

A Contextual Leadership Model for Indigenous Churches in Northern Brazil

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This research examines the history, culture, and leadership methods of the Ingarico Amerindian tribe of Northern Brazil. The leadership methods are studied with the goal of discovering a model of leadership among the Ingarico. In addition, this research examines the communication and teaching methods of the Ingarico to find a culturally relevant model for leadership training among the Ingarico. The Ingarico have a method of leading that is set within the Christian tradition. This model of leadership includes core themes like humility, a concern for the followers including a low power distance, an understanding of authority through the picture of a father, and a commitment to practical leadership. The Ingarico have an oral culture that causes them to use verbal, visual, and demonstration as forms of teaching, such as reenacting historical events. These forms of nonlinear teaching can be used to facilitate leadership development among the Ingarico and reflect a Biblical model of Shepherd leadership founded in the visual and storytelling concepts in teaching the Bible, using different aspects of the stories to teach leadership.

Introduction

Many of the current leadership models or theories have been developed in the context of the urban, industrial, fast-paced realities of the 20th century (Northouse, 2004). The models are also derived from a western context and worldview (House, Hanges, Javidian, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). These models include issues of power and influence and have been adapted to different cultural settings, to give rise to leadership development. Leadership has been studied across cultures, although how culture influences leadership and organizational processes is just beginning to be understood (House et al., 2004). While there is

no universal consensus on the definition of leadership, at the heart of the definition is an interest in influence and how leaders influence others (House et al., 2004). Leadership consists of practices that can be learned including modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart (Kouzes & Pozner, 2002). Leadership is a learned behavior, which means that it can be developed through training and guidance. However, the attributes that differentiate a culture are predictive of organizational practices and leader attributes and behaviors that are most effective in that culture (House et al., 2004). This cultural learned behavior for leadership, though sharing many qualities across cultures, will also be uniquely suited for the culture in which it is embedded. Leadership is more than a collection of traits; it is also the way of interaction contextualized in a particular environment. It is important to develop leadership in ways that are relevant to their specific context so that leaders can be effective in leading others in their particular contexts.

The Problem

Within the context of leadership studies and leadership training, there do not appear to be any models that fit the culture of the Ingarico Amerindians, since the current urban models of leadership have been created with a western worldview that is not shared by the Ingarico. These models do not fit their cultural context or their understanding of leadership. There are some studies concerning Amerindians (Olson, 1991; Peiffer, 2006; Pierce, 1992; Smalley, 1999; Steffen, 1990), but even these, though neither urban nor western, do not fit the cultural context of the Ingarico. In the area of Northern Brazil, there are several Amerindian tribes who live in a society whose culture is not part of the industrialized, urban, modern, or postmodern context. In one sense, the Ingarico have been excluded from Brazilian culture due to their location in remote villages that have been demarcated or set aside by the Brazilian government. However, in another sense, the Ingarico have been influenced by the Brazilian culture through government and church relations that have moved between antagonistic to violent, and then to advocacy (Astor, 2008; Moore & Lemos, 1999; *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Brazil*, 1997). In this context many of these Amerindians have become Christians, with cases of whole villages converting to Christ. The Ingarico have churches in these villages that need leaders. There are at least two reasons for this need of leadership: the first is that many of the churches have no leaders at all, except pastors who travel to them only periodically, and the second is that the leaders that do exist need training and experience to become effective leaders.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the customs, patterns, and perceptions of leadership among the Amerindians in Northern Brazil, specifically among the Ingarico. Comparisons will be made to the Biblical model of leadership from the perspective of the Amerindians. Additionally, this study examines the Amerindian methods currently used for training individuals in their villages. The problem is that the current urban models for leadership do not fit well in the Amerindian cultural setting.

There have been other studies of leadership focusing on church development among

tribal groups (Hogan, 1999; Patterson, 1999; Peiffer, 2006; Pierce, 1992; Sinclair, 2006; Smalley, 1999; Steffen, 1990) in areas of North America, Latin America, and Asia. In these studies, it has been discovered that leadership training is most effective using methods that include storytelling, mentoring, and “learning by doing.” Relational learning is most effective in producing indigenous leaders among tribal groups. Principles of contextualization are important not only in the understanding of leadership among tribal groups but also in training leaders among the indigenous peoples to lead in the churches. However, to this researcher’s knowledge, no one has studied leadership development among the tribes of northern Brazil.

