship of Jesus. This chapter confirms the principle that “within the Kingdom of God, leadership is divinely conferred” (Hale, 2004, p. 16). In relationship to the characteristics of African leadership this principle can elucidate the characteristic of “Elevated and Chosen.” The divinely empowered leader is chosen and set apart for leadership by God which is then affirmed by the community of believers (Acts 13: 2-3). A second principle is that the Spirit empowers all God’s people to leadership potential (Acts 2:4). A third principle has bearing on West African leadership: the miraculous work of God in and through the leader’s life.

There are elements of [the divinely empowered leader’s] character, actions, and results that can only be explained by understanding the supernatural work of God in and through the leader’s life. The only way to explain the sudden transformation of the previously timid Believers into bold witnesses is by comprehending the work of God in their lives. (Hale, p. 18; Acts 2: 1-13, 43)

The principles of divine empowerment and miraculous results lead to an expression of leadership that is “spiritual in essence and practice.”

This section establishes the relationship between the characteristics of African leadership (see Table 2), the variables of servant leadership theory (Farling et al., 1999; Greenleaf, 2002; Spears, 1998), and transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1997, 2000; Bass & Avolio, 1990; Hartog et al., 1999). However, the characteristics of African leadership “elevated from but chosen by the community” and “spiritual in essence and practice” find no association with servant leadership and transformational leadership. Three principles from Acts 2 complete the model: (a) leadership conferred by God and confirmed by the Community of Believers, (b) empowerment by the Spirit, and (c) evidence of the miraculous work of God. Therefore, divinely empowered leadership, servant leadership, and transformational leadership work together to form a leadership model appropriate in the West African context. Figure 5 introduces this model.

Explaining Divinely Empowered Transformational Servant Leadership

The model consists of three major leadership forces: divine empowerment, service, and transformation. Each of these forces impact one or more of the five linked factors: obtain authority, earn credibility, establish trust, build community, and fulfill the vision.

Divine empowerment. Divine empowerment is the foundation of the model. It is through divine empowerment that one obtains authority. Leadership in the West African context is a spiritual act. In order to lead appropriately in this context, the cross-cultural leader must have a divine mandate. There must be character qualities and results that can be directly attributed to the work and blessing of God. The cross-cultural leader in West Africa should have a clear sense of God’s calling to his or her leadership role. This calling should be affirmed by the Community of Believers. The cross-cultural leader must be empowered by the Spirit; otherwise, the fruit of his or her labor will be in vain (John 15:1-8). Divine empowerment is the force that drives service.
Figure 5. A graphical model of divinely empowered, transformational, servant leadership.

Divine Empowerment

Obtain Authority
Conferral by God
Confirmed by Community
Empowered by the Spirit

Earn Credibility
Character
Competence
Social Justice
Strategy & Goals

Establish Trust
Mentoring
Encouraging
Participatory Decisions

Build Community
Through Service

Fulfill the Vision

Leader

Followers

Community

Service

Transformation

Empowerment

Earn Credibility

Establish Trust

Build Community

Fulfill the Vision

Leader

Followers

Community

Published by the School of Leadership Studies, Regent University
Service. Through service, one earns credibility, establishes trust, and builds community. In the West African context, genuine spirituality is the underpinning for credibility. Spirituality is manifested in moral character. As the leader proves his or her competence in leadership his or her credibility grows. One way to build credibility in the West African context is to give serious attention to addressing social injustices. Because of the communal nature of African society, Africans are more attuned to the ills of society and their consequence for the community than are many Western leaders. Having clear goals and strategies to address these social issues enhances one’s credibility. Naturally, as one earns credibility through service, trust is established.

The credible leader will also be a mentor and an encourager. Apprenticeships or mentorships are an important educational and skills development methodology in West Africa. The cross-cultural leader will do well to build these types of relationships with individuals and with groups. In doing this, one must spend time with people. To an African there is no greater encouragement than a person’s presence. For example, most persons from the US, when they are ill, (generally) want privacy. When Africans are ill they want people around them. They are encouraged by the presence of others.

A natural part of African community is decision by consensus. The cross-cultural leader should learn how to facilitate participatory decisions and build consensus. Genuine concern and thoughtfulness with individuals and with groups will build trust with West Africans. As one establishes trust, one will build community thorough service to individuals and groups.

Vision forms and finds momentum for completion through community. Thus, service leads to transformation.

