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THE 5 PILLARS OF LEADERSHIP

In a world tossed about by all kinds of crises: economic, social, health, political and environmental, the need for leadership and the development of future leaders is more than ever a critical imperative of our societies. Leadership could be defined as a set of values, attitudes and actions that are conducive to positively inspiring a group, an economic or social community or even an individual towards a higher goal.

The leader is the one who embodies these values in a given situation. It is therefore the criticality of the situation that makes the leader emerge and it is his actions and their positive impact on the group that perpetuate his qualities in time and space and that survive his departure or disappearance.

We could therefore in a somewhat simplistic way, speak of crisis resolution leadership or construction leadership and often the 2 situations intertwine in action: For example, Senghor was the builder of the Senegalese nation just like his many peers in the aftermath of independence. Mandela was both the one who put an end to Apartheid and the builder of the South African nation

In the 2 scenarios, we find attributes of universal value but whose declination is specific according to the situation and the cultural environment. Indeed, it is culture that defines the set of values characteristic of a group, a community or a people. The 5 pillars of leadership that we describe below, give an African perspective of these values.

***1. A VISION**: In Mandela's example, it is that of a multiracial, diverse and tolerant South Africa in which every individual would have the same rights and duties in order to build a just, egalitarian and prosperous nation. This vision is the horizon towards which everyone's efforts must be directed.*

***2. AN ATTITUDE:** These are the standards of behavior, the standards that the Leader imposes on himself and for which he accepts to be judged. It is a self-discipline that is superior to that which he requires of others. This requires a judicious balance between emotion and reasoning, in other words the heart and reason, observation and action in an enthusiasm that inspires, trains and mobilizes. Among these standards we can mention, integrity, humility, courage, empathy, action, etc. Most of the leaders whose reputation has stood the test of time*

(Mandela, Senghor, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Steve Jobs, Mother Theresa, Wangara Mathai, Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, Sundiata Keita, etc.) were examples to be followed by their contemporaries and disciples. Therefore, the ability to establish a relationship of trust with everyone and to inspire others to surpass themselves and lead them in action is a major value of leadership.

3. A TEAM: Building a team is the first test of leadership because the temptation is always great to surround ourselves with people we know and who look like us. It is the ability to form a group, to inspire and involve in action diverse personalities whose ideas we do not always share but whom we manage to federate around a vision. This is the importance of the notions of diversity, originality, complementarity and socio-cultural differences. Beyond the grouping of talents, there is above all the creation of an atmosphere, a working environment, an environment conducive to challenging preconceived ideas, to the emergence of new ideas and to the assumed acceptance of imperfections in action.

4. LISTENING and COMMUNICATION: These are two aspects of the same value that are based on 2 truths; the first is that we are all different and that we do not perceive the world and situations in the same way. The second truth is that we all react and act differently depending on the circumstances. Armed with these 2 truths, we must encourage individuals, whether or not they are members of the group, to talk about themselves, their interests and their motivation. It is under these conditions that the leader can know and understand the levers of motivation, group discipline and effectiveness in action. Communication then becomes the art of talking to everyone in such a way that everyone can find themselves in the subject as if we were talking to them individually to act in the direction of the defined objective. In the African world, the power of speech is a function of the relevance of the references to the values that serve the purpose.

5. INITIATIVE and DECISION-MAKING: There are many situations in which there is no unanimous decision in the conduct of business or of people. Each decision itself generates induced risks for which there is not always a good solution. The leader is confronted with solitary decision-making in full
knowledge of the difficulties in getting the group on board and the devastating consequences of failure. As a reference, we can cite Mandela who decided to engage in negotiations with the supporters of Apartheid without the agreement of the ANC, it was Lou Gerstner who decided not to dismantle IBM into 13 "Baby Blue", it was Senghor who decided to devote 40% of the State budget to Education. In the company, the weight of the time factor is decisive, as is the speed of execution. The leader is therefore forced to act without having the time to collect all the information he or she needs, based essentially on his or her intuition, his or her knowledge of the environment, the men and women who make up his or her team and their ability to engage with enthusiasm and determination in action.



Taking initiative includes not only decisions to achieve objectives but also individual and collective recognition of performance and success. From this point of view, celebration is inseparable from the leadership and cohesion of the group. This is how we have often seen Mandela dance in the African style during major successes, namely, his release, the organization of the first free elections in 1994, the conquest of the Rugby World Cup in 1996 and the organization of the 2010 World Cup.

