Views on Effective Leadership from Insiders and Outsiders

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Introduction

What African managers consider effective leadership may not be the same as what is seen as effective by expatriates. As part of the LEAD project, insights from local African leaders (insiders) and expatriate leaders (outsiders) were researched. We found that there were very few differences and mostly commonalities between insider (locals) and outsider (expatriates) leaders interviewed. Some commonalities included: using an authoritarian leadership style, sharing a clear vision, and understanding and respecting the culture, norms and taboos of the people, and the business environment to gain acceptance. In this article, insights to culturally-appropriate effective leadership are provided. Implications include incorporating best leadership practices from other parts of the world into African organizations.

As outlined in the first paper in this issue and elsewhere (Aseidu-Appiah, Agyapong, & Lituchy, 2017; Lituchy & Punnett, 2014; Lituchy, Galperin & Punnett, 2016; Mengitsu & Lituchy, 2017; Metwally & Punnett, 2017) the LEAD research project uses an emic-etic-emic research cycle. This paper presents initial results of the second round of emic data collection, interviews with local leaders and expatriate leaders, “insiders” and “outsiders,” respectively. These interviews sought to understand the two groups thinking on effective leadership and to identify commonalities and contrasts between them.

Thinking in the leadership field has evolved substantially over the past century. Current leadership theories and models of effective leaders focus on transformational, visionary, authentic, and adaptive leadership (Avolio, Walumbwa & Weber, 2009; Northouse, 2016). Avolio et al. (2009) identified the field as becoming more universal, with more constructive leadership practices being incorporated into the leadership research, the follower becoming essential in the system, and growing interest regarding antecedents of leadership, e-leadership, and shared leadership in organizations. Leadership today is viewed as a complex process that evolves in organizations. This view can account for some of the unexpected similarities. Northouse (2016) identified multiple dimensions of trait, skills, behaviors, situational approaches, path-goal, leader-member exchange, transformational, authentic, servant, adaptive, psychodynamic, and team leadership. This illustrates the complexity of understanding what makes an effective leader. Avolio et al. (2009) note that “new leadership models emphasized symbolic leader behavior; visionary, inspirational messages; emotional feelings; ideological and moral values; individualized attention; and intellectual stimulation.” However, charismatic and transformational leadership have been the most frequently researched theories over the past 20 years.

The focus has still remained on this relationship from the viewpoint of Western leaders (Van Vugt, Hogan, & Kaisar, 2008; Zhang, et al., 2012). The cross-cultural literature suggests that further research is required in many under-researched areas (Lituchy & Punnett, 2014; Zhang et al., 2012), and Africa has been singled out for attention. This research needs to be independent of prevailing Western organizational models, to generate better understandings of leadership effectiveness in Africa. In addition to understanding local leadership in Africa, the issue arises as to what makes an effective expatriate. When expatriate leaders use the cultural norms and expectations of leadership from their home country and attempt to operate in that framework in a new country the results are often different than anticipated (Cox, Lobel, & McLeod, 1991). Osland (2008: 10), in a direct comparison of domestic and expatriate work, found that “expatriates reported significantly higher demands for social and perceptual skills, reasoning ability, and adjustment- and achievement-orientation personality requirements in their work.” Cultural norms vary among different groups depending on the profession or sector. This explains how an expatriate leader’s behaviors in a new country can be misunderstood by their employees, whom are accustomed to different cultural norms (Cox, et al., 1991).
The Current Project

The aim of this paper is to compare and contrast insights on effective leadership from two different perspectives: local leaders (insiders) and expatriate leaders (outsiders) working in several African countries (Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda). This approach can contribute to an African-centered, culturally appropriate understanding of effective leadership. Insights from both insider and outsider leaders can also be incorporated into practice.

As part of the larger LEAD study, 17 insiders (local leaders) and 16 outsiders/expatriates were interviewed. Participants included a CEO, managers, financial officers, professors, deans, administrators, broadcast journalists, a public service director, an inspector, an auditor, bankers, government officers, advisors, and self-employed people. The sample was a purposive non-probability sample that targeted people in leadership positions who could provide the desired information. The participants were told that data collected would be used exclusively for research purposes.

