

# **Updating American Leadership Practices by Exploring the African Philosophy of Ubuntu**

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*This paper was presented at the International Business Conference sponsored by the Center of Excellence in International Business of Northern State University, Aberdeen, South Dakota, USA. This paper explores the African philosophy of Ubuntu and its collective potential to be applied to American leadership theory and practice. Included is a brief discussion on culture's impact on leadership, a discussion on the preferred American leadership style based on the GLOBE studies, a discussion of Ubuntu philosophy, and the respective gaps in the "American way" of leadership. This paper explores possible solutions to heroic (and often disastrous) American leadership and decision making.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Much has been written over the past few decades concerning the topics of leadership and culture. This voluminous collective research has been conducted across a broad array of disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, business management, leadership, to name only a few. One needs only to review the bibliographies of recent theses, dissertations, and review articles concerning leadership and culture to realize the vast reach, appeal, and impact that this topic has had on the literature and schools of thought. Many social scientists believe that the world is converging toward a single core global culture, citing the globalization of business, democracy, communications, technology, religious conversions, the success of American business theory and practices, and global travel as primary reasons that people of one culture are adopting behaviors and practices of other cultures. At the same time, other social scientists agree that people are becoming more aware of their own culture and such local interpretations are becoming more popular, resulting in an increasing resistance to cultural change and global assimilation. In effect, culture does matter and will continue to be a fact of life and, similar to race, resistant to change (Glazer 2000; Hofstede 1980a, 2001; House, et al. 2004; Shweder 2000; Trompenaars 1993a; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1998; Weisner 2000).

There is very little debate over the idea that we live in a multicultural world; a fact that should not be ignored or overlooked by managers and leaders. Indeed, cultural differences are a fact of life for many nations and it is highly unlikely that cultures will converge into a single global culture (Hofstede 1980a, 2001; Hofstede and Hofstede 2005; House et al. 2004; Shweder 2000; Trompenaars 1993a; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1998). Hofstede's (2001) research indicates that cultures are very stable; implying that assimilation and global cultural convergence may not be so straightforward. There will continue to be local cultural elements which will be resistant to change, even if the convergence theorists are proven correct (Hofstede 2001). Javidan, et al. (2006) state a case for divergence-centric positions more succinctly and urgently: "[T]he future of our planet depends on better understanding and acceptance

among people of differing cultures” (p. 911). Additional supporters of the “culture specific” theory which resulted in further evidence of culture’s impact on preferred leadership styles include the collective authors of the massive GLOBE Study (House et al. 2004).

For many years, the general theory of managing and leading an international business consisted of a single ‘best way’ to manage and lead people and organizations. The success of the U.S. economy, along with the dominance of U.S. business schools and the proliferation of democracy have all led many academics and practitioners to believe that the ‘American way’ of management was, indeed, the ‘best way’ to manage regardless of the local context. (In the context of the current manuscript, the word “America” will be used in reference to the United States of America). One cultural anthropologist went so far as to claim this attitude to be ethnocentric monism (Shweder 2000). This philosophy went relatively unchallenged for several decades. Although the most significant authors of cultural research have not agreed on much concerning the cultural models and methods of measurement, they do agree that a single ‘best way’ to manage and lead, while ignoring the local context, is a philosophy in need of updating (Hofstede 1980a, 1980b; House et al. 2004; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1998). Contrasting this attitude of the one best ‘American way’ of management with the cultural relativism of anthropology reveals that, in other social sciences, thinking that there was a better ‘way’ was rather obscene. There seems to be a dichotomy of sorts playing out within the social sciences. On one hand, management theorists in the past subscribed to the notion that there was, indeed, one best way to manage an organization (a.k.a. ‘the American way’). This ethnocentric monistic school of thought was generally accepted as described above. At the same time, other social sciences had subscribed to the notion of cultural relativism whereby ‘anything goes and is acceptable’. These two sciences, (management vs. other social sciences) have since reversed their collective way of thinking. Today, most management theorists agree that local culture does matter and influences management functions, while many anthropologists and other social scientists believe in cultural pluralism or cultural contextualism (Shweder 2000). One thing is consistent... the dichotomy continues.

Based on the assumption that the “American way” of management and leadership can be improved by incorporating other philosophies from other nations (a.k.a. ‘melting pot’), this paper seeks to analyze the African philosophy of Ubuntu as a potential contributor to a new and improved American leadership model. Specifically, is Ubuntu potentially useful in shaping American leadership thought and practice as organizations participate in a globalized economy?

The literature review was purposefully narrowed to include an overview of culture, leadership theory and practice, a definition of preferred American leadership styles, and an examination of African Ubuntu philosophy. This sequence was chosen based on the well-argued points found in the massive GLOBE publication (House et al. 2004). Within the Overview, House and Javidan (2004) offer substantial evidence that cultural attributes at the societal level do and will influence a leader’s behavior. The literature review, then, first reviews the concepts of culture and leadership with respective attention to American culture and leadership. A section of the literature is devoted to Ubuntu as a possible existing philosophy that could contribute to an improved American leadership model. Following the literature review will be an analysis of gaps that exist in the Ameri-centric concept of leadership. Conclusions will include new, non-western philosophies and concepts that may enhance or augment the current prevailing American leadership practice. Recommendations for further research will be included.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Culture**

