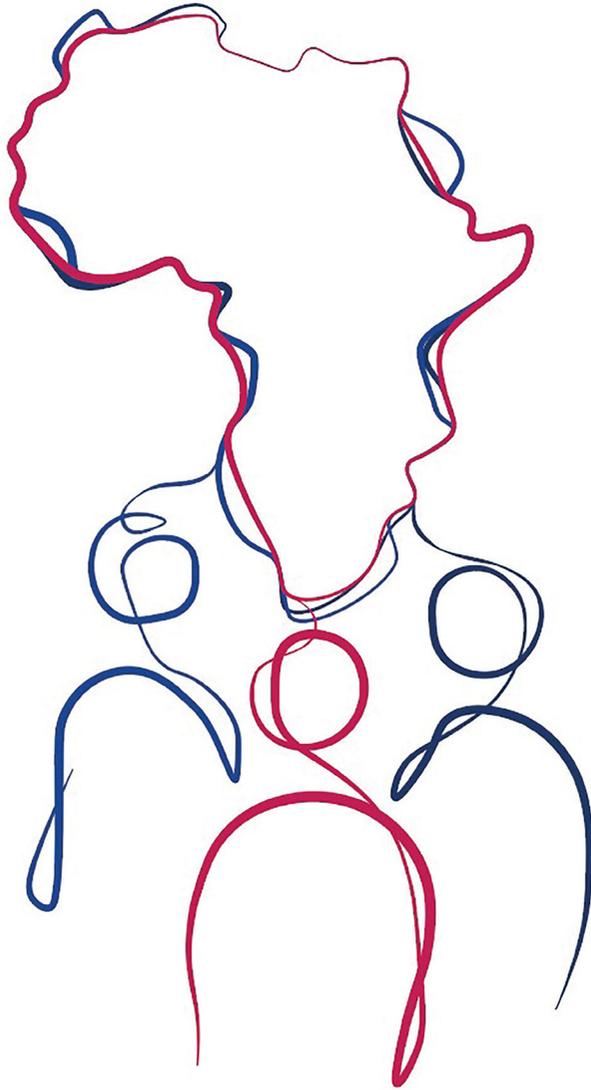# AFRICAN LEADERSHIP

Powerful Paradigms for the 21st Century

Rob Elkington • Faith Wambura Ngunjiri • Gloria J. Burgess
Xoliswa Majola • Erwin Schwella • Nico de Klerk

Editors

African Leadership

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African Leadership: Powerful Paradigms for the 21st Century

EDITED BY

ROB ELKINGTON

Global Leadership Initiatives, Inc., Canada

FAITH WAMBURA NGUNJIRI

Global Leadership Development, LLC. USA.

GLORIA J. BURGESS

University of Washington, USA

XOLISWA MAJOLA

University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

ERWIN SCHWELLA

Tilburg Law School, Netherlands

AND

NICO DE KLERK

School of Social Innovation, Hugenote Kollege, Wellington

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

This book is dedicated to Angela Volmink, who, through the dark years of Apartheid and in the bright democracy that followed, served as an exemplary leader! You showed strength balanced with kindness, courage balanced with humility, and shone light into darkness, thereby influencing the lives of so many to forge a different pathway, a better pathway. Your legacy of leadership lives on in your wonderful husband and your amazing family. They continue to lead as you did, thereby creating a better world for all.

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About the Editors

Rob Elkington, PhD, is an Assistant Professor with Trent University, Faculty of Business, and the CEO and President of Global Leadership Initiatives. He also serves as an Adjunct Professor at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities and the Faculty of Education.

Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, EdD, is President and Coach at Global Leadership Development, LLC, as well as Adjunct Dissertation Advisor at Abilene Christian University.

Gloria J. Burgess, PhD, is Visiting Faculty in Transformational Leadership at University of Washington, Northwest University, University of Southern California, and IEDC – Bled School of Management. She is also CEO of Jazz International and Executive Director of The Lift Every Voice Foundation.

Xoliswa Majola, PhD, is a Senior Lecture at the University of KwaZulu Natal, Graduate School of Business and Leadership.

Erwin Schwella, MPA, PhD, is an Emeritus Professor at Tilburg Law School and Stellenbosch School of Public Leadership. He is currently also the Dean of the School of Social Innovation at Hugenote and the Founding Director of the Centre for Good Governance in Africa. He is also a Global Fellow of the International Leadership Institute.