Open-ended questions examined the participants’ views about leadership in their countries of residence, challenges faced, and suggestions/advice that they could give to existing leaders, future leaders, and expatriates. These questions were asked to insiders in each country: What is your description of the leadership style in the country you live in? How is this similar to or different from what you observe in foreign visiting managers? What leadership style is most effective in your country? What advice regarding leadership style would you give foreigners coming to your country? These questions were posed to outsiders: To what extent do you have other international experience (living and working outside the home country)? What similarities (to home country) in leadership have you observed in the host African country? What differences (from home country) in leadership have you observed in the host African country? What are your perceptions of the leadership style that is most effective in the host African country? Describe some leadership challenges that you have had in the host African country? What advice regarding leadership style do you have for other foreigners going to the host African country?

Participants were contacted by phone or email. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in English. Content analysis was used to organize and synthesize the data and identify the relevant commonalities and differences between the groups.

### Table 1: Commonalities and Differences between Insiders and Outsiders*

| Commonalities | Insiders % | Outsiders % | Differences | Insiders | % | Outsiders | % |
|---------------|------------|-------------|-------------|----------|---|----------|---|
| Spend time understanding followers’ ideas, problems, complaints | 18 | 13 | Expats should avoid condescending attitudes that suggest that as a foreign manager they know better than locals | 41 | | |
| Be firm, dictate work, command people, and adopt an authoritarian leadership style to get work done | 59 | 13 | Pay more attention to the basic rights of employees, have good communication skills, and be less disappointed when dealing with subordinates | 6 | | |
| Share a clear vision | 35 | 19 | The relationship between leaders and subordinates is influenced by their personal relationship with the subordinates, which is in-turn influenced by religious and ethnic ties | 6 | | |
| Allow mistakes to happen for people to learn | 12 | 6 | The traditional African style of leadership remains the most effective...for democracy and concern for human rights to mature to the next level in most parts of Africa, there will need to be some modifications | 6 | | |
| Do not tolerate malpractice | 12 | 25 | | | | |
| Delegate authority gradually, respect authority | 6 | 6 | | | | |

* 17 insiders (locals) and 16 outsiders (expatriates)
There were very few differences between the insiders (locals) and outsiders (expatriates). One difference was that insiders (41%) thought that outsiders should avoid condescending attitudes that suggest that as a foreign manager they know better than locals. This was not mentioned by outsiders (see Table 1).

Some commonalities include: Be result-oriented, goal-driven, and well-trained and skilled (76% insiders; 44% outsiders); Be serious; fair; honest; respect time; and show integrity in terms of managerial and public leadership (47% insiders; 50% outsiders); A mixed leadership style is appropriate (59% insiders; 19% outsiders); Be firm, dictate work, command people, and adopt an authoritarian leadership style to get work done (59% insiders; 13% outsiders); Focus on capacity-building, developing subordinated, and accountability (35% insiders; 31% outsiders); and, Share a clear vision (35% insiders; 19% outsiders).

In addition both insiders and outsiders thought expatriates should: Understand and respect the culture, norms and taboos of the people, and the business environment, in order to gain acceptance (35% insiders; 44% outsiders). An outsider stated, “The traditional African style of leadership remains the most effective mainly because it is familiar. However, for democracy and concern for human rights to mature to the next level in most parts of Africa, there will need to be some modifications to the traditional African style of leadership.”

All of the preliminary findings are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 presents commonalities in conjunction with differences between the two groups, and Table 2 lists the remaining commonalities. The information presented includes more commonalities than originally anticipated but this could be due to the small sample size.

Although “commonalities” refers to factors that were mentioned by both groups, it is also relevant to consider the differences in emphasis. For example, being firm, dictating work, and so on was more important to insiders (59%) than it was to outsiders (13%), and showing respect to subordinates was more important to outsiders (50%) than it was to insiders (24%). These differences in emphasis are worthy of further exploration.

### Conclusion and Implications

Although we are at the beginning of this phase of the research and the findings are limited and need to be expanded, they support those of earlier emic and etic studies (Lituchy et al., 2017), and other studies on leadership (Avolio et al., 2009; Northouse, 2016; Osland, 2008; Van Vugt et al., 2008). For example, while many of the insiders and outsider said they use an authoritarian or mixed leadership style, they also suggested using many aspect of transformational leadership. This is also similar to the LEAD Mexico results (also in this issue), where both insiders and outsiders stated that managers who exhibit transformational behaviors are more effective leaders.