The Scope and Questions of Amerindian Leadership

This study will be limited to interviews and discussions with a small sample of leaders among these Amerindian tribes, particularly from among the Ingarico. For breadth and comparative purposes, leaders from the Wapishana and Macuxi tribes will also be interviewed. However, this will not be an exhaustive study of leadership among the Amerindians of Northern Brazil. Rather, it specifically examines leadership in the church, focusing on the Ingarico peoples.

Research Questions

There are two related research questions:

- (i) What methods can be used to develop indigenous leaders among the Ingarico for effective church ministry?
- (ii) What models of leadership are most appropriate to leadership development among the Ingarico?

Though related, these two questions form the basis of the endeavor to understand the practice of leadership of the Ingarico, and to discover how to develop indigenous leaders for the churches among them. To explore and understand this concept of leadership, the phenomenological approach will be used in collecting data from the leaders of the Ingarico churches and organizations. Phenomenological studies seek to grasp and elucidate the meaning and essence of the lived experience about a phenomenon as described by participants, either groups or individuals (Patton, 2002). Therefore, individuals interviewed in this study are those living in Northern Brazil who are involved in leadership among the Amerindian churches north of Boa Vista, reaching to the borders of Guyana and Venezuela.

Leadership among the Amerindians

Tribal groups have been studied extensively in North and South America, as well as in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific Islands. However, up to this point, there have been no published studies of leadership among the Ingarico, though there are some private journals and notes from Jesuit priests and evangelical missionaries; but even these are rare. There is very little published concerning the Ingarico in any areas except for an occasional paragraph, typically about their

language (McQuown, 1955; Mosely, 2007; Olson, 1991).

However, other tribal studies offer insights that can inform the present study. Kraft (1996), an anthropologist, notes that Euro-American practice of leadership is out of step with most of the world, especially when combined with belief that primary instruction to leaders should be intellectual. This is particularly true when applied to tribal peoples. This is an issue that must be addressed to be able to contextualize leadership in indigenous churches. The answer is not to appoint Euro-American leaders, though they may have extensive training. Churches that appoint leaders without culturally-appropriate characteristics must realize that this procedure results in weak leadership and distorts the intended message (Kraft, 1996). Therefore in properly communicating the message of the gospel, tribal leadership must be understood. It is also important to note that an educational model having validity in one society may not easily be transferred to another (Kraft, 1996). Models for training that are indigenous become important for leadership training as well, especially among tribal groups whose cultures are quite distinct from the Euro-American cultures.

Leadership among the Ingarico

The Ingarico have not become absorbed into Brazilian society and have distinct villages among the demarcated areas of Northern Brazil, while some of their villages cross over the borders into Venezuela and Guyana. There are other tribes in close proximity to them, including the Yanomami, who also have not become absorbed into Brazilian society. In addition, there are two tribes who have separate villages but have been deeply influenced by Brazilian culture and language, but they still live in distinct villages.

The Ingarico have a chief over each village and there is at least one person who is the chief over all of the Ingarico village chiefs. There is no medicine man or shaman among the Ingarico (Chaterpal, 2009).

They have a long tradition of monotheism that goes back at least 400 years. Their tradition tells of a man named Precuma who lived about 400 years ago and had dreams of Jesus coming to him at night. He told the rest of his village of these dreams and about the one true God who had a son named Jesus. A few people believed him but most did not. He was killed by the tribe before he convinced them about the dreams. But, before he died, he convinced a few to believe in the one true God and told them that one would come who would tell them the rest of the story. Most of the tribe became believers in Precuma's story about the one true God, and developed traditions and songs based on this teaching, waiting for the one to come to tell the rest of the story (Chaterpal, 2009). This tradition has developed deep spiritual roots in the tribe, which impacts their view of leadership, in that they have no medicine man or shaman.

The Roots of the Ingarico Tribe and Culture

The Ingarico speak their own language and few speak the language of their political country, whether it is Spanish in Venezuela, Portuguese in Brazil, or English in Guyana. Their

language is understood by the other tribes of the area such as the Macuxi and Wapishana, and the Ingarico understand these other tribal languages as well. While the Macuxi and the Wapishana have a written language, the Ingarico do not, and though they understand the other languages, they do not read it.

Their worldview, much like those of other Amerindians, focuses on connection with the land and issues of hunting, farming, and fishing. In addition, they are a highly relational people, emphasizing community. However, their concept of the one true God kept them distinct from the other tribes, which continues to this day. Today, as believers in Jesus, they still have a strong oral culture and learn many things through dreams (Chaterpal, 2009).