Transformation. In most Western applications of transformational leadership, vision casting is a foundational activity. It focuses the group on the overriding goal to be obtained. It focuses the group on obtaining the overriding goal. Thus, vision casting assumes a task orientation. Vision casting explains what needs to be done and how to accomplish it. In this model, vision is the culmination of the process. West Africans will not be concerned about the task until they are certain relationships are right. If the leader exhibits the spiritual qualities that confirm his or her God-given authority, and through service earns credibility, establishes trust, and builds community, all of these activities will lead toward a group vision. Because the relationships are foundational and preliminary, once the group discovers its vision, the group exhibits high motivation and mobilization to achieve the vision. Divine empowerment drives service and now service begins to energize transformation. The leader, the followers, and the community find themselves transformed by achieving the vision though service. This evident transformation becomes verification of the leader’s divine empowerment. This starts the cycle again leading to new heights of credibility, trust, community, and transformation—individually and corporately.

Once a model has been proposed, its validity should then be tested. How can divinely empowered transformational servant leadership be empirically tested?

A Research Proposal
The pressing need is to verify the validity of the variable sets that make up the model: African leadership, servant leadership, and transformational leadership. To what extent do African leaders in reality recognize and practice the characteristics identified in Table 2? Do non-African cross-cultural leaders recognize and practice the characteristics of servant leadership and transformational leadership? In short the research must answer two questions:

1. Are the model’s variables viable?
2. Is the model effective in the field?

A mixed research design administered in two stages responds to these questions. The first stage verifies the model’s variables through a qualitative study. Stage two features a quantitative quasi-experimental study for
field testing and analysis of the model. Stage two also has a journaling component which adds another method of data collection.

Stage One: Are the Variables Valid?
For this stage of the research, a qualitative design is appropriate. A select focus group of 10 African leaders will meet for a collective interview. The interview will take place in 4 to 7 hours on a single day. The purpose of the interview is to discern the importance and employment of the hypothesized variables of the model. The group interview process is important because of the collective nature of African society. Africans tend to process information and be more creative in group settings.

The process will involve a semi-structured interview. An interview protocol will center the discussion on the expression of the model's variables in West African leadership. Audio and/or video recordings and written notes will document the interview data.

Stage Two: Will the Model be Effective in the Field?
This stage will consist of quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative approach will feature a quasi-experimental Pre-test—Treatment—Post-test design. A pre-test will be designed to measure the participants' perception of their current employment of the model's variables in their leadership style. A two-day workshop will be conducted on the theory and practical application of the model. Participants will be given a 4 month period to integrate the model into their leadership style. Following this integrative period, a post-test will be administered to measure the participants' perceived employment of the model in their leadership style. Specifically designed pre-test and post-test instruments will measure the variables of the Divinely Empowered Transformational Servant Leadership. The post-test will include the pre-test questions with some additional open-ended questions.

Additionally, each participant will maintain a journal. The journal will contain weekly entries describing the participants' experiences in implementing the model and its perceived value as a model of cross-cultural leadership in the West African context.

Summary
This paper proposes a contextualized model of cross-cultural leadership appropriate for the West African context. The model unfolds from the literature relating to the current leadership crisis in West Africa, West African culture, West African leadership, Servant Leadership Theory, and Transformational Leadership Theory. Generalized characteristics derived from the literature review describe West African culture and leadership.

An analysis of these general characteristics yields a composite list of West African leadership characteristics. These characteristics harmonize and integrate with the variable sets of servant leadership (Farling et al., 1999; Greenleaf, 2002; Spears, 1998), transformational leadership (Bass, 1997, 2000; Bass & Avolio, 1990; Hartog et al., 1999), and principles for divinely empowered leadership (Hale, 2004) from Acts 2. This integration produces the Divinely Empowered Transformational Servant Leadership Model.

In this model, divine empowerment fuels service through the development of credibility, trust, and community. Service builds relationships and stimulates corporate vision. The leader, the followers, and the community find themselves transformed by achieving the vision through service. This evident transformation becomes verification of the leader's divine empowerment. This starts the cycle again leading to new heights of credibility, trust, community, and transformation—individually and corporately.

In conclusion, a research proposal suggests a mixed research design administered in two stages to test the model. The first stage will verify the model's variables through a qualitative study. Stage two features a quantitative quasi-experimental study for field testing and analysis of the model. Stage two will also have a journaling component which will add another method of data collection.
References


Footnotes

1 This grammatical error has been preserved from the electronic source document.

2 MLQ: Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. The most widely used measure of transformational leadership.