As more countries participate in the new global economy, domestic business managers have slowly realized that people from different backgrounds, different belief systems, and different value systems behaved differently (often to the surprise of the American manager!). As management research revealed that cultural differences affect management, Geert Hofstede’s landmark and seminal work in 1980, *Culture’s Consequences* questioned whether American theories of management and leadership could continue to be universally applied abroad and discussed the consequences of cultural differences in terms

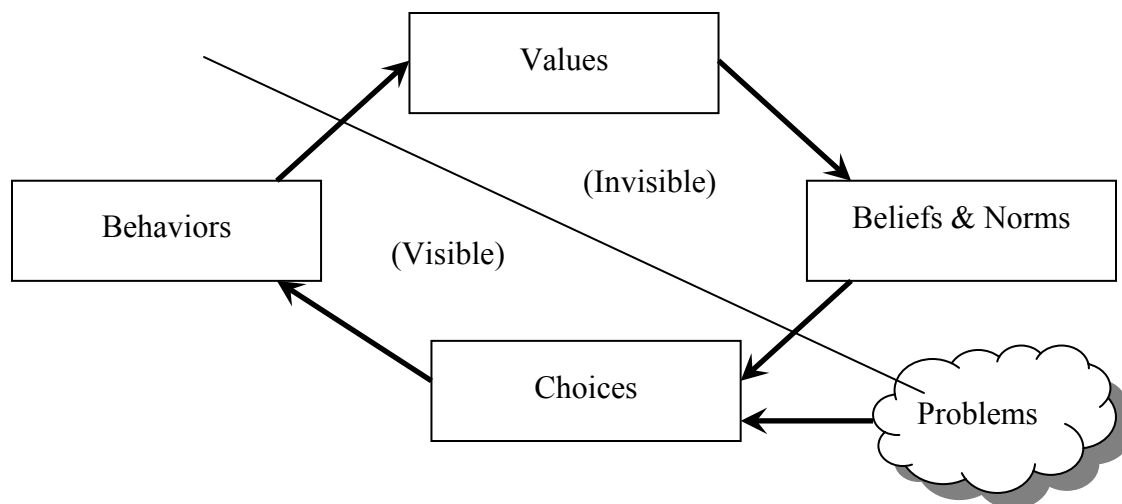
of management (Hofstede 1980b). Since Hofstede's (1980a) seminal work, other researchers have added to the theory of divergence: that culture does have an impact in the context of business management and leadership (Adler 2008; Harrison and Huntington 2000; Hofstede 1980a, 2001; House et al. 2004; Trompenaars 1993a; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1998). Even within the world of anthropology and political science, cultural values and attitudes have been deemed to be important yet neglected factors in scholarly work (Harrison and Huntington 2000). Indeed, culture does matter.

Earley (2006) stressed the importance of clearly defining the concept of culture in any culture-based research effort. To that end, this paper will rely on the cumulative and amalgamated definition found in the literature from prior researchers:

Culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another (Hofstede 1980a, 2001). At the heart of this collective programming is a system of values (Adler 2002, 2008; Holt 2007). These values are among the building blocks of culture and influence the norms, beliefs, and choices necessary to address the problems presented by the environment (Hofstede 1980a, 2001; Shweder 2000; Weisner 2000). The causal relationships between values, norms, beliefs, choices, and behaviors collectively make up the culture of one human group (Adler 2002, 2008; Schein 2004). This collective programming is generally passed from established members of the group to new members of the group (Hofstede 2002a).

Scholars agree that key components of the definition of culture include values and beliefs (invisible aspects of culture) and choices and behaviors (visible aspects of culture). These have distinctive characteristics and form definite causal relationships in a cyclical model. See for example Hofstede (1980a, 2001); Hofstede and Hofstede (2005); House, et al. (2004); Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961); Schein (2004); Triandis (2004b); Trompenaars (1993a; 1998). Indeed, as illustrated by Bertsch (2008), the solutions and subsequent behaviors that a group chooses in order to address specific problems is reproduced in the figure below. As can be seen, values, beliefs, and norms influence decisions and behaviors of societal (cultural) group members as a response to situational problems.

**FIGURE 1  
CULTURE'S CYCLE**



Within the 'Overview' of the massive GLOBE publication (House et al. 2004), House and Javidan (2004) offer substantial evidence that cultural attributes at the societal level do and will influence a leader's behavior. In other words, accepted leadership traits are determined by a society's cultural values and norms (House and Javidan 2004).

## Leadership

Maybe even more difficult than defining the concept of culture is to define the concept of leadership. Although the concept of leadership has been studied for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the collective literature has not produced a single, agreed-upon definition of leadership (Bass 1990; Dorfman and House 2004; Yukl 2002). Quite obviously, ‘leaders’ have existed throughout history and, in many cases, actually have shaped and defined history. Unfortunately, the concept of leadership has not been so clearly articulated. Many Western researchers define leadership with words such as ‘power’ and ‘influence’. The prevalence of ‘power’ within the management and leadership literature influenced the GLOBE authors as they grounded their source of power in French’s and Raven’s (1959) five-category classification of power bases: (i) coercive power, (ii) reward power, (iii) legitimate (position) power, (iv) expert power, and (v) referent power (Carl, et al. 2004; House et al. 2004). Many times for Americans, power is rooted in position, coercion, and rewards. These tend to be very American ideas of ‘leadership’. As a result, ‘leadership’ has typically been defined or thought to include traits held by the leader to influence, motivate, and empower people to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of an organization or group (Dorfman and House 2004; House et al. 2004; McShane and Von Glinow 2008). Key to most western definitions of leadership is ‘influence’ (Dorfman and House 2004). Because it has been easier to define leadership based on the actual leader (see, for example, Dorfman and House (2004)), there has been little discussion concerning the value of the message, philosophy, or the culture in which the leader endorses or operates within. As for an acceptable model of American leadership, Americans have tended to romanticize the leader resulting in the naming buildings, statues, highways, monuments, and other lasting symbols to honor the life and contribution of a ‘leader’. Contrasted with other societies (Dutch and Swiss for example) where leadership is viewed a bit more suspiciously and with not nearly the reverence as in America.

