Tradocratic Leadership Style and Its Imperative for African Development: Towards a Theory of Leadership for Africa

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Abstract

The paper examined the leadership dilemma faced by the African continent in its quest to make meaningful progress and development since independence from colonial Europe. After more than half a century of self-determination, many African countries are still in search of a leadership model that can lead their people out of excruciating poverty, bad governance by a privileged few, looting of the public treasury, political instability, economic crisis, infrastructural decay, non-functional educational systems, high crime rates, and opportunistically tyrannical leadership. It is noteworthy that African countries trying to practise the western democratic leadership style, as being practised in Europe and America, have had tremendous challenges as cultural differences were not considered in adopting such models. The tradocratic leadership style being proposed in this article combines the ideals of African traditional leadership styles, the traits theories, the Ubuntu philosophy and western democratic ideals into a truly African model of leadership that is culture and value-based. It is a conceptual study based on a comprehensive review of existing historical books and articles, management and leadership studies by previous authors. Conclusion drawn from the study indicated that the tradocratic leadership style, if adopted, could be the rescuing model that can transform Africa and place the continent on the path of development.

Keywords: Tradocratic, Ubuntu, Traits, traditional, democratic.

1.0 Introduction

The construct "Tradocratic" is coined from two words, 'traditional' and 'democratic'. It represents a new thinking towards building a theory of leadership best suited for African people. It seeks a complementarity of both approaches to leadership by blending what is compatible with African culture in western democratic values and the traditional African way of life. Africa is inundated with western leadership philosophies that have become deeply entrenched in our consciousness as well as our school curricula. This acceptance of the supremacy of western ways of doing things, and the subsequent abandonment of traditional African cultures and values have left the continent confused and still in search of a model of leadership that can lead her people out of poverty, misery and underdevelopment. Obasola (2002) notes that no nation can make any meaningful

social, political and economic progress without good leadership. Venter (2004) warns African leaders against the imposition of western values on African culture.

Having good leaders to rule in post-colonial Africa is a rarity. This perhaps explains why some well-meaning individuals instituted awards to reward exceptional leadership on the continent (Salawu, 2011). The Mo Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership, despite its attractiveness, has not swayed the selfish, corrupt and mostly power-drunk leaders that transverse the African continent. The award is the highest achievement-based award anywhere on earth including an initial USD5million deposit and an annual sum of USD 200,000 for life to the recipient. The award is aimed at promoting good leadership and deserving recipients are presidents or heads of governments who deliver security, health, quality education, economic empowerment and respect for human rights to their citizens. The first award went to Joaquim Chizanno, then president of Mozambique, in 2007 for bringing peace and democracy to his war-ravaged country. 2008 saw Festus Mogae of Botswana receiving the award for his outstanding economic and political transformation of Botswana despite ravaging HIV/AIDS pandemic in the Southern African country. No African leader was considered qualified for the award in 2009 and 2010. But in 2011, Pedro Pires of Cape Verde got the award for transforming the tiny island nation to a fledgling democracy. Hifikepunye Pohamba of Namibia was the recipient of the award for 2014. In 2015 and 2016, no leader was found qualified to receive the award.

Traditional African leadership styles applied by ancient kingdoms such as the Ubuntu in Southern Africa, preached social justice, interconnectedness, love, peace and egalitarianism (Nzimakwe, 2014). The Umunna, in the eastern part of Nigeria ensured team spirit, peaceful coexistence and co-prosperity (Ifechukwu, 2010). African cultures value having a symbolic head that everyone looks forward to as the leader. Such a person must be strong; should command respect and loyalty from the followers, and must care for the welfare of the citizens. It was believed that leaders were ordained from above and as such, must be revered and honoured by the subjects. While some cultures favoured group decision-making and teamwork, others sought for leadership and direction from the supreme leader. In Nigeria, the Ooni of Ife, the Oba of Benin, Alaafin of Oyo were some of such feudal lords that ruled their kingdoms successfully for many centuries by passing the mantle of leadership from father to son. Ancient Ghana, Mali, Songhai, Axum, Ethiopia, Egypt and Great Zimbabwe were equally governed by strong leaders. Such empires and kingdoms relied heavily on the traits theory which presupposes that leaders are born, not made (Stogdill, 1974). And as such,

the ruling house ordained by God should continue to produce the king or leader who must be strong, aggressive and self-confident.

