**THE APPLICATION OF “AFRICAN” LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES IN INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP**

**Introduction:**

Recent leadership thinking and training has shifted from an entity (leader, or leader-follower), subject-object individual reality based or human capital focus, to focusing on the relationships and relational practices in the collective and increased inclusion of all the interconnected systems, or multiple reality based, social capital focus (McCauley, van Velsor & Rudderman, 2010).

Both “African” Leadership, and Inclusive Leadership’s mayor focus is on collective relational practice or social capital, are in line with the latest leadership thinking and leadership development practices.

**Purpose:**

In this paper I critically analyze the collective relational principles and practices of “African” Leadership and explicate the applicability of most of these in Inclusive Leadership practice.

**“African” Leadership Principles and Practices:**

While Africa is not a homogenous group, and sensitivity to the diversity of cultures and contexts is required in leading people in Africa, research is beginning to show that there might be broad underlying elements and commonalities across African cultures (an African philosophical thought system – or Ubuntu) that can inform leadership thinking and practice. These include deference to authority, paternalism, extended family obligations, hospitality, mutuality, solidarity, filial piety, and emphasis on harmony, compassion, acceptance, relational practice and a collective interdependent ethos. Ubuntu, literally translated, means: "I am because we are". It is an expression of collective person-hood and collective morality. Simply put, it implies encouraging individuals to express themselves through the group - through group support and commitment, acceptance and respect, cooperation and consensus, caring, sharing and solidarity (Booysen, 1999; Kamoche, 2010; Karsten & Illa, 2005; Newenham-Kahindi, 2009; Mbigi, 2005; Walumba, Avolio, & Aryee, 2011). While Ubuntu does help in affirming interconnectedness, a collective web of relationships, and relational practice, it can also lead to some discriminatory practices since it is heavily focused on extended family and group obligations, paternalism, and deference to authority and status, which can culminate in in-group favoritism, oppression, sexism, high levels of power stratification, and stifling of individual aspirations (Booysen, 2009; Newenham-Kahindi, 2009).

**Inclusive Leadership:**

It can be argued that inclusive leadership extends our thinking beyond assimilation strategies, or organizational demography to empowerment and participation of all, by removing obstacles that cause exclusion and marginalization. Inclusive leadership involves particular skills and competencies for relational practice, collaboration, building inclusion for others, creating inclusive work cultures, partnerships and consensus building and true engagement. Different from exclusive workplaces where individuals or groups need to conform to pre-established “mainstream” ways of doing and value systems, inclusive workplaces are based on a collaborative, pluralistic, co-constructed, and coevolving value frame that relies on mutual respect, equal contribution, standpoint plurality, and valuing of difference (Ferdman, 2010, Mor Barak, 2011).

Leaders are, by nature practitioners, so they are busy with the “doing” all the time, which is contingent on their “knowing” and “being”. Following Vaill’s (1996), Riggio’s (2008) and McCauley, et al.’s (2010) thinking on leadership as learning coupled with Wheatly’s, (2007) notions on leadership as relationships, and Uhl-Bien’s (2006) emphasis on relational practice, leadership can then be viewed as practicing learning in relations and context. It is an ongoing cycle of collective learning; knowing, being, and doing, (learning) together with others (relations) directed, aligned and committed towards shared outcomes within specific constraints (context). In the same vein, I want to define inclusive leadership as: An ongoing cycle of learning through collaborative and respectful relational practice, that enables individuals and collectives to be fully part of the whole, directed, aligned and committed towards shared outcomes, for the common good of all, while retaining a sense of authenticity and uniqueness (Booysen, in print).

In this paper I will focus on how Ubuntu principles if practiced in an inclusive non-discriminatory way focusing on both the social and individual units, can enhance inclusive leadership.

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