An outcome of this paper may be to call to question the seemingly outdated and significantly western, heroic definition of leadership. As was discussed earlier, the time to abandon the “American way” as the best and only way has come. As the world continues to embrace the emerging global economy (see for example trading blocs, common currencies, etc), it is likely that followers are not so eager to swallow the homogenized leadership stew being offered by American-based and American-dominated multinational corporations. It is well passed the time to consider other philosophies and traits as new key ingredients to an updated, more diverse, and ultimately more flavorful American Leadership model.

A common position in the cross-cultural leadership literature is the challenge of getting culturally diverse people to work together. Getting culturally diverse people to work together as a team requires special skills and sensitivities (Chen and Tjosvold 2005). The relatively new concept of cross-cultural leadership has been defined as being able to influence people across national and cultural boundaries (Dorfman and House 2004). A society’s culture and context will shape the values and norms held by that leader which, in turn, affect his or her methods, decisions, and other behaviors.

Societal values also shape the followers expectations of their leaders (Dorfman and House 2004; House et al. 2004; McShane and Von Glinow 2008). An example of this can be seen in one society’s interpretation of the word “responsibility” (in the context of individual/collective responsibility) translates to the word “chief”. Telling members of such a society that they are responsible for an outcome implies that they are all chiefs and creates chaotic interpersonal conflicts (Etounga-Manguelle 2000). It is easy to conclude that the already murky concepts of ‘culture’ and ‘leadership’ are further complicated in the context of cross-cultural leadership. Another example from Dorfman and House (2004) cites that the Dutch society prefers egalitarian and consensus values which imply little need for the heroic lone-wolf leadership style that exists in many American leaders.

Dorfman and House (2004) concluded that simply because specific leadership practices are successful in one country does not guaranty success in a different country. Nevertheless, knowledge of this fact has not lead MNCs to embrace new methods of management and leadership in various local contexts. It is said that culture, at both the national and organizational levels, can be sticky and slow to change (Hofstede 2001; Hofstede and Hofstede 2005). In this regard, American leadership styles, as influenced by national and organizational culture, have also been slow to change.

## American Culture & Leadership

For the current writing, the review of ‘American’ culture was purposely limited to societal values. This is due, in part, to the specific findings of the GLOBE authors whereby societal values were key to forming and influencing preferred and acceptable leadership traits (House et al. 2004; House and Javidan 2004). It is worth pointing out that societal values were *not* significantly correlated to societal practices in seven of the nine GLOBE dimensions (House et al. 2004). This means that societies are likely to prefer certain states that are not currently being practiced. This is an important point as this paper intends to illustrate cultural and philosophical values that may enhance the currently practiced leadership style in America. There would be little to report in this paper if societal values were being fully satisfied by current societal practices. In other words, this paper seeks to illustrate the gap between American leadership practices and American society’s preferred leadership style. What, if any, concepts and traits within the African philosophy of Ubuntu can be implemented to fill gap(s) in the American leadership practice?

To facilitate summarization, Table 1 was created to illustrate American positioning across various measurable dimensions of culture. This table was fully derived from the collective and respective chapters by the GLOBE authors (House et al. 2004). Following Table 1, each of GLOBE’s dimensions and the societal level (value) influence for each correlated leadership style will be discussed. This will be followed by a summary of which leadership style would be the preferred style in American society.

**TABLE 1**  
**SOCIETAL VALUES AND LEADERSHIP STYLES**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Global Mean</b>	<b>American Mean</b>	<b>+/- Standard Deviation</b>
Performance Orientation	5.94	6.14	+0.59
Future Orientation	5.48	5.31	-0.42
Gender Egalitarianism	4.51	5.06	+1.15
Assertiveness	3.82	4.32	+0.80
In-Group Collectivism <sup>1</sup>	5.66	5.77	+0.31
Power Distance	2.75	2.85	+0.29
Humane Orientation	5.42	5.53	+0.44
Uncertainty Avoidance	4.62	4.00	-1.02

<sup>1</sup>In-group collectivism was included herein to represent individualism vs. collectivism.

Within the *Performance Orientation* discussion, GLOBE reports a global mean of 6.02 (on a 7-point scale) indicating universal acceptance that leaders must effect and reward performance (Javidan 2004a). Additionally, societal values of performance orientation were significantly correlated at  $r=0.46$  ( $p<0.01$ ) to performance oriented leadership at the global level. This is even truer for American respondents as the American mean score for performance oriented leadership was 6.46 or 1.2 standard deviations above the global mean. Societies valuing performance orientation (such as the U.S.) are likely to prefer a value-based leadership style such as charismatic ( $p<0.01$ ), participative ( $p<0.05$ ), or humane-oriented ( $p<0.01$ ). Conversely, self-protective leadership styles would likely not bode well in performance-oriented societies ( $p<0.01$ ). For a more thorough discussion, see Javidan (2004a). The net result is that Americans prefer a value-based leadership style such as charismatic or humane-oriented as influenced by societal values along the Performance Orientation scale.