Democratic or participative style of leadership is consonant with western democratic values. It involves consultation with subordinates on proposed actions and decisions (Weihrich, Cannice & Konntz, 2011). It presupposes equality of all, rule of law, and consensus building. These values are not altogether alien to Africans, as can be seen from the tenets of Ubuntu and Umunna leadership philosophies. But, the very idea of neglecting the role of that 'great man' as the symbolic head is not valid in most African cultures. Africans want the man who can act as a go-to-person, who is capable of defending them in times of crisis or even war and who can provide their needs and render any other necessary assistance whenever the need arises. That is a true leader to an African.

But the western world hates the idea of the one 'great man' no matter how benevolent he may be or how much personal sacrifice he makes to ensure a better society and improved welfare of his people. Late Colonel Muammar Gadhafi of Libya exemplified a semblance of tradocratic leadership (although not in every aspect) when he took his country to enviable heights in human and infrastructural development. Gadhafi was no doubt a strong man given his military background but his reign was cut short by western instigated rebellion from east of the country. Till date, six years after his death in 2011, Libya has had neither peace nor a functional government.

The objective of this study is to seek solutions to African leadership dilemma, by navigating worthwhile leadership practices from both African traditional leadership practices and western democratic models and prescribing a leadership style that is consistent with African culture, based on African ideals and values, to fast-track the development of the continent.

1.1   Statement of the Problem
The numerous challenges bedevilling the African continent, including poverty, corruption, tribalism, advanced fee fraud, high crime rates, unemployment, election rigging, insecurity, drug trafficking and religious intolerance, to mention but a few, call for insightful re-examination of our inherited western democratic leadership and governance practices. Such practices do not resonate with our African cultures and traditional ways of life. Democracy (as being practised in Africa) paves way for the imposition of leaders by an elite class or through outside affiliation. Such leaders may neither have the qualities nor the experience to lead. Quite often, their policies and programmes are at variance with the

realities of the society and the actual needs of the followers. Due to inexperience and lack of leadership readiness, they make their societies worse than what they met. With failure staring them on the face, the leaders run for foreign assistance whose prescriptions further alienate the leaders from the led. The disaffection and unrest that ensues culminate in agitation for change and subsequent termination of tenure.

It is in the light of the foregoing that the tradocratic leadership model is intended to bridge the leadership gap and make prescriptions for a truly African leadership style that is culture and value-based for the ultimate development of the African continent.

2.0   What is Leadership?
Leadership is all about transformation. It is an influence process that builds trust and confidence between the leader and the led in order to achieve some goals (Blanchard & Hersley, 1977; Robbins & Sanghi, 2006; Weihrich, Cannice & Koontz, 2011). It involves charting a course and direction for the future well-being of the citizens or the organization. This will involve developing a clear vision and communicating that vision to the followers and inspiring them to buy into the vision (Koontz & Weihrich, 2006; Newman, 1997). The leader must thus harness and align energies, utilise resources – men, machines, money, methods and materials for the attainment of the vision.

2.1   Trait Theories of Leadership
Trait theory of leadership is consistent with African traditional belief that leaders are born not made. It considers personal qualities and characteristics that separate real leaders from usurpers. 'The great man' concept applies in identifying leaders from non-leaders in Africa as leaders stand out from the crowd. For people to lead successfully, they must possess outstanding qualities such as energy, intelligence, charisma, assertiveness, self-confidence and a domineering personality. Such people must be good at getting along with others and exact their obedience and support without coercion. This enables them to get what they want from their followers willingly.