Methodology

How do the Ingarico view or define leadership? From their perspective, how does leadership function and what are the important elements to be considered for leadership training? This study will be processed as a phenomenological approach, seeking to grasp the lived experiences of the Ingarico concerning leadership and training.

The Ingarico's Experiences of Leadership

The collection of data comes mainly from interviews. Those interviewed included Pastor Marcos, of the Ingarico tribe, who is one of the chief elders over all of the Ingarico villages and the Chief Pastor over all the Ingarico churches. He speaks only Ingarico, so the interviews were translated through Portuguese and Macuxi. Awan Chaterpal was interviewed; he has been a missionary to the Ingarico for eight years and lived among them for three years. He and his wife Jemima have also begun to write a book on the history and culture of the Ingarico. There were also several other Amerindians from the Macuxi tribe interviewed, Jose Pereira who is an Amerindian church planter, and Peter and Charlo, who work among several tribes, strengthening and planting churches in Guyana. This data was recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Leadership among the Ingarico

Pastor Marcos is the leader among the Ingarico villages and is recognized as both a spiritual leader and community leader. He works with the village chief in each village in developing the spiritual and community life of the people of the village. Since most Ingarico are believers in Jesus Christ, these two aspects of leadership converge in the practical life of the village. Their leadership style here is simple, practical, and straightforward in that all participate and all follow the leader's movements and words exactly, sometimes for extended periods of time. Also, leadership is delegated in that the father will teach the stories to the mother, who will teach it to the children.

Pastor Marcos explains:

In the Ingarico language there is no word for leadership and the Ingarico understand leadership through their captain—the captain is the leader and he is the one who gives

direction to the people and calls them together to work and tells them the plans for the future—they understand leadership as the word chief. I did not choose myself to be the leader, before my father died, the people elected me to be the leader. I am the leader of the Ingarico tribe in Brazil and in Guyana and in Venezuela. As a leader, I ask the Lord to help me and give me wisdom to lead this people and the Lord through the Holy Spirit has inspired me to be a leader among his people. (M. Ingarico, personal interview, July 23, 2009)

They have no word for leadership yet they understand the concept of leadership as represented as their captain or chief. They use the word *teshou* for chief or captain, but Awan says, “The word *teshou* is not even in their language; it is a borrowed word from the Macuxi. So they use that word but it is not really their word” (A. Chaterpal, personal interview, July 24, 2009). Even the word they use to represent their leaders is a borrowed word from another tribe. Possibly there is a humility here in not having a direct word to use for leadership. It is also noteworthy that Marcos mentions that he did not choose himself and that it is the Holy Spirit who inspires him to lead and to give answers.

The leaders are elected; however, once elected, Awan points out that they are in charge but with certain restrictions, “Whoever is elected as a leader of a village—after God’s Word, after God, he is in charge. He is completely in charge” (A. Chaterpal, personal interview, July 24, 2009).

Once elected, this chief will direct with absolute authority, and he will be supported by the elders who have authority over the Ingarico villages. However, his position is conditional based upon his lifestyle being one of godliness according to their understanding of Scripture. Marcos agrees, “The *teshou* is elected by the people and can stay the rest of his life if they serve the people well and are not involved in any kind of corruption or things that are a disadvantage to the people—because if he is in any kind of corruption or moral failure, the village will release him immediately” (M. Ingarico, personal interview, July 23, 2009). His leadership is also influenced by the work of the Holy Spirit inspiring and directing him in giving leadership to the villages and the churches. A recurring theme is one of dependence on the Lord for help in their leadership. According to Pastor Marcos:

So as the leader, I do the following: call the people together to make plans for community development in the village, and secondly as a leader to make plans for the future – what they are going to do in the future. Thirdly I sit with them and share dreams and inspiration that I have received from God about the communities and they will respond. (M. Ingarico, personal interview, July 23, 2009)

The approach to leadership among the Ingarico includes the making of no distinction between the physical world and the invisible world or the spiritual; it is leadership that includes daily living and spirituality together. They are very concerned for the future and the community as

well as the spiritual health of the people of the villages. In concern for the future, there are glimpses of transformational leadership but with a focus on spiritual leadership as well. Their way of leadership is practical yet spiritual; it is connected to a godly life, the work of the Holy Spirit, and their daily connection to living in the community.