Within the *Future Orientation* discussion, GLOBE concluded that two leadership styles are preferred based on this dimension. Specifically, the humane-oriented leadership style was positively correlated ( $p<0.01$ ) indicating a societal-level preference for this leadership style. Surprisingly, the self-protective leadership style was also positively correlated with this dimension ( $p<0.05$ ). This oddity cannot be

ignored and will require further discussion in the analysis section below (Ashkanasy, et al. 2004). Because the U.S. is not in the upper half of future-oriented societies (0.42 standard deviations below the mean), one must interpret the correlations cautiously. Because humane-oriented leadership was positively correlated to future orientation (the more future oriented a society, the more likely it is to embrace humane-oriented leadership), and with the U.S. being below average along this dimension, it is more likely that Americans would frown upon a humane-oriented leadership style. The same is true for the self-protective leadership style (positively correlated to future orientation). Cautious interpretation is necessary, however, because it could also be that Americans would be somewhat indifferent (or, at least, the results are inclusive) toward the two correlated leadership styles. It is for this reason that the reader is cautioned to skeptically interpret the Future Orientation dimension and correlations presented herein.

*Gender Egalitarianism* was found to be significantly and positively correlated to charismatic ( $p < 0.01$ ) and participative ( $p < 0.01$ ) leadership styles. This indicates a societal-level preference for these two styles of leadership. Conversely, the self-protective leadership style was found to be statistically negatively correlated ( $p < 0.01$ ) to Gender Egalitarianism (Emrich, et al. 2004). It could be argued that this dimension is the most influential dimension in the American context of preferred leadership styles due to the U.S.'s greatest deviation (+1.15) from the global mean. The end result is that Americans would likely prefer charismatic and participative leaders while shunning self-protective leaders based on the Gender Egalitarianism dimension.

Along the *Assertiveness* dimension, cultures rated higher on this scale (such as the U.S.) are likely to tolerate strong, directive, tough, and autonomous leaders. That said, oddities in GLOBE's findings were uncovered. For example, GLOBE found that the humane-oriented leadership style was the preferred ("Should be" values) leadership style at both the societal and organizational levels ( $p < 0.01$ ). However, upon further discussion, the GLOBE authors point out the need for leaders to be socially supportive in highly assertive and, at times, threatening environments (Den Hartog 2004). In other words, in societies valuing assertiveness as an acceptable trait, those societies would likely expect their leaders to be humane-oriented. This is in line with House's path-goal theory of leadership (Den Hartog 2004). No other leadership style was found to be statistically significant when correlated to the societal value of Assertiveness. Based on the Assertiveness dimension, Americans would likely prefer a humane oriented leadership style.

Within the *In-Group Collectivism* dimension discussion, GLOBE reported one statistically significant and preferred leadership style in charismatic leadership ( $p < 0.01$ ). Conversely, GLOBE reported a significantly negative correlation ( $p < 0.05$ ) between self-protective leadership and In-Group Collectivism. Both of these make intuitive sense. However, an oddity exists in that team-oriented and participative leadership styles were not correlated to the in-group collectivism dimension at either the societal or the organizational values dimension. One would have intuited that the higher a society values collectivism, the more likely a team-oriented or a participative leadership style would be preferred. For more discussion, see Gelfand, et al. (2004). The results of the In-Group Collectivism influence on preferred leadership styles may be the most interesting. The U.S. practices are those of an individualistic society. However, along this dimension, Americans reported to prefer in-group collectivism even above the global average (+0.31 standard deviations above the global mean preference score). It would seem, then, that a charismatic leadership style would be welcomed by American employees and organizations. On the other hand, the autonomous leadership style (often associated with the American cowboy or lone-wolf American leader) was negatively correlated to this dimension.

When discussing the *Power Distance* dimension, one must keep in mind that the dimension measures the extent to which a society accepts an unequal distribution of power. In other words, how great is the distance between those who hold power and those who do not? In this regard, the GLOBE authors found that societies that embrace power distance are not likely to prefer a charismatic leadership style ( $p < 0.01$ ) or participative leadership ( $p < 0.01$ ). GLOBE found that societies valuing power distance were more likely to endorse humane-oriented ( $p < 0.05$ ) and self-protective leadership styles (0.01). Interestingly, similar to the Assertiveness dimension described above, societies that embrace a greater separation of power would likely prefer humane-oriented leaders (Carl et al. 2004). Rather surprisingly,

Americans value Power Distance above and beyond the global average (+0.29 standard deviations above the global mean). This is counter-intuitive as power distance theory is grounded in democracy, access to power, separation, etc. Based on this dimension, it would appear that Americans would not prefer charismatic or participative leaders but, rather, would seek and embrace humane-oriented or self-protective leadership styles. This anomaly may be a result of the romantic pedestal that Americans hold for their esteemed leaders.

The *Humane Orientation* discussion in GLOBE's seminal work yielded some interesting results in the context of correlation to preferred leadership styles (Kabasakal and Bodur 2004). Specifically and oddly, there was no significant correlation at the societal level between this dimension and the leadership style of the same name. The only statistically significant correlations found to exist between societal level values and leadership styles were participative leadership (positive,  $p < 0.01$ ) and self-protective (negative,  $p < 0.01$ ). It is clear, along the Humane Orientation dimension, that Americans would prefer a participative leader over all others while, at the same time, would shy away from self-protective leaders.