Nico de Klerk, PhD, served as Adjunct Professor at Princeton Theological Seminary in Spiritual Theology. He is an Associate at the School of Social Innovation at Hugenote Kollege and is the Founder and Executive Director of StreetBiz Foundation.

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About the Contributors

Jacqueline Abuor is Coaching Coordinator of The Leaders Guild, Centre for Leadership and Management – Tangaza University College. She is a Certified Organizational Effectiveness Coach, Certified Practitioner of Global Leadership Assessment (GLA, 360) and a Member of the International Coaching Federation.

Edward O. Akoto, PhD, is a Professor of Management at Henderson State University. He specializes in Evidence-based Management, Cross-cultural Management, and Leadership in the African context. He is Co-founder, along with Eunice V. Akoto, EDVAKO Company LTD and EBAMConsult, which engage in a wide variety of Consulting Services, including Leadership and Workforce Training, Evidence-based Practices, and Thesis/Dissertation Coaching.

Eunice V. Akoto, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Public Management at Henderson State University and a Nonprofit Management and Leadership Consultant.

Abdul-Latif Alhassan is a PhD Candidate in the Transdisciplinary Sustainability Program at the School of Science and the Environment, Grenfell Campus of Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN), Canada. He is a 2019 Mandela Washington Fellow (MWF) and a 2020 African Leaders of Tomorrow (ALT) Scholar.

Marisa Alicea, PhD, is a Professor of Sociology and Affiliate Faculty Member of the Latin American and Latino Studies Department at DePaul University in Chicago, IL. For over 15 years, she's collaborated with colleagues in Kenya and the United States to design and deliver various leadership development programs at Tangaza University College in Nairobi.

Nancy L. Bailey, PhD, retired from the University of Phoenix, as Doctoral Dissertation, Writing and Process Advanced Facilitator and Department of Education and School of Advanced Studies Online Instructor.

Pierre Balamou, MD, MBA, MSc, is a Medical Doctor, Health Policy and Financing Specialist and Health Programs Management Specialist from Guinea (West Africa). He has over 14 years of experience in the Design and Implementation of Primary Health Care Programs. He is a 2014 Mandela Washington Fellowship Alumnus.

Justice Nyigmah Bawole, PhD, is a Professor of Public Administration and Management and the Dean of the University of Ghana Business School. He previously served as Head of Department for Public Administration and Health Services Management. He serves on many Boards and Governing Councils including the Governing Councils of Ghana National Banking College and Ghana National Development Planning Commission.

Patricia M. Bombard, DMin, is Director of Vincent on Leadership: The Hay Project and a Part-time Faculty Member in the School of Public Service at DePaul University, Chicago, IL.

Joan F. Burke, DPhil (Oxon), is a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur, who has served as a Senior Lecturer at the Centre for Leadership and Management at Tangaza University College and at the Maryknoll Institute of African Studies in Nairobi, Kenya. She has lived and worked with African Catholic Sisters in the DRCongo, Nigeria and East Africa. She also served as the Official Representative of her Congregation as an Accredited NGO in New York.

Gregory Frankson, OCT, BEd, is the CEO of Voice Share Inc. and Co-founder of AfriCANthology Canada. He is also a member of the Board of Directors at Prince's Trust Canada, Consulting Associate with Morten Group, LLC, and Leadership Catalyst at Global Leadership Initiatives.

Brandon W. Kliewer, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Civic Leadership in the Mary Lynn and Warren Staley School of Leadership at Kansas State University. He studies and develops leadership in organizations and community through the lens of leadership-as-practice, democratic theory, and complex adaptive systems change.

Keba T. Modisane, PhD, served as Chief Human Resources Officer at Rural Industries Promotions Company (Botswana). She is the Founder of Basikwa Holdings – Women & Youth Entrepreneurship & Empowerment Company, Director of Achievement Associates (Botswana), and is the Chairperson of Mmopane Community Development Committee.

Syanda A. Mthuli is currently a Senior Lecturer in the Discipline of Public Governance under the School of Management, Information Technology (SMIG) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa). Concurrently, he is the Director of the Southern Africa Centre for Research & Institutional Development (SACRID).

Margaret Mutiso, DSH, is the Assistant Director in the Centre for Leadership and Management at Tangaza University College, Kenya. She is a Co-founder of the Leaders Guild Alumni Association (TLG) in which she was the Program Coordinator for six years. She is also a Certified Leadership Coach.