Pastor Marcos clarifies the understanding of the Ingarico concerning their leader, “He functions as a guide to the people, as a father to the people. That is actually an Ingarico word seeing leadership as a father. Guiding his people, taking care of his people, seeing that they are taken care of and that they are treated well” (M. Ingarico, personal interview, July 23, 2009). Here the picture of leadership continues as a shepherd much like the biblical exhortations in John 21 where Jesus instructs Peter to “feed my sheep” showing the picture of one who nurtures and cares for people.

Jose, Domicinio, Peter, and Charlo noted differences between the Ingarico and the other tribes, in that the other tribes had been absorbed by Brazilian culture and their leadership was separated between spiritual and community, and Jose mentioned that the Wapishana language and culture was disappearing. The leadership structure among the other tribes was at one time very similar to the present Ingarico system. Once the system was displaced by another system of leadership, the culture and the distinctiveness of the tribes began to disappear (Chaterpal, 2009).

Leadership among the Ingarico involves humility, godly character, care for the people, and an ability to give direction as authority under God. Leadership is practical and connected to daily living, deeply spiritual in dependence on the Lord for guidance, connected deeply to the community, concerned for the future, and the picture is that of a father. Pastor Marcos adds, “Between the people and leadership, there is no difference; they do things together, they have communal meals together, they communal farming, they go out to hunt together, and their culture is such that they all do things together” (M. Ingarico, personal interview, July 23, 2009). Finally, due to the community involvement and daily practical aspects of leadership, there is a very low power distance between leader and follower.

Table 1 – Key concepts and expressions of leadership among the Ingarico

1. Humility	“I did not choose myself”
	“Their ways are no better than the way of others”
2. Godly character	“An honest person ...without corruption”
3. Dependence on the Lord	“I ask the Lord to help me and give me wisdom”
	“I share the dreams I have from God”
4. Care for the people	“Seeing that they are taken care of and treated well”
5. Directive	“He is the one who gives direction to the people”
6. Authority under God	“After God, he is in charge”
7. Practical, daily living	“If this person is involved in the day to day activities”
8. Spiritual	“Does he have an intimate walk with Christ”
9. Community	“If this person is a community person is he with the people”
10. Concern for the future	“He calls them together and tells them plans for the future”
11. Picture of a father	“He functions as a guide... a father to the people”
12. Low power distance	“Between the people and leadership there is no difference”

Leadership Training and Development among the Ingarico

The observation concerning the way the Ingarico teach is by hearing and repetition as in learning new songs and new stories. The stories they learn of their history and the Scripture are repeated many times in different settings. Each morning they would get up early and sing then tell stories of God that would be repeated in the home. Also in the villages there are leaders who help Marco in the churches and these are the things he said that are important for them to learn.

Concerning their method of teaching, Marcos says:

In our culture, the hub of everything is Christ. It is from Him flows everything else, whether it is farming or hunting or working in the garden or whatever. Christ is the hub of everything – all of the training revolves around Him. The second thing is that teaching about farming is a practical demonstration or hands-on experience, they will show them how you plant this, how this is grown, what is this for —how do you do this? It is all hands-on and spoken. Thirdly, the way we teach the children and young people is to ask the Lord for inspiration and in my mind’s eye there is like an open book, a written book, and I talk from that from which I see and use that illustration in my mind and teach from that illustration. Singing is all part of the culture; it is an expression of something we have already learned, we sing and dance because of something in us. It is an expression of what’s in our mind. The other thing is that I write songs as well as other leaders within the churches; we come up with new songs and we will put it together – put words together in a song and sing it. (M. Ingarico, personal interview, July 23, 2009)

The training is very practical with spoken explanations as well as practical demonstrations. They use illustrations that are seen in the mind then expressed to help the learning process. Also singing is used to express something they know but is passed on to others.

Awan furthers the discussion, particularly in the practical aspects of training explaining some of the things they use for teaching helps, “They use a lot of craft and marking and rocks. Among them are a lot of historical markings and rocks that dates back hundreds of years” (A. Chaterpal, personal interview, July 24, 2009). Training for them takes on a visual form in crafts, painted rocks, and carvings. Singing is not only a major part of their worship but also speaks of daily activities, teaching not only about God but also about protection and practical activities.