The *Uncertainty Avoidance* dimension resulted in the highest number of correlations to the six GLOBE leadership styles (five total correlations). The more that a society avoids uncertainty, the less likely that society would be to embrace charismatic (negative,  $p < 0.05$ ) or participative (negative,  $p < 0.01$ ) leadership styles. On the other hand, higher uncertainty avoiding societies are likely to embrace humane-oriented (positive,  $p < 0.01$ ), team oriented (positive,  $p < 0.05$ ), or self-protective (positive,  $p < 0.01$ ) leadership styles (de Luque and Javidan 2004). When interpreting the Uncertainty Avoidance correlations, similar to the Future Orientation discussion above, one must be cautious due to the fact that America values less uncertainty avoidance compared to the global average along this scale. In other words, Americans are more tolerant of uncertainty compared to the world average. Because humane-oriented leadership was positively correlated to Uncertainty Avoidance, and with the U.S. being below average along this dimension, it is more likely that Americans would frown upon a humane-oriented leadership style. The same is true for the team-oriented and self-protective leadership styles (both positively correlated to Uncertainty Avoidance). On the other hand, both the charismatic and participative leadership styles were negatively correlated to this dimension and, with the American society falling below the global average, it is likely that Americans would prefer both of these leadership styles. Like the Future Orientation discussion above, the reader is cautioned to interpret these recommendations and correlations skeptically.

From the above collective discussion across these eight dimensions, Table 2 was created to summarize the correlation between each respective societal cultural dimension (values='should be') and the significant correlations (positive, none, negative) for each leadership style. GLOBE concluded that societal values will influence the preference or rejection of each respective leadership style (House and Javidan 2004). Discussion centric to the seemingly preferred leadership style in America follows Table 2.

**TABLE 2**  
**SOCIETAL VALUES AND LEADERSHIP STYLES**

<b>Societal Values</b>	<b>Charismatic</b>	<b>Participative</b>	<b>Humane-Oriented</b>	<b>Team-Oriented</b>	<b>Autonomous</b>	<b>Self-protective</b>
Performance Orientation	Positive (p<0.01)	Positive (p<0.05)	Positive (p<0.01)	None	None	Negative (p<0.05)
Future Orientation <sup>2</sup>	None	None	Positive (p<0.01)	None	None	Positive (p<0.05)
Gender Egalitarianism	Positive (p<0.01)	Positive (p<0.01)	None	None	None	Negative (p<0.01)
Assertiveness	None	None	Positive (p<0.01)	None	None	None
In-Group Collectivism <sup>1</sup>	Positive (p<0.01)	None	None	None	None	Negative (p<0.05)
Power Distance	Negative (p<0.01)	Negative (p<0.01)	Positive (p<0.05)	None	None	Positive (p<0.01)
Humane Orientation	None	Positive (p<0.01)	None	None	None	Negative (p<0.01)
Uncertainty Avoidance <sup>2</sup>	Negative (p<0.05)	Negative (p<0.01)	Positive (p<0.01)	Positive (p<0.05)	None	Positive (p<0.01)

<sup>1</sup>In-group collectivism was included herein to represent individualism vs. collectivism.

<sup>2</sup>For discussion about why these dimension's correlations were not included in the final model concerning 'missing' attributes in the current American leadership style, see the previous paragraphs for each respective dimension.

### **American Leadership**

As can be gleaned from the previous section and as summarized in Table 2, the following summary can be made concerning preferred American leadership styles across the various cultural dimensions.

1. *Performance Orientation*: Americans would likely prefer charismatic or humane-oriented styles and would likely reject a self-protective leadership style.
2. *Future Orientation*: Americans would frown upon humane-oriented and self-protective leadership styles.
3. *Gender Egalitarianism*: Americans would likely prefer charismatic and participative leaders while rejecting self-protective.
4. *Assertiveness*: Americans would like prefer a humane oriented leadership style.
5. *In-Group Collectivism*: It would seem that a charismatic leadership style would be welcomed by American employees and organizations while the self-protective leadership style would likely be rejected.
6. *Power Distance*: Based on this dimension, it would appear that Americans would not prefer charismatic or participative leaders but, rather, would seek and embrace humane-oriented or self-protective leadership styles.
7. *Humane Orientation*: Americans would prefer a participative leader over all others while, at the same time, would shy away from self-protective leaders.
8. *Uncertainty Avoidance*: Americans would likely frown upon a humane-oriented leadership style, team-oriented style and the self-protective styles while likely embracing both the charismatic and participative leadership styles.

Interpreting the above summary suggests that Americans would likely prefer charismatic and participative leadership styles when aggregated across all cultural dimensions (i.e. taken as a whole). Reviewing more closely those cultural dimensions that included positive correlations with these two leadership styles in the American setting reveals Performance Orientation, Gender Egalitarianism, In-



Group Collectivism, Humane Orientation, and Uncertainty Avoidance had statistically significant positive correlation to the American dimension scores. The results of the In-Group Collectivism influence on preferred leadership styles may be the most interesting. This may lend support to the notion that Americans prefer leadership styles that are different than the current or past leadership practices which is steeped in individualistic values (Hofstede 1980a, 2001). For example, although America is viewed as an individualistic society as it pertains to ‘as is’ behaviors (Hofstede 1980a, 2001; House et al. 2004; Trompenaars 1993a; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1998), it appears that respondents in the GLOBE study would prefer a society (‘should be’) with greater in-group collectivism. It would seem, then, that Americans would embrace leadership styles that are more fitting to the in-group collectivism dimension. This may indicate that the prototypical American leadership model is in need of updating. With this in mind, attention is turned to the two ‘preferred’ American leadership styles. Specifically, the definitions are provided below as they are given in the GLOBE project (House and Javidan 2004, p. 14).