Seydina M. Ndiaye is a Social Entrepreneur and Socio-political Actor working mainly in inclusion, youth development, and democracy in Dakar, Senegal. He also works as a Senior Consultant with a focus on politics and development strategies for digital growth where he has had several collaborations with those in the Senegalese public sector. Seydina is an alumnus of the Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders, the flagship program of the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) and completed his program at Kansas State University. He is a civic leadership practitioner where he is prototyping a contextualized civic leadership and engagement framework based on African local community organizing activities and spreading local narratives to increase citizen awareness to promote civic engagement, participatory democracy, especially through digital technology and cyberspace.

Florence A. Ochanda, MA in Counselling Psychology and BA in Leadership and Management, serves as the Training Coordinator at The Leaders Guild (TLG) and supervises research projects for BA students all under the Centre for Leadership and Management – Tangaza University College, Kenya (TUC).

Purshottama S. Reddy is a Senior Professor and Subnational Governance Specialist in the School of Management, Information Technology & Governance at the University of Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa. He is currently the Vice-Chairperson of the Programme and Research Committee of the International Institutes of Administrative Sciences (IIAS) (Brussels).

Paul R. Sachs, PhD MBA, is a Licensed Psychologist and Non-profit Professional in the USA. He is Founder of ReidSachs LLC, a Consulting, Training, and Coaching Practice.

Nikita Singh, PhD, is currently a Senior Lecturer at the Rhodes Business School at Rhodes University (Eastern Cape Province, South Africa).

Neil J. Vincent, PhD, is Chair and Professor in the Department of Social Work at DePaul University in Chicago, IL. He teaches courses in program evaluation, forensic social work practice, and quantitative research methods.

John D. Volmink, PhD, is the President of the Ubuntu Global Network which has headquarters at Instituto Padre António Vieira, Lisbon. He was formerly Pro-Vice Chancellor at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

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Foreword

John Volmink

This book appears at a time when the world is searching for courageous leaders – leaders who can make people more confident to face the future into which they are being hurtled. The leader of the future will need the skills to mobilize people to face tough problems and live into its opportunities, while at the same time retaining their humanity. It is the case that the world has been facing many challenges. Even before the arrival of Covid-19 we realized that we are in trouble because, for the most part, as people occupying this earth, we have been an uncaring people driven largely by self-interest and self-preservation. The realization of the dream of living together, in solidarity, as one global community has always eluded us.

At national and global levels our preference appears to be that of continuing to work separately, thus making cooperation and mutual support very difficult. It also places severe limitations on our ability to deal with chronic crises such as climate change, pandemics, financial crises and other crises that threaten world peace and heighten tensions in a fundamental way.

Of course, Covid-19 brought everything to a standstill and threw everything we knew as "normal" into disarray. It also laid bare the many contradictions in our society and the deep inequalities and divisions which prevent people from being participants in the choices that affect their lives. We now have an opportunity to re-imagine what leadership at all levels could be in this volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world.

In his book Let Africa Lead (Khoza, 2005), the author, Reuel Khoza writes: The greatest leader of our era, Nelson Mandela, has set an example of African Leadership based on Ubuntu.

Two issues emerge from this statement. Firstly, it is important to understand this concept of Ubuntu – Africa's gift to the world. It is rooted in a world view that says "I am because you are and we are." In other words, it says "a person is a person by virtue of other persons." By embracing the concept, we are recognizing that our humanity is inextricably bound up with each other. As long as we are alienated from each, we can never be complete as human beings.

Ubuntu reminds us that we are not only connected with each other, but we are dependent on each other. Ubuntu creates the possibility for us to see "otherness" not as something to avoid, but to celebrate as an opportunity for mutual growth.

A world that understands and respects Ubuntu is one in which "differences are celebrated as good news, as opportunities for learning." It encourages a global

perspective, celebrating what is distinctly human in all cultures. It reminds us that it is through diversity that we express our ultimate unity.

The concept of Ubuntu challenges many aspects of Western leadership thought because it calls for a shift from individuality separate from the community toward individuality embedded in the community.

The second issue is highlighted by Khoza's statement is the quality of the leadership of Nelson Mandela – as an African leader, but also as a world leader. He writes: I simply cannot overstate how important Mandela's personal example is for all of us in the world today. He has written no book on the theory of leadership, no manual on how to lead. His life is that book and his actions are that manual (Khoza, 2005, p. 9).

Living in South Africa, I had the privilege of observing Madiba as a leader for little more 20 years after he was released from prison. Although he was in office as President for about five years, his impact as a leader spans his entire life. There are so many things that I have learned from Mandela as a leader and I mention only a few.