Table 2 – Ingarico Communication and Teaching Methods

1. Spoken explanation	“It is all spoken”
2. Repetition	Observation – hearing and repetition “Put words together in a song then taught to

	young people”
3. Hands on demonstration	“Teaching is practical demonstration or a hands on experience”
4. Verbal illustrations	“I see the illustration in my mind and teach that illustration”
5. Visual expressions	“Painted rocks and crafts... a form of teaching” “Carve on a rock one who is a great hero”
6. Singing	“Many of their songs are about hunting... farming” “Expressing something we have learned”
7. Telling stories	“One who represents a great hero, what he did – great hunter”

Conclusion

Leadership among the Ingarico includes several important attributes. However, none of the theories of contemporary leadership capture the diverse aspects of Ingarico leadership. Since they constantly refer to Scripture in their ways of leadership and training, perhaps there is a model there in the life of Jesus. Key elements of Ingarico leadership derived from this preliminary study include:

- Biblical characteristics are important—humility, godly character, dependence on the Lord, and a Christian spirituality
- There is a concern for the followers—care for the people, concern for the community, and a low power distance
- An understanding of authority though there is no word for leadership—authority under God, they are directive, and use the picture of a father as a leader
- There is a concern to lead in practical areas—of daily living and a concern for the future
- Their communication and teaching methods are verbal, which includes repetition, verbal illustrations, singing, and telling stories
- Their communication and teaching methods are practical, including hands-on demonstrations
- Their communication and teaching methods are visual yet without a written language, including use of visual arts and painted rocks.

Jesus uses many metaphors to explain who he is and his form of leadership; however, one of the central pictures of Jesus as leader is that of shepherd.

Table 3 Leadership of Jesus in John 10

1. Humility	“I lay it (my life) down of my own accord”
2. Godly Character	“The good shepherd lays down His life”—not a hireling
3. Dependence on the Lord	“This command I received of my Father”
4. Care for the people	“That they might have life and have it to the full”
5. Directive	“They too will listen to my voice”
6. Authority under God	“I lay it down and take it up again”—command from Father
7. Practical, daily living	“Through me he will come in and go out and find pasture”
8. Spiritual	“Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father”
9. Community	“I know my sheep and my sheep know me”
10. Concern for the future	“Whoever enters through me will be saved”
11. Father down my	“Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—I lay life for the sheep”
12. Low power distance never	“His sheep follow him because they know His voice—they will follow a stranger”

The Shepherd Leadership Model

This is not only a biblical model but a culturally relevant model for the Ingarico to train leaders for their churches. This model of leadership is not only culturally sensitive, it is based in the leadership model of Jesus, who actually intended others to lead this way after he ascended. This model may be different than the current leadership models but this model could inform the practice of leadership in other contexts as well. This model can be used to strengthen the leadership of the Ingarico for the churches and communities, based on their existing models but strengthened and stretched through this shepherd model of leadership.

The Model for Training

Training among the Ingarico is unique due to its oral culture and rich spiritual background. There is an illustrative aspect of their training that would be addressed by using pictures, drawings, and modern media, such as PowerPoint slides. Other aspects would include telling stories and particularly useful would be telling stories of Scripture, expressing truths from the stories, helping them write songs about the stories, and using hands-on crafts to express the stories. The Biblical concept of repeating a story from a different perspective as seen in Genesis, chapters 1 and 2, or in Kings and Chronicles could also be useful. There is a concept of teaching the Bible chronologically story by story that is used among many tribal groups (Sinclair, 2006). This would be effective in teaching the Ingarico, with some additions for using repetition and hands-on experiences. This method could take longer but it finds good precedent in the mentoring of the disciples by Jesus.

Leadership among the Ingarico is spiritual, Christian, and yet practical. Leadership does

not have to be separated from Christian spirituality. Scriptural Christian leadership is not only a western construct found in the United States, but is found among the Ingarico, who have little connection to western culture. This practical form of leadership has implications for leadership studies generally. Leadership models can include Christian spirituality, not as an external addendum but as an integral part of the model. Christian spirituality is not just a western construct, but it is a model that has applications in non-western cultures as well as western. In fact, the origins of this type of leadership are in the rural world of the East and Israel, not the western urban world. It is not just that the Ingarico can use a biblical model for leadership since it is culturally contextual, it is that Christian spirituality, as found in the Scriptures, has a practical leadership model that possibly has applications for different cultures.

Future Research

Research for the future could examine the stories of the Ingarico looking for recurrent themes. In these themes, the researcher may find details concerning heroes and their concepts of human or leadership greatness. This would answer the question not only of expressed or desired leadership characteristics but also implied leadership characteristics in the implied culture of the Ingarico. This research could include an experiment with sequential bible stories to measure its effectiveness in leadership development.

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