

Knowing in Context: A Postcolonial Analysis of Contemporary Leadership Development
and Leadership Education

Submitted by Vanessa Iwowo to the University of Exeter
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ABSTRACT

The thesis contributes to the emerging critical perspective on global management education and leadership development in a multi-faceted world. It takes a critical look at leadership, particularly with respect to how this is conceptualised and understood, and also, what are the implications for such epistemological leanings. This is in light of recent criticisms of global management education, and other salient questions of knowledge imperialism and ethnocentrism that arise with respect to how knowledge is created and represented. Furthermore, there are even more pertinent questions of universality and contextual applicability, given the relevant issue of cultural diversity and what many researchers increasingly suggest is the socially constructed nature of leadership. To this end, it has been suggested that there might be a possibility of contextual dissonance between mainstream leadership paradigms and the lived socio-cultural reality of many non-western societies. This is in view of the fact that there are as many definitions of leadership as those who have tried to define it (Stodgill, 1970), such that there is now no one universal ‘truth’ about leadership (Billsberry, 2007) because leadership is a process of reality construction that is grounded in the management of meaning (Smircich and Morgan, 1982), so that it means ‘different things to different people’ (Gill, 2006; p.7).

This thesis therefore investigates the contemporary practice of leadership development/leadership education and in particular, questions its application as a management learning intervention in the contexts within which it is deployed. It explores the pertinent question of contextual dissonance and in this, critically examines leadership development as a catalyst for organisational change within the context of a global non-

profit organisation, and again, as a tool for management development in the context of a non-western society.

Findings indicate the presence of a strong community orientation that is seemingly consistent with the philosophical underpinnings of indigenous community practices in Africa and that reflect a noticeable degree of contextual dissonance between mainstream paradigms of leadership and the lived experiential reality of programme participants in the context understudied i.e. Nigeria. Subsequently, this thesis proposes a model of leadership development that may begin to address this contextual gap; one that although acknowledges the conceptual importance of the mainstream, is fundamentally accommodating of the local knowledge frameworks within which it is deployed.

Overall, the research contributes to understandings of Leadership Development in that it uncovers how 'knowledge' about leadership is conceptualised within the studied context and it generates new insight into how leadership development as a contemporary practice is constructed within this environment; in particular, how this is negotiated and engaged with relative to that society. Secondly, it advances a model through which contemporary management education interventions may account for the lived socio-cultural reality of the contexts within which they are applied.

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