Attributes of Leadership Effectiveness in East Africa

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Introduction

Leadership effectiveness in East Africa is becoming increasingly important, leading to new initiatives and investments in recent years. In 2014, then-President of the United States of America Barack Obama announced the creation of four leadership centers in Kenya, Ghana, Senegal, and South Africa as part of his Young African Leaders Initiative to improve the availability and quality of training programs and professional development opportunities. This paper summarizes the findings from the LEAD research project in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, which suggest both similarities and differences in perceptions of leadership effectiveness. Participants from the three countries describe effective leaders as people who are visionary, goal-oriented, and results-oriented. Further, the tribe/language, sense of community, and traditions are important cultural dispositions in all the three East African countries. The study can assist managers and academicians to better understand how leadership effectiveness is perceived by East Africans and help managers to better prepare to succeed in their leadership roles.

Eastern Africa comprises 20 varied territories (United Nations, 2016); however, East Africa often refers (especially in English) to Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, colonial territories of British East Africa and German East Africa. This region is the fastest growing in Sub-Saharan Africa with average GDP growth of 6.2% in 2015 and a combined population of 148 million people (EAC, 2015). Christianity is dominant, although other major religions include Islam and Hinduism, and many people still believe in the ancestor world. From a business perspective, the ease of doing business is getting better, but still needs to be improved. According to Hofstede (2015, 2016) Kenya and Tanzania score high on power distance, while Uganda scores lower, suggesting

that Kenyan and Tanzanian societies accept hierarchical order with distinct places in the power relationships, while Ugandans have a low acceptance of inequality in power relations between leaders and followers. All three countries are collective, showing a preference for working collaboratively with others. On masculinity, Kenya is highest, followed by Uganda, with Tanzania lower suggesting that Kenyan and Uganda societies are more competitive and achievement-oriented, while Tanzanians emphasize quality of life and wellbeing. Kenyans and Tanzanians are indifferent toward uncertainty, whereas Ugandans generally have less tolerance. Data on long-term orientation are only available for Tanzania and Uganda, where both countries score low, suggesting that they maintain their links to the past and traditions. There are no data on indulgence for Kenya and Uganda; Tanzania has a low score, suggesting restraint. These scores are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Cultural Dimensions: Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda
Scores by Country

Cultural Dimension	Kenya	Tanzania	Uganda
Power Distance	70	70	38
Individualism	25	25	30
Masculinity	60	40	57
Uncertainly Avoidance	50	50	56
Long Term Orientation	-	34	20
Indulgence	-	38	-

Source: Hofstede, 2016

The Current Project

Kenya and Uganda were part of the Delphi research of the LEAD Project. In Kenya, two rounds of Delphi were used to achieve convergence. There were ten participants in the first round and six participants in the second round. All were born in Kenya, had a post graduate education, and worked in a variety of industries. In Uganda, two rounds of the Delphi were conducted. There were 23 participants in the first round and 16 in the second round; 22 were born in Uganda while one had lived there for 26 years. Participants worked in a variety of occupations and industries. Participants from both countries highlighted their ethnic group/tribe and language as important cultural characteristics. Kenyans described their ethnic and cultural background as being aggressive, hardworking, and cosmopolitan; Ugandans used words including *foods*, *cultivated land*, and *language* as descriptors of culture. Regarding effective leaders, participants highlighted vision, and being goal- and results-oriented. They described effective leaders as being able to inspire and motivate subordinates. Leaders were also seen as motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, including achievement and monetary rewards. In Kenya, a motivator for leaders was the joy of success, in Uganda it was the community.

One focus group was conducted in Kenya, with six participants (one female, five male). Two had master's degrees, three were pursuing doctoral studies, and one participant held a PhD; they came from various occupations. Similar to the Delphi, findings show cultural/ethnic background as part of a tribe and sense of community/belonging. Participants perceived effective leaders to be visionary, team leaders, results-oriented, influencers, and change agents. Example of what motivated leaders to lead were the need to serve and succeed and financial rewards.

Based on the findings from the Delphi and focus groups, a survey was developed that included the personal characteristics of an effective leader, leadership style, leadership behaviors, delegation and authority, and traditions and gender. To date, the survey has been administered in Uganda and Tanzania. In Uganda, 85 people participated; the majority worked full-time (98.8%), 61% were male, and almost 66% had completed a graduate/postgraduate degree. The average respondent was 38 years old and had nine years' work experience. In Tanzania, 221 people participated. All were professionals working in the public and private sectors; the majority worked full-time (87.8%); 67% were male, and 42% had completed a graduate/postgraduate degree and 40% an undergraduate degree. The average respondent was 37 years old and had 11.57 years work experience. All respondents were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential.

