

Leadership Development in Africa – Part I

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In my [last article](#), I highlighted the latest thinking in the area of western leadership development and the deployment of training programs in a corporate setting. In this short article, we will discuss some specific approaches to leadership development for public and private organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa.

I would like to welcome Dr. Paul Rono as my co-author. With Paul's experience as a university lecturer and my experience as leadership developer for numerous private and public companies in Africa, we think we can give the reader a good 'blend' of effective leadership development for African managers.

Natural Leaders?

The leadership and philosophies of African political leaders have affected institutions and companies in various African countries for many years. For example, charismatic leaders were believed to be those who have the natural capacity and personality traits or qualities to lead. Hence, leaders were said to be born or natural “great men.” Traditionally, leadership was said to be an attribute of personality. Born or charismatic leaders become real leaders because they have such personality qualities but also: ambition, patience, pride, humility, wisdom, friendliness, dependability, force, endurance and, of course, managerial competencies.

Modern Functional Leadership is essentially to facilitate the interaction within a group to achieve preset goals, to realize the organization's strategic objectives. Such functional managers or leaders are usually nominated, appointed and selected from among equals.

If people utilize proper and effective managerial tools and motivation, performance and effectiveness increase considerably. Of course, this is also applicable to African managers and leaders acquiring or possessing modern functional leadership skills in a target achievement and ‘productive’ environment.

Successful Leadership Behaviour

The elements enumerated above are essential to successful leadership behaviour. The successful leader is:

- Sensitive to the feelings of others, helpful, responsive and friendly.
- Loyal to his ideals and ideas and respectful of the beliefs, rights and dignity of others.
- Strong in his/her feelings of self-confidence and ability to identify easily with co-workers and supervisors.
- Enthusiastic when informing others about the introduction of a strategic program.
- Takes interest in improving the group and get work done and avoid envy and jealousy.
- Endeavours to give others the benefit of doubt and or advantages and firm but not proud or stubborn in making judgments and decisions. They are sincere and straightforward.
- Embraces change in their departments and don't avoid reasonable risk taking.
- Manages individual performance and steer their subordinates on a regular basis.

Successful African Leaders Competencies

The modern African leader or manager should be more 'democratic' in his/her relations with subordinates and at the same time maintain the necessary authority and control in the organization or institution for which he/she is responsible. The somewhat less modern African leaders rely on collective accountability. Good (thus effective) leaders inspire people/staff to perform optimally if necessary individually or as a team. The best African leaders, despite their many differences in personality, practice certain principles like delegation, creativeness, networking, individual accountability and decision-making.

What are Effective Leaders?

- **They take an interest in employees and communicate clearly and transparent.**
- **They keep morale high. They encourage team spirit. They also give a feeling of being respected and being needed. They awaken enthusiasm and motivation.**
- **They use commands sparingly. They avoid giving orders such as, "Do this!", "Stop this," or "Do it this way." They request, not demand.**
- **They show respect and faith to subordinates. They show the same consideration they would like to receive and show interest to others.**
- **They welcome suggestions and prompt employees to think creatively. They avoid the phrase: "Yes but..." which generally is considered as a: "No!"**
- **They handle grievances fairly. They act fairly. No favourites when assigning work. They are impartial.**
- **They express approval. They show appreciation and complement, but they allow a certain level of mistakes made.**
- **They create highly productive teams, delegate tasks wisely, and step aside.**

- **They develop their people to enable them to prepare them to achieve more challenging goals.**

Characteristics of Effective Leaders

The nature and style of functional (managerial) leadership greatly influence job satisfaction and motivation. Effective leaders show consideration for employees and enable them to have a sense of participation in decisions that affect them and they will have the following characteristics:

- Sensitivity to the individual problems people face on the job.
- Availability and openness to people in need of help.
- Sympathy with adverse conditions in the work environment.
- The ability to establish more than a boss-worker relationship.
- Above all delegate challenging tasks to their subordinates.

Highly productive leaders tend to spend more time than less productive managers to:

- Motivate and inspire their employees and provide structure.
- Keep employees informed.
- Get ideas and suggestions on important matters before going ahead.
- Try out new ideas with them.
- Show consideration for their needs.
- Coach their workers individually.
- Develop and train employees for increased responsibilities.

Managers and Leadership Development

Most leaders want to be more effective in their leadership. Some think they only need to learn techniques, others assume that they can learn a magic formula or foolproof method. Effective functional leadership implies an intensive development process. Some of the ability comes as a result of experience, some by learning from mistakes, by profiling from the experience and mistakes of others, from personal insights and by learning managerial skills.

To become truly effective African Managers and Leaders they will have to be developed through sustainable leadership competency programs that offer training with a difference. (See [“Trends in Leadership development” Part II](#)). These development efforts should be highly interactive, aimed at leadership and managerial competencies such as delegation and responsibilities acceptance. These customized interventions are generally short (maximum 4 to 5 days) followed up and coached by their superiors, i.e. the participants should be given room to ‘experiment’ with their newly acquired skills.

In Summary

It is certain that African countries will grow and develop in the coming years; look at the example of the pace of growth of mobile phone networks and coverage. Efficient

infrastructures, systems and processes are put in place. However, just this is not enough; *Inspiring Functional Leadership* is an absolute necessity for growth. Sustainable investment in the modern development of African managers and leaders is primordial. In order to accelerate and maintain growth in Sub-Saharan Africa we must put in place the right learning work environment and formal, high-impact development possibilities.

In our next article, Paul and I will go deeper into specific competency development aspects such as the ability to delegate tasks, sense of responsibility and speeding up the execution of tasks, again related to African managers and leaders.

More About the Authors

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Dr. Rono is a lecturer at [Kenyatta University](#) in Nairobi. He is an authority on leadership development, and has published various articles related to leadership development in Africa with a progressive yet adoptable and realistic view. Watch for his new website coming soon!