2.2   Traditional African Leadership Styles
Human beings lived in what is now known as Nigeria since about 9000 BC and evidence abound that they led themselves well and practiced some form of management (Olusoji & Ogunkoya, n.d). Traditional African societies led their people successfully by adhering to the culture and societal norms and values of the African people. Leaders in pre-colonial Africa were usually strong, fearless

and humane men chosen from the royal lineage by the kingmakers. But the imposition of western values that came with the long period of colonial administration left people with altered thought processes and experiences (Adegboye, 2013). Unfortunately, the kind of leadership or management practices that may have evolved without the experience of colonialism in countries like Nigeria is open to speculation (Ifechukwu, 2010). Many African empires thrived under successful leadership. For instance, the Axum Empire (100-940AD) dominated most of East Africa extending to modern day Yemen and Saudi Arabia. The empire traded and extended its influence to China and India and was regarded as one of the four superpowers of the time. In the same manner, ancient Egypt constructed the pyramids through outstanding management and leadership prowess around 2900BC. It is worth noting that one pyramid required the joint effort of 100,000 men, working for 20 years, covering 13 acres of land, using 2.3 million blocks, each weighing an average of 2.5 tons (Oghojafor, Ademola & George, 2012).

2.3 Ubuntu Leadership Philosophy

Since the end of apartheid in South Africa, Ubuntu was embraced by the blacks to bring about a stronger sense of unity and human dignity which was so brutally denied during the apartheid era by the ruling white minority.

Ubuntu is a traditional African philosophy that promotes the dignity of man. It is believed to be a Xhosa word meaning humanness. It presupposes a link between every human being and through mutual interaction; we discover our own human qualities (Manda, nd). The Ubuntu mantra in Zulu language goes thus: "Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu" meaning that we are only humans because of others. This reflects the interdependence, collaboration, co-existence and cooperation that Ubuntu epitomises. Nussbaum (2003) argues that Ubuntu is the cultural means by which Africans express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity. It is a call to sharing joy and sorrow, as well as, co-prosperity.
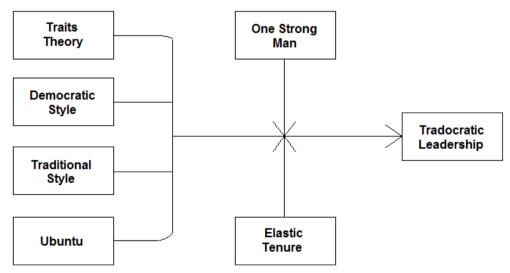
2.4 Democratic Leadership Style

This leadership style, otherwise known as participative leadership gives others a chance to participate, contribute and exchange ideas. The democratic leader listens to his followers, cherishes contribution from others and allows freedom and liberty (Obisi, 1996). Democratic leaders encourage suggestions and flow of information from group members and do not discriminate among group members (Asika, 1995).

2.5   Conceptualising Tradocratic Leadership

Tradocratic leadership is a call to service and not a despotic suppression of subordinates or followers. It recognises 'the great man' who is committed to serve his people in a humane, caring and compassionate manner but with undiluted authority. The leader exercises control and exacts obedience from followers through his actions and people-oriented activities. The leader must be seen to be powerful and awe-inspiring in order to command respect from the followers. Such a leader must be capable of standing up to face challenges that threaten his followers even if it constitutes a threat to his life. Such a leader must be a person of high integrity, dignity and unblemished personality. He leads by example through a simple and frugal lifestyle devoid of misappropriation of public wealth for personal benefit.

Tradocratic leadership involves being a good shepherd, building trust, confidence, sacrifice, humanness and interdependence between the followers and their leaders. Leadership must be transparent, moral, credible, just, honest, caring and purposeful. It must be devoid of deceit, discrimination, tyranny, and affluence of a privileged cabal. While being firm, it must be consultative and participative, although the final decision will remain the prerogative of the top leader who must be seen to act in the best interest of the majority.

Conceptual Framework

Source: Author, 2017.

The conceptual framework shows the link between the different interacting leadership philosophies like the traits theories, democratic leadership style, traditional African leadership model and the Ubuntu philosophy. With the virtues of these leadership models led by one strong man and given an elastic tenure, the combination will produce tradocratic leadership.

3.0   Methodology
The study is purely conceptual as it relies on published texts and articles for secondary data. It employs a qualitative approach using narratives that belie the interpretivist philosophy. Rieder (1985) opines that the interpretivist method seeks to understand issues from personal observation and in-depth interviews. This is unlike the positivist approach which believes in the existence of facts that can be tested and verified through scientific means.