*Charismatic/Value-Based Leadership*

A broadly defined leadership dimension that reflects ability to inspire, to motivate, and to expect high performance outcomes from the others based on firmly held core values. The GLOBE Charismatic/Value-Based leadership dimension includes six leadership subscales labeled (a) visionary (9 items), (b) inspirational (8 items), (c) self-sacrifice (3 items), (d) integrity (4 items), (e) decisive (4 items), and (f) performance oriented (3 items).

*Participative Leadership*

A leadership dimension that reflects the degree to which managers involve others in making and implementing decisions. The GLOBE CLT Participative leadership dimension includes two subscales labeled (a) nonparticipative (4 items) and (b) autocratic (6 items) (both reversed scored).

An example of operationalized elements of the above American-preferred leadership styles which *may* be currently missing in American leadership practices include notions such as self-sacrificing. To further explore those elements included in each subscale identified above (six for charismatic leaders and two for participative leaders), an exploration of each of the items is in order. Table 3 illustrates the scale items used to create each subscale. These were actual items used to assess respondents’ views of these words/concepts as they relate to effective leadership traits.

**TABLE 3  
GLOBE LEADERSHIP CONSTRUCT, SUBSCALE, AND SURVEY ITEMS**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Subscale</b>	<b>Survey Item Concepts</b>
Charismatic Leadership	Visionary	<b>Inspirational</b> , Anticipatory, Prepared, Intellectually stimulating, Foresight, Plans ahead, Anticipatory, <b>Visionary</b> , Future-oriented
	Inspirational	Positive, <b>Encouraging</b> , Morale booster, Enthusiastic, Motive arouser, Confidence builder, Dynamic, Motivational
	Self-sacrifice	Risk-taker, convincing, <b>self-sacrificial</b>
	Integrity	<b>Sincere</b> , Just, <b>Trustworthy</b> , <b>Honest</b>
	Decisive	Decisive, Logical, Intuitive, Willful
	Performance oriented	Improvement-oriented, Excellence-oriented, Performance-oriented
Participative Leadership	Nonparticipative (reverse scored)	<b>Individually-oriented</b> , <b>non-egalitarian</b> , micro-manager, non-delegator
	Autocratic (reversed scored)	Bossy, Autocratic, Domineering, <b>Elitist</b> , Ruler, Dictatorial

The survey items found in Table 3 (far right column) are the actual preferred leadership concepts that would best fit the American culture based on the previous and collective discussion thus far. Those bolded in Table 3 are of particular interest as potentially ‘missing’ elements in currently practiced American leadership styles. Note that the reverse scoring of the nonparticipative and autocratic leadership traits requires that one interpret the opposite of that trait as the desirable trait.

## **Ubuntu**

The African word *Ubuntu* comes from the word Zulu that means “humaneness”. The context of the word comes from the phrase “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” which is translated to mean that ‘a person is a person because of other persons’ (Bekker 2007). Bekker (2007) describes it as the capacity to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity, and mutuality in the interest of building and maintaining communities with justice and mutual caring. An explanation of Ubuntu includes the idea that a person can only effectively exist as a fully functioning human being when he/she acknowledges and appreciates the roles that others play in his/her life. Ubuntu is not simply a description of African values; but rather, it should be viewed as a social African philosophy. Mbigi (1997) has operationalized ubuntu into five distinct constructs: (i) survival, (ii) solidarity spirit, (iii) compassion, (iv) respect, and (v) dignity. Mbigi likens these five constructs onto the functionality of the human hand and has referred to the five constructs of ubuntu as the collective finger’s theory. The analogy stems from the African proverb ‘a thumb, although it is strong, cannot kill aphids on its own. It would require the collective cooperation of the other fingers’. These five dimensions within Ubuntu are defined below.

### *Survival*

The ‘shared will to survive’ stems from the reliance on the group, community, and brotherly care necessary to overcome difficulties. This reliance and collective belief results in a view that survival is only possible through brotherly care rather than individual self-reliance. Survival results in pooled resources, community, and collectivism. Personal struggles are times to display responsibility, accountability, sacrifice, and a spirit of service toward the community’s survival (Mbigi 1997; Mbigi and Maree 1995; Poovan, et al. 2006).

### *Solidarity Spirit*

From very early childhood, Africans are socialized to understand that difficult goals and tasks can only be accomplished collectively. In fact, the idea of ‘self’ as an individual does not exist in the Ubuntu context; but, rather, ‘self’ refers to the community (Mbigi 1997; Mbigi and Maree 1995; Poovan et al. 2006). It is difficult to define individuals based on physical and psychological properties that are separate from the community. Individuals are defined in the context of the collective community (Nussbaum 2003; Poovan et al. 2006). The underlying belief is that all people are interconnected and share common and communal responsibility to and for each other (Poovan et al. 2006).