Discussion

Our findings suggest both similarities and differences in the perceptions of effective leadership in the three East African countries. In line with collectivism, the tribe/language, sense of community, and traditions are important cultural dispositions in all the countries. According to our findings, this suggests that East African countries would prefer leadership styles that are consistent with communal traits rather than individualistic characteristics mostly found in Western countries. Extant literature suggests that a directive leadership style is more likely in collectivist cultures where the interest of the group supersedes that of an individual. A supportive leadership style is also used due to the emphasis on group relations and follower well-being. In Western, individualistic cultures, a directive style is less advocated in favor of more participative leadership, delegation of authority, and charismatic and transformational leadership (Wendt et al., 2009).

Both the qualitative and quantitative results indicate that leadership characteristic/attributes (e.g., being a team leader player) and leadership style (e.g., goal- and results-oriented,

Table 2: Cultural and Leadership Dimensions for LEAD East African Countries

Cultural Dimension	Kenya	Tanzania	Uganda
Role of Tribe/Group	✓	✓	✓
Language	✓	✓	✓
Sense of Community	✓	✓	✓
Traditions	✓	✓	✓
Ethnic/Cultural Background	• Aggressive • Hard-working • Cosmopolitan	-	• Foods • Cultivated Land • Language
Leadership Dimensions			
Visionary Leadership	✓	✓	✓
Goal-Oriented	✓	✓	✓
Results-Oriented	✓	✓	✓
Team-Leadership	✓	✓	✓
Servant Leadership	✓	✓	✓
Motivator for Leaders	• Joy of Success	-	• Community

visionary and servant leadership) are key factors of leadership effectiveness in East Africa. Consistent with the cross-cultural leadership literature, our data suggest that effective leaders display both directive and supportive behaviors; however, more recent research suggests that there may be a shift toward more supportive leadership behaviors which emphasize charismatic leadership, servant leadership and team leadership (Bagire, Begumisa, & Punnett, 2017).

While leadership in East Africa may generally be described as directive, East Africans recognize the need for supportive styles which can inspire and motivate followers to bring about a positive change. These supportive leadership approaches are consistent with the Anglo-American leadership theories of: (1) team leadership, which suggests that the leader's role is to facilitate the team's dynamics in order to improve team effectiveness (Norhouse, 2004), and (2) servant leadership, as described by Greenleaf (1991), which is based on the assumption that leaders view themselves as stewards and serving their followers.

Some theorists suggest that the move toward more supportive leadership styles, with a decreased emphasis on directive leadership, is due to globalization and the move to flatter organizations regardless of cultural context (Jogulu, 2010), which is consistent with the GLOBE project which argued that inspirational and team-oriented attributes are found in effective global leaders (House et al., 2004). Others suggest that colonization has impacted African patterns of leadership and urge Africans to adopt more Afro-centric perspectives of leadership (e.g., Nkomo, 2011). Hence, future research should further explore indigenized models of leadership which can provide more culturally-oriented models. Our results also suggest that past traditions and gender can play a role in leadership effectiveness in the East African context. An overview of the leadership dimensions in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda are summarized in Table 2. A comparison of East African leadership styles and Western-based leadership concepts are summarized in Table 3.

Conclusion and Implications

The preliminary findings of the LEAD study on culture, motivation, and leadership effectiveness have both theoretical and practical implications. In the future, international business (IB) researchers should further explore the role of cultural and tribal traditions on leadership effectiveness. For example, researchers may examine how Maasai (a tribe located in southern Kenya and northern Tanzania) leadership principles can contribute to leadership effectiveness in organizations. IB researchers should also further explore how personal characteristics (e.g., gender) impact perceptions of effective leadership in various African organizational environments (e.g., for profit, non-profit, and in government). In addition, IB researchers should establish and examine

Table 3: Summary of LEAD Findings
A comparison of East African leadership styles and Western-based leadership concepts/theories

East African Leadership Style/Aspects	Western-Based Leadership
Emphasis on directive leadership	Emphasis on participative leadership (Wendt et al., 2009)
Being a team leader player	Team leadership (Norhouse, 2004)
Stewards to followers	Servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1991)
Visionary leadership	Charismatic and transformational leadership (Wendt et al., 2009)
Traditions	
Gender Differences	Gender Equality

those dimensions of servant leadership that have the greatest impact on leadership effectiveness in East Africa. We therefore encourage researchers to examine the specific aspects of tradition, personality and leadership styles to bring out more clarity on how culture, motivation and personality inform leadership effectiveness in East Africa.

Our findings show that having respect for traditions, developing appropriate personal characteristics, and adopting a visionary and servant leadership style are important elements of effective leadership and would thus contribute to the success of organizations in East African. These results can assist managers to better understand how leadership effectiveness is perceived by East Africans in general, and further explore between-country differences. Based on these findings, human resource managers should focus on further developing the important leadership characteristics and styles associated with effective leadership in East Africa, in general, and for the specific East African countries.

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