What I have learnt from Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela taught me that leaders must create hope. He gave the whole world hope in the dream that seems so unattainable: that we can overcome our prejudices and hate and embrace the power found in one community, one country, and, indeed, one global, human family.

So Mandela brought two issues to my attention within the context of Ubuntu: one was the concept of common humanity and the other is that of a common future. Nelson Mandela made me realize that a sense of community is absolutely essential, particularly in a society such as ours in South Africa.

Nelson Mandela taught me that good leaders do not divide. They bring people together. Nelson Mandela swept away the conventional signposts which were leading us only to greater injustice and pain, and gave us new hope of a future country that belongs to all its people. We have a long way to go to reach that future.

In 1990 when Nelson Mandela walked out of prison on his own terms, I completed my own understanding of who this incredible man really was. He stepped out of prison into a deeply divided society filled with conflict, hate, and injustice, and he immediately began to lay the foundation of a bridge of healing from a broken past to a new dynamic future. Nelson Mandela lead us away from hate and fear.

Nelson Mandela was a bridge-builder and he taught me that good leaders are bridge builders. We live in a world where we have allowed many issues to divide us: ideology, culture, religion, gender, race, and class, and even our response to the Covid-19 pandemic. So, today, the clarion call is for people who create relationships. Bridge builders are people who create relationships. They bring people who are disconnected from each other into community and forge ties that cut across borders, cultures, religions, etc.

Bridge builders help build trust between conflicting people and groups. Because bridge building is about creating community, it is fundamentally an Ubuntu activity. Understanding the logic of the narrative of the "other" involves

empathetic listening to the "other," to imagine how their "enemies" must feel and to understand why they believe what they believe.

Bridge building is highly dependent on leadership. You cannot presume to influence others unless you have changed yourself.

Nelson Mandela taught me that leaders are people of action. Ubuntu acknowledges individuality not in the service of self but in the service of others and the community. Ubuntu helps us to understand that a basic moral reason for action is that action should always be for the greater good. In other words, action is seen as desirable if it helps to develop community, reduces discord, and produces harmony.

Nelson Mandela convinced me that we cannot overcome hate through hate but by empathy. He said: "As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew that if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison." – Nelson Mandela.

Against expectation and despite all the hardship, pain and adversity he and his family experienced during his years in prison, he continued to believe that: "No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite." – Nelson Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom

This book written in the Ubuntu paradigm would hopefully lead to a more humane society informed by an ethic of care. It will hopefully encourage a spirit of generosity: that unselfish concern for others in every sphere of human activity. It is that spirit that helps us to forgive, to understand and to support. It speaks to the personal pleasure derived from understanding and helping others.

The leadership for the twenty-first century is that of servant leadership. This kind of leadership requires new skills and values. This requires personal change to the process of unlearning certain ways of leading and to relearn new ways of being and leading. This book on African leadership will hopefully take us on a new, long walk to a new world.

I firmly believe that we do not have to live in a world full of hate, conflict and violence. We can change our world one person at a time. We can change the world only if we understand that Ubuntu is about being connected with each other and realizing that we are dependent on each other. And when we act on the world, we do so with kindness and compassion.

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Preface

Rob Elkington

Sawubona: Why this Book on African Leadership

Sawubona is a mighty Zulu greeting that highlights the importance of leadership acknowledging, validating, and understanding colleagues and followers in their commitment to shared goals (Caldwell & Atwijuka, 2018). In picking up this book on African leadership, you begin the transformative journey of thinking about leadership and followership differently. Why a book on African Leadership? Perhaps a more poignant question is why so few books are articulating the paradigmatic elements of African leadership. In a discussion recently with several colleagues from Africa, there appeared frustration that so much of the current articulation concerning leadership theory and praxis centers on Western notions of leadership. It is not that they see Western leadership paradigms as vacuous. Instead, they believe an intersection might enrich these notions of leadership with non-Western traditions such as those in African leadership. This book, *African Leadership: Powerful Paradigms for the 21st Century*, attempts to begin the journey of a wider interlocution of non-Western theories of leadership.