Taken together, survival and solidarity spirit appear to be missing elements in the individual-centric and individually revered American leader. If Participative Leadership traits as described in the previous section are sought-after traits, then much could be learned from the two Ubuntu dimensions of survival and solidarity.

### *Compassion*

A human quality of understanding the dilemmas of others and wanting to help them (Nussbaum 2003; Poovan et al. 2006). Beyond the western interpretation of compassion and empathy, the Africans reach out to others, go out of their way to help others, all in an effort to become more human by fostering relationships and friendships as they practice compassion (Broodryk 2002). Specifically, Africans strive for interconnectedness by sharing and giving without worry or concern for receiving (Poovan et al. 2006). Africans practice ‘Ukwenana’ which means to give unselfishly without expecting anything in return

(Broodryk 2002). This parallels closely the self-sacrificing concept defined as part of the charismatic leadership style.

### *Respect*

An ‘objective, **unbiased**, consideration and regard for the rights, values, beliefs, and property’ of the community [emphasis added] (Poovan et al. 2006).

### *Dignity*

Closely related to respect is the concept of dignity. Here, dignity is a precursor to respect and is understood to be a quality that earns or deserves respect (Poovan et al. 2006). However, there is a bit of a circular connection between dignity and respect within the Ubuntu philosophy. Poovan (2006) offers that members of society become dignified by others being respectful. Dignity also requires respect.

McShane and Von Glinow (2008) describe *ubuntu* with words such as harmony, connectedness, compassion, respect, human dignity, and collective unity. These concepts are usually not compatible with heroic leadership styles that are common in Western cultures. Archbishop Desmond Tutu describes *ubuntu* as the essence of being human. Ubuntu includes the fact that you cannot exist as a human being in isolation. Tutu calls for an end to individualism and separation. Here, Tutu reiterates that *ubuntu* is all about human interconnectedness where actions of one individual will affect others. Ubuntu includes generosity, harmony, compassion, respect, human dignity, and collective unity (Bekker 2007; McShane and Von Glinow 2008; Tutu 1999).

In practice, *ubuntu* includes people helping people regardless of wealth or status. When speaking about actually living the philosophy of *ubuntu*, Archbishop Desmond Tutu instructed people to be open and available to others, to be affirming, to not feel threatened that others are capable. People living *ubuntu* have proper and healthy self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs to a greater whole. At the same time, people living the concept of *ubuntu* will feel diminished when others are humiliated, tortured, oppressed, or diminished in other ways (Magadlela 2008). In other words, as long as *someone* is suffering, *everyone* is suffering. Of course, this is also a key teaching in Buddhism and is not monopolized by the *ubuntu* philosophy. Nelson Mandela explains that Ubuntu philosophy is powerfully relevant in business. When speaking of *ubuntu* in the business world, Mandela claims that *ubuntu* can bridge gaps between people in the workplace as *ubuntu* promotes tolerance and acceptance. People living *ubuntu* believe themselves to be part of a greater human interdependent family that promotes peace and understanding (Magadlela 2008). The philosophy of *ubuntu* results in a standard for conduct and acceptable behaviors within the community.

Ubuntu is used largely to emphasize the need for unity or agreement in decision-making; while at the same time, it seeks to provide people with a suitable and ethical way of informing others of decisions that need to be made. Ubuntu has provided people with a certain mindset that potentially has the ability of promoting a more efficient means of ethical decision making and most of all the way individuals act towards one another. Interconnectedness dictates that each individual’s humanity is tied with others (Hewitt 2004). Understanding this concept is the most important aspect of living in an interconnected world. People are closely tied together and therefore must respect one another and always keep the idea of interconnection close to mind.

## **GAP ANALYSIS**

This author recognizes the risk that exists when Americans challenge or question American values, practices, beliefs, and norms (a.k.a. ‘culture’); even selecting the correct way to reference leadership traits that are inherently different than American traits causes concern. To refer to such traits as ‘non-American’ may lead a reader to interpret them as ‘un-American’. There is a profound difference. It is with concern and caution that this author considers methods and outcomes that could improve upon the system to which he claims to belong. Even while proceeding cautiously, the risk of readers incorrectly interpreting the intent of this paper still exists. It is ‘reform from within’ that is suggested here. This paper does not

claim to hold the only answer to reforming American leadership traits and practices; rather, this paper simply draws attention to potential flaws within the system with hope to continue the discussion for further improvement. An outcome of propagation is, hopefully, to leave things better than we inherited them. This should also be applicable to leadership, management, and other such intangible concepts. To think otherwise would lead one to believe that the system we operate in is not in need of improvement. For a thorough discussion of closed systems, please see Rohr & Martos (2005), Schaefer (1986, 1987) and Schaefer & Fassell (1988). Rohr and Martos (2005) call for *metanoia* in order to transform the system. Metanoia is the process of changing one's mind and embracing thoughts beyond the mind's present limitations or patterns.

Ubuntu is best understood by the notion that the "Ego" gets in the way of good leadership. A leader exhibiting Ubuntu "...is open and available to others, affirming of others, [and] does not feel threatened that others are able and good..." (Archbishop Desmond Tutu). A leader will only retain his/her position as long as he/she acts as a leader. They must lead with civility, respect, and trust. Ubuntu leaders put the team or community ahead of themselves. Self-awareness and self-assurance are key ingredients in understanding and exercising Ubuntu. This philosophy is also present in Greenleaf's seminal Servant Leadership model of the early 70s. An Ubuntu or servant leader does not wish to be in the spotlight or seek credit for his or her work. Instead, such leaders highlight the work of their team members and others. This is counterintuitive for most American leadership models where the leader is glorified, seeks recognition, and does not deflect the spotlight.