4.0   Discussion
4.1   Why Africa Needs Tradocratic Leadership
Africa is a continent without a cultural identity in its leadership practices. Rather, the inherited western democratic leadership models externally imposed have not brought any meaningful development to the continent. Nussbaum (2003) notes that African values could contribute meaningfully to world consciousness, but people in the Western world misunderstand Africa due to lack of written records, the betrayal of Africans by most of their leaders and the love for negative information about Africa by western countries. The new millennium brought a wave of conflict, turbulence and discontinuous change to Africa and this has resulted in leadership failures and agitation for change (Suarez & Oliva, 2005 as cited in Ncube, 2010). Bekker, 2007 (as cited in Ncube, 2010) argues that there is an urgent need for an indigenous, innovative, value-based leadership approach in Africa. Leadership style must align with the culture, traditions, norms, values and beliefs of the people; else the followers will feel alienated. Tradocratic leadership is all about blending the ideals of African traditional leadership practices with western democratic values to create a leadership style that is practical, clearly understood and consistent with African culture. Leadership is all about winning the trust of the followers and getting them to voluntarily accept the vision created by the leader; align their energies and work towards the realisation of the vision.

If the leader must succeed, he must clear hurdles. Hurdles come from the inherent resistance to change and the tendency to maintain the status quo. The way and means to achieve a meaningful transformation is situation-specific and varies among different cultures. Quite often, a fairly long period of experimenting, re-working, adjusting and implementing is required to achieve the desired results.

Kwan Yew took almost thirty years to achieve the Singapore of his dream. China is seen as a success story today. Their approach is culture-specific and time elastic. Late Colonel Muamar Gadhafi of Libya and late Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso were great African leaders with a vision for transformation based on African ideals. Both leaders fell to the bullets of assassins aided by western conspirators who never see anything good originating from Africa than imposing their western democratic ideals on other cultures.

Ubuntu is a home-grown African management and leadership philosophy based on African collectivist tradition and culture. It is a Xhosa word meaning humanness. Africans are known to be humane, compassionate and interdependent. Ubuntu goes deep into the real African values of peaceful co-existence, compassion, cooperation, collaboration, consensus building, co-prosperity and the promotion of the dignity of man. But the absence of a clear strong leader that stands out of the crowd at every level of leadership makes the implementation of the Ubuntu ideals a near mirage. South Africa, the birthplace of Ubuntu has not been able to implement the tenets of Ubuntu like every other Bantu tribe all over Africa. The absence of a clear leader to direct the Ubuntu prescription has led to deep-rooted rivalry and power tussle within the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa.

Democratic leadership style is a product of the highly individualistic western cultures. It is no respecter of individuals but the supremacy of institutions. Democracy creates room for freedom, equality and equal opportunity for people to aspire to any height. It provides the platform for unfettered participation, although the institutions which form the bedrock of democracy place limits and constraints to individual actions. For instance, the four-year tenure of elected political office holders in Nigeria and some other democracies is a clog on the wheel of effective performance. Many good leaders that have made history had longevity of tenure as the main tool that facilitated the actualisation of their vision. But democratic governance terminates tenure with constitutional limits no matter how good intentioned such a leader might be. Even the private sector is not spared of tenure specification under the governance code recently rolled out by the Central Bank of Nigeria to leaders of financial institutions.

The tradocratic model being prescribed in this article draws heavily from African culture, the Ubuntu philosophy and the western democratic leadership style. Successful leadership is achieved by selecting the right leadership style which is contingent on the followers' level of readiness (Hersey & Blanchard, 1974; Hersey, Blanchard & Johnson, 2001). The tradocratic leadership style is an attempt to blend such African ideals of collectivism, collaboration, cooperation,

compassion, empathy, trust and humanness with participation, freedom of choice, unfettered opportunity and consultation to produce a truly African leadership model. The model must create room for a 'strong man' with leadership qualities and an elastic time frame to tackle challenges and realise agreed objectives. To select such a leader would be the responsibility of a committee or council as exemplified in ancient Benin kingdom, (*Uzama ni hiron*) or old Oyo empire (*Oyomesi*) who were then responsible for selecting who emerges as a king.