While it was anticipated that transformational leadership would be prevalent, a greater difference was expected since most Western expatriates bring their individualistic home country view into an African setting, which is often more

### Table 2: Commonalities between Insiders and Outsiders

| Commonality                                                                 | Insiders % | Outsiders % |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------|
| Be serious; fair; honest; respect time; and show integrity in terms of managerial and public leadership | 47         | 50          |
| Show respect to subordinates                                                | 24         | 50          |
| Understand and respect the culture, norms and taboos of the people, and the business environment, in order to gain acceptance | 35         | 44          |
| Listen to everyone who has been there long-term                            | 6          | 38          |
| Consider the level of education upon dealing with people                    | 10         | 6           |
| Give clear instructions and directions                                        | 12         | 19          |
| Constantly check progress                                                   | 18         | 19          |
| The relationship between local leaders and their subordinates should not be influenced by their personal relationship | 24         | 13          |
| A mixed leadership style is appropriate                                      | 59         | 18          |
| Be result-oriented, goal-driven, and well-trained and skilled                | 77         | 44          |
| Hiring practices should focus on competency instead of personal relationships and nepotism | 18         | 6           |
| Focus on capacity-building, developing subordinated, and accountability      | 35         | 31          |
communal. In this limited study this key difference was not highlighted, however further research should be conducted with larger sample sizes to more extensively discuss how this factor can possibly cause miscommunication or misunderstanding between expatriate leaders and local workers.

Indeed, further research is needed in Africa, as well as the African Diaspora. This distinction is crucial as the views of Africans and those in the African Diaspora, with the largest populations in Brazil, the United States, and Haiti, for example have different cultural norms and perspectives that may create differing views on effective leadership. These groups have been extensively studied separately and concurrently in historical contexts, yet not in terms of leadership effectiveness.

This initial study provides some early insights on effective leadership that may be used to advance cross-cultural leadership theory as well as practice. Implications of these insights suggest incorporating effective leadership practices from other parts of the world into African organizations.

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The risk of insider threats compared to outsider threats is an ongoing debate, though more companies are taking notice of the risks that insiders can pose to the company's data security today than in the past. Historically, the data breaches that make the news are typically carried out by outsiders. While these breaches can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars (often millions more), outsider threats are generally the threats that have been addressed with traditional security measures. To gain more insight into the threats posed by insiders vs. outsiders and how companies can effectively mitigate these risks, we asked a panel of data security pros to answer this question: "What's more of a threat to a company's data security: insiders or outsiders?" Insiders often complain that they are at lower salaries compared to newly recruited outsiders. To bid the compensation above their market value, insiders must convince the firm that there is a credible threat of their departure. A credible threat is when the firm believes the insider would leave and wishes to retain them. This exacerbates the compensation differences between outsiders and insiders as, all other things being equal, the average market value of the former is higher. Since it is natural human tendency to feel undercompensated (see my blog: Should Data on Salaries be Transparent?) and have positive illusions (see my blog: How Do We Perceive Ourselves?), the entry of high profile outsiders may bring considerable envy and heartburn. We then examine new-genre leadership theories, complexity leadership, and leadership that is shared, collective, or distributed. We examine the role of relationships through our review of leader member exchange and the emerging work on followership. From the perspective of the insiders and outsiders, this study explores the influence of differential leadership on employees' affective commitment and the moderating effect of leader's self-enhancing humor and individual traditionality. The results show that the differential leadership has a positive impact on the organizational affective commitment of employees, the leader's self-enhancing humor and the employees' traditionality play a positive regulatory role respectively. Effective leadership is almost always one of the main and primary drivers for growth, development and innovation. And take note, leadership isn't about the titles, or even the accolades. Effective leadership is much more meaningful, impactful and profound. It's earned and worked for. There is no set formula or step-by-step plan, it depends on the culture and needs of the organization. What is leadership? The dictionary version of leadership is "to lead a group of people or an organization." But it's not as simple as that. Leaders throughout every rung of the organization ladder are integral to Leadership styles are inherent or they develop with time and practice. It is more than a position of authority. Good leadership is a choice. Leadership styles are how a leader guides a team through different stages. These styles dictate how a leader implements plans, provides guidance, and overlooks work. Based on different personalities and methods, there are many different styles. "The greatest leader is not necessarily the one who does the greatest things. He is the one that gets the people to do the greatest things."