Famous men have defined Leadership in a few meaningful thoughts. These include:
· The importance of an organization can be measured by a variety of factors. One of the most fundamental factors is the quality of its leaders **(Nelson Mandela 1989)**
· "A true leader is one who remains committed to a higher goal than most others do not yet see." — **Tony Elumelu**
· An authentic leader does not seek consensus, he creates it **(Martin Luther King 1967)**

African quotes and leadership proverbs emphasize community wisdom, responsibility, humility, and transmission. They consider the leader not as an isolated being, but as the pillar of a group whose strength depends on unity and concrete actions.

African Leadership: The Art of the Shepherd and the Strength of the Collective
Leadership in Africa is not just about exercising vertical power or the authority of a single individual. It is deeply rooted in a humanist and community philosophy. Unlike Western models that often focus on individual performance and competition, traditional and modern African leadership is based on a subtle balance between benevolent guidance, active listening and the constant search for consensus.

From Traditional to Modern: The Mutation of African Leadership
The transition from traditional community leadership to the demands of modern organizations in Africa represents a major cultural and managerial challenge. The shift from an agrarian economy and a highly hierarchical social structure to globalized and digitized business environments requires a redefinition of roles. This shift creates tensions, but also unique opportunities for managerial innovation.

1. The Clash of Models: The Tensions of the Transitio

The integration of ancestral values into the framework of the modern company generates three main paradoxes:

• **The paradox of authority vs. consensus:** Tradition values consensus (the palaver tree), a slow and inclusive process. Conversely, the modern economy requires agile, fast, and often top-down decision-making to remain competitive.

· **Managing the Elders and Merit the Young**: In African culture, age is synonymous with wisdom and legitimacy to lead. In business, the explosion of technology and the digital economy is placing very young managers at the head of teams that include older employees, disrupting the codes of traditional respect.

· **Community solidarity vs. individual performance:** The spirit of Ubuntu pushes to support the group at the expense of competition. Modern management, modelled on Western standards, imposes individual performance indicators (KPIs) and a results-oriented culture that can be perceived as individualistic or brutal.



2. The New Challenges of the Modern African Manager

To succeed in the current economic context, the African leader must navigate between several imperatives:

• **Reconciling social and corporate issues:** The manager is often called upon for extra-professional obligations (family events, community mutual aid). It must set clear boundaries without appearing disconnected or insensitive to local realities.

· **Adapting to the brain drain and retaining talent:** Faced with a globalized market, the modern manager must create an attractive corporate culture, offering not only a salary, but also a sense of belonging and cultural pride to retain young people on the continent.

• **Intergenerational and interethnic management:** In increasingly cosmopolitan companies, the leader must transcend ethnic or regional barriers to unify his teams around a purely professional vision, while respecting the diversity of each individual.

3. Towards a Hybrid Model: "Afro-management"

The solution to this transition does not lie in rejecting the past, nor in copying and pasting Western methods. It is found in the hybridization of cultures. The most influential African leaders today (such as the figures of pan-African capitalism) succeed by merging the best of both worlds: Indeed, while modern societies privilege individual performance and meritocracy, the African tradition emphasizes solidarity, consensus and social harmony.

The hybrid model must take into account the best of both worlds in an individual and collective performance perspective, namely: benevolent listening, decisions based on facts and data based on an ambitious community objective

- • ***Humanize performance indicators:*** *Use the culture of results while maintaining a strong empathy towards people. This is the idea of "performance through collective well-being".*
- • ***The digital palaver tree:*** *Replace long traditional meetings with collaborative communication spaces (Slacks, transversal working groups) where everyone's voice is valued in a structured and rapid way.*
- • ***Social impact leadership:*** *Modern companies in Africa almost natively integrate a social mission (CSR). Profit is no longer the only measure of performance; the modern leader must prove how his company develops the community, thus directly reconnecting with the philosophy of Ubuntu.*



In short, leadership according to African culture is a quest for harmony. He teaches us that to lead is to know how to hide behind the common interest, to value humility and to cultivate solidarity while allowing everyone to be the best of themselves to achieve a higher goal. In an interconnected and often fragmented modern world, this human-centred and long-term model offers a powerful and inspiring alternative to meet the challenges of tomorrow.