Leadership traits such as energy, ambition, intelligence, job-relevant knowledge, ethicality, being articulate and self-confidence must be considered in choosing a leader. And the search for such traits must not be limited to the ruling class or some privileged individuals. There must be equal opportunity by everyone to be selected through a democratic process.

4.2 Principles or Fundamental Assumptions of Tradocratic Leadership

1. The 'strong man' as a leader: A leader must be perceived to be strong, assertive, awe-inspiring and courageous to exact obedience from followers.
2. Trust, confidence and ethics: The leader must be a person that exudes trust, self-confidence and ethical behaviour.
3. Longevity of Tenure: Any leader who performs to the expectation of the people should not have the tenure truncated early as long as he/she continues the good work.
4. Law and Order: A leader must believe in and be guided by the rule of law as well as respect for constituted authority.
5. Emotional Intelligence: A leader must score high on emotional intelligence. He/she must be empathic, compassionate and kind to followers.
6. A Driver of Change: The leader must be visionary and ready to lead a genuine transformation.
7. Survival of the individual and the state: The leader must be passionate about the right of individuals to a good life as well as the development and progress of the state.
8. Participation, consensus building and teamwork: The leader must believe in, and practice participative style of leadership which will involve consensus building and teamwork without diluting his authority.
9. Interdependence and interconnectedness: There must exist the spirit of interdependence and interconnectedness among leaders and followers. The relationship that exists is such that none is complete without the other.

10. Promotion of key cultural values: The leader must exemplify the supremacy of African culture, norms and values.

4.3 Operationalizing Tradocratic Leadership

The starting point for the successful implementation of tradocratic leadership is the process of identifying potential leaders. A Leaders' Selection Council (LSC) has to be established just like the traditional *Oyomesi* in ancient Oyo Empire or *Uzama ni hiron* in ancient Benin Kingdom. Membership of the LSC must be men and women of proven integrity who will never compromise standards for personal gains. At every level of society, such a council must exist to recommend a leader who passes through a thorough scrutiny and deemed to have satisfied the prescribed criteria for becoming a leader. The criteria or guidelines for leader selection will be strictly based on the tenets of tradocratic philosophy. For instance, the personality characteristics based on traits theories such as the Big Five Model like extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness to experience (Robbins & Sanghi, 2006); as well as other personality factors such as self-confidence, intelligence, sociability, energetic and articulate. Having satisfied such characteristics, the true African leadership requirements consistent with cultural norms and values are people who display interest in collectivism, being humane and compassionate, display good neighbourliness, respect for law and order, cooperation, team spirit, collaboration, enthusiasm, empathy and strength of character. Such a person must come from an unblemished family background and he or she must have been a good community person.

For any leader recommended for appointment by the screening council, a replacement will also be made readily available to ensure smooth succession in case anything unusual happens to the incumbent or is forced to abdicate the position. The same LSC will also act as a watchdog over leader behaviour and performance. Any violation of the constitution will be immediately pointed out for correction but failure to act in good faith or intentional violation of the tenets of the tradocratic philosophy will lead to severe punishment as may be prescribed by the council or, as may be enshrined in the tradocratic constitution.

5.0 Conclusion

The paper examined the tradocratic leadership style as an alternative model that can accelerate development in Africa as previous attempts to practice western democratic leadership style have left the continent in stagnation and confusion.

Real progress in human and infrastructural development has remained a mirage in most African countries due to bad leadership. With a culture and value-based model of leadership that promotes the dignity of the human person, uses participation and consensus building in selecting and deciding what is good for the people, the tradocratic leadership style, is perhaps, the panacea that the continent needs to liberate its citizens from the strangulating hold of poverty, disease, oppressive leadership and underdevelopment.

5.1   Limitation of the Study
The study is still a work-in-progress. It must be tested by practicing the tenets of tradocratic leadership before it can be adopted as a leadership model for African people. More research needs to be conducted on the subject by including studies of other African cultures before concrete generalisations can be made.

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