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Beyond Eurocentrism: Developing an Ubuntu-based Framework for Leadership and Engagement

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Abstract

Grounded in an African humanist philosophy and values, this conceptual paper advances the Afrocentric value system of Ubuntu as a new paradigm for organisational leadership that complements and corrects the Eurocentric bias of mainstream leadership theory. Building upon previous scholarly work and insights from an earlier empirical study, the core Ubuntu values of humanness, solidarity, compassion, and dignity and respect are synthesised into a cohesive leadership ethos, articulating their theorised impacts on organisational life. A model is developed proposing that Ubuntu leadership fosters employee engagement and, through this mechanism, improves organisational effectiveness (e.g., financial, customer, internal process, and learning/innovation performance). Comparisons are drawn between Ubuntu and related Western models, particularly servant leadership, to clarify its conceptual uniqueness while acknowledging potential synergies. The paper contributes to theory by (i) positioning Ubuntu as a legitimate, generalisable lens for leadership in plural societies; (ii) specifying testable propositions linking Ubuntu behaviours to employee engagement and organisational performance; and (iii) answering calls to decolonise management knowledge through an indigenous, values-based framework. Practical implications include leadership development designs that embed Ubuntu practices (relational respect, collective sensemaking, shared accountability) to promote high performance, inclusive, and high-trust organisational climates. The paper concludes by proposing future directions for research to validate the model cross-culturally and across different sectors, to refine the measurement of Ubuntu leadership, and to examine contingencies. By reframing leadership from "I" to "we," Ubuntu offers a human-centred pathway to sustainable performance and social well-being. The author calls for testing and refinement of this paradigm.

Keywords: Collectivism; Decoloniality; Humanism; Organisational Behaviour; Management