Understanding the inherent risk of drawing attention to the possibility of improving the system from within (without suggesting a revolution), this paper now attempts to describe the 'missing' aspects within American leadership preferences (based on societal 'should be' values) that were measured and part of the two preferred leadership styles presented earlier. The intent is to ferret out any Ubuntu traits that could fill the gaps in American leadership styles and practices.

Referring back to Table 3, the far left column included leadership traits that were found to be preferred and correlated to the American societal values of how a leadership should conduct him/herself. Table 4 summarizes those traits that are most likely missing traits within the context of American leadership practices. This is within the context of American society's readiness to embrace these traits in her leaders. Also in Table 4 are the Ubuntu philosophy traits that may help American leaders fill the gap in current leadership practices.

**TABLE 4  
MISSING TRAITS**

<b>Missing Trait</b>	<b>GLOBE Definition</b>	<b>Attributable GLOBE dimensions</b>	<b>Ubuntu Concept</b>
Inspirational	Inspires emotions, beliefs, values, and behaviors of others; inspires others to be motivated to work hard.	Performance Orientation, Gender Egalitarianism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, In-group Collectivism	Respect, Dignity, Compassion
Visionary	Has a vision and imagination of the future.	Performance Orientation, Gender Egalitarianism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, In-group Collectivism	Compassion, Solidarity, Survival
Encouraging	Gives courage, confidence or hope through reassuring and advising.	Performance Orientation, Gender Egalitarianism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, In-group Collectivism	Solidarity, Compassion, Respect, Dignity

<b>Missing Trait</b>	<b>GLOBE Definition</b>	<b>Attributable GLOBE dimensions</b>	<b>Ubuntu Concept</b>
Self-sacrificial	Foregoes self-interests and makes personal sacrifices in the interest of a goal or vision.	Performance Orientation, Gender Egalitarianism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, In-group Collectivism	Survival, Solidarity, Compassion, Respect, Dignity
Sincere	Means what he/she says, earnest	Performance Orientation, Gender Egalitarianism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, In-group Collectivism	Respect, Dignity, Compassion, Solidarity
Trustworthy	Deserves trust, can be believed and relied upon to keep his/her word.	Performance Orientation, Gender Egalitarianism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, In-group Collectivism	Respect, Dignity, Compassion, Survival
Honest	Speaks and acts truthfully.	Performance Orientation, Gender Egalitarianism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, In-group Collectivism	Respect, Dignity, Compassion, Survival
<i>Not</i> Individually-oriented	Concerned with and places high value on preserving group rather than individual needs.	Performance Orientation, Gender Egalitarianism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Humane Orientation	Survival, Solidarity, Compassion
<i>Not</i> Non-egalitarian	Believes that all individuals are equal and all should have equal rights and privileges.	Performance Orientation, Gender Egalitarianism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Humane Orientation	Survival, Solidarity, Compassion
<i>Not</i> Elitist	Believes that no one is superior and no one should enjoy special privileges.	Performance Orientation, Gender Egalitarianism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Humane Orientation	Survival, Solidarity, Compassion

It cannot be taken too lightly that a culture shift toward encouragement, compassion, solidarity, and the like would have on American leadership practices. Culture becomes a part of one's psychological makeup and it becomes difficult to unlearn (Poovan et al. 2006).

## CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper attempted to apply elements of the African Ubuntu philosophy to the context of American leadership theory and models to illustrate the possibility of a new leadership philosophy. Such an application could transform the ethical decision making dilemma facing many American-based corporations. Theory is necessary for not only operationalizing each concept but for interpreting the results of the measurement exercise (Malhotra 2007). It has been said that theory drives better measures and that better measures improve theory. This 'chicken and the egg' paradox is best described by Wrenn (1997):

“...measurement, as in scientific discovery in general, [is] an iterative process by which we improve our measures by measuring our theory, which in turn improves our theory, which suggests better measures” (p. 40).

The leadership traits that may be missing in the current American leadership practices, yet would be preferred leadership practices based on societal readiness to embrace them, include such traits as Inspirational, Visionary, Encouraging, self-sacrificial, Sincere, Trustworthy, Honest, not Individually-

oriented, not non-egalitarian, and not Elitist. It may be wise for American organizations, managers, and leaders to consider remediation, education, and implementation of these concepts to fully embrace what is being sought – yet missing – within the American societal values of what ‘should be’. For such a culture shift to take place, a first step would be to embrace a value-based leadership style. Value-based leadership has been likened on to successful traits in the Ubuntu philosophy (Poovan et al. 2006). The literature is fraught with the impact that value-based leadership has on performance, cohesiveness, survivability, etc (see, for example, (Avolio and Gardner 2005; Engelbrecht, et al. 2005; Fairholm 1991; Kuczmarski and Kuczmarski 1995; Overbeek 2001; Poovan et al. 2006)). Value-based leadership includes equal-participation in decision making, group support for risk taking, confronting change, developing a sense of community, conveying passion and strong conviction, and instilling values of belongingness and belief in the group goals (Kuczmarski and Kuczmarski 1995). In other words, value-based leadership is very ‘ubuntu’.

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