The Richness of African Leadership (And Followership) Paradigms

In recent years a wealth of discourse concerning the richness of African leadership and followership has emerged in academic circles within Africa and, to a lesser extent, beyond Africa. For instance, we have Ofumbi's research into followership among the Acholi people of Uganda (Ofumbi, 2017). Along similar lines is Hallowell's focus on courageous followership and leadership in West African political fiction (Hallowell, 2014). Perhaps ahead of his time is the Ghanain scholar Michael Tagoe wrestling with the manifestation and vagaries of followership in his country (Tagoe, 2011). Authors such as Haruna and others seek a broader sweep of leadership and followership within sub-Saharan Africa (Colbry et al., 2015; Haruna, 2009). Another incisive work that draws back the curtain on the richness of African leadership and followership is Hotep's treatise which exemplifies the richness of an intersection between African and Western notions of leadership–followership (Hotep sees them as co-equal concepts in the leadership process) (Hotep, 2010). As an African born in Zimbabwe, and growing up

in Apartheid South Africa, my leadership–followership lens has been forged by the contextual realities of those countries as they emerged from colonialism and Apartheid.

For instance, there is the majestic treatise on the power of Ubuntu in the life and leadership of Nelson Mandela (Oppenheim, 2012). In her work, Oppenheim highlights that Ubuntu is multifaceted. However, at its core, Ubuntu animates the principle of mutual beneficence and communalism. Oppenheim highlights that Ubuntu was the philosophical driveshaft that shaped the leadership of Nelson Mandela. The philosophy of Ubuntu, embodied in the life and leadership of Mandela, set him apart. Ubuntu's philosophy could enrich Western notions of leadership, especially the many aspects of Ubuntu as articulated in S. M. Kapwepwe's *Shalapo Canicandala* (Mukuka, 2013). *Shalapo Canincandala* expresses the following Ubuntu-related values. Reflect on how these values could enrich Western notions of leadership and how they expressed themselves in the life and leadership of Nelson Mandela:

1. *Food generosity*: Never refuse to share food with both people you know and strangers.
2. *Always speak the truth*: The requirement to speak the truth had two dimensions, orality and safety and one goal (credibility of one's spoken word).
3. *Never steal*: In communal philosophy, to steal from a person is to harm oneself.
4. *Never kill a human being*: In a communal mindset killing anyone meant weakening the family, community, and the kingdom.
5. *Be humble*: You are one of many, all have value and all contribute.
6. *Never covet another person's spouse*: Marriage was not only a tie of two families but also the natural unit for "producing" abantu. Tampering with family had community-wide repercussions.

Mukuka (2013) highlights the practical value of leadership and followership marked by Ubuntu when he crystallizes these Ubuntu-related values by stating:

> Truthfulness meant trust in one's word of mouth, which translated into collective security should one spot the approaching enemy. The need to keep away from another person's spouse meant the protection of the people-producing social unit. Forbidding theft encouraged hard work, which translated into having no one in need and ensured morality. Preservation of life meant more resources for the community and ensured the preservation of the community. Looking after vulnerable, though not young, members of the community meant unity and a cultivation of values of interdependence. Safeguarding the well-being of all God's creatures meant people's interdependence with nature was preserved.

As we conclude this brief introduction to this beautiful book on African leadership, there is one additional component to African leadership that we would be

remiss in not drawing to your attention. This critical concept is that of *Ukama* as a pivotal leadership ecosophy in a climate-threatened world (Le Grange, 2012). As LeGrange (2012) suggests:

> In Shona there is a broader concept ukama, which means related-ness-relatedness to the entire cosmos. Murove (2009, p. 316) argues that *Ubuntu* (humanness) is the concrete form of *ukama* (related-ness) in the sense that "human interrelationship within society is a microcosm of the relationality within the universe.

Concerning leadership and followership in the twenty-first century, Ukama provides a rich grounding for human and ecological togetherness, an articulation that humanness is an expression of interconnectedness between people and the biophysical world. Cultivating Ubuntu through the mechanism of Ukama means the healing of self, society, and nature. That is leadership and followership at its best!

Concluding Thoughts and the Structure of this Book

This book drew upon the expertise of African editors who are specialists in their field. Having six editors also epitomized for us the principle of Ubuntu. We sought to illustrate and exemplify African leadership across various African sectors such as political, healthcare, business, grassroots, and diaspora. Each chapter begins with a poem highlighting another African tenet, art's beauty, and how art and leadership intersect within the African context. Each chapter ends with a series of thoughtful questions that seek to assist you in contemplating how African leadership and followership might enrich your praxis.

The design of this book is academically informed but practitioner-focused. We want the book to be helpful. At the same time, we understand that actual utility is grounded in solid research and evidence. We trust that your journey into African leadership through this book will be encouraging, uplifting, inspiring, and meaningful.

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