Leadership framework informed by the Samurai and Ubuntu leadership approaches

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growth, leadership, quality, Samurai, Sustainable, Ubuntu

Abstract

Lack of appropriate leadership and entrepreneurial skills has hindered most SMMEs to achieve sustainable growth. Current leadership approaches in SMMEs are modelled on Western multinationals that are mainly productivity oriented, with very different organizational challenges and contexts. There is a need for a framework that provides a lens through which leadership approaches in SMMEs can be identified and understood from other perspectives.

***Purpose of the Research**: The aim of the study was to formulate a leadership framework informed by the Ubuntu and Samurai leadership approaches that can be used to foster growth in SMMEs.*

***Methodology**: The study was exploratory or descriptive in nature and quantitative techniques were used for data collection from a sample size of 377. Data was gathered from owners and executive managers of SMMEs in the Gauteng province and analyzed through quantitative statistical techniques.*

***Results:** The results reviewed show that the values emerged from both leadership contexts include respect, humility, courage integrity and humility. The findings also indicated that the participants possess a favorable disposition towards employee relationships and demonstrate leadership attributes that foster employee engagement and contentment. Thus, the findings indicate preference for Samurai and Ubuntu leadership approaches.*

***Practical Implication of the Study**: The study contributed to the body of literature on leadership approaches by proposing a framework that can be adopted by SMMEs in the real world of work.*

***Conclusion**: SMMEs also experience failure among other challenges towards their growth as well as sustainability due to several challenges including skills shortage. The identified values are essential for the success of SMMES.*

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Introduction

Most companies in the SMMEs sector fail to achieve sustainable growth because leaders lack appropriate skills in both leadership and entrepreneurship in general (Abor & Quartey 2010). Fatoki (2014) has shown that SMMEs remain profitable and highly successful when they are led by competent entrepreneurs leading them with good leadership skills. SMMEs that are led by good leaders are relatively more sustainable and profitable in comparison with SMMEs that are led and operated by leaders who lack leadership skills.

Dube (2016: 1-4) has shown that the basic principles of "Ubuntu" are essential for ensuring that emerging SMMEs in South Africa enjoy sustainable growth. Current leadership approaches in SMMEs are modelled on Western multinationals that are mainly productivity focused with very different organizational challenges and contexts. This study proposed a conceptual framework that provided a lens through which leadership approaches in SMMEs can be identified and understood from other perspectives. The preference for these two leadership frameworks other than other leadership styles is because of their unique core values. These two are a blend of crucial values in leadership. These are

humanity, an inclusive culture, long term cohesion and strong lasting relationships from Ubuntu while the robust militaristic values of Samurai such as strong ethics, loyalty, honor, discipline and resilience will blend well for a solid balanced framework.

Thus, the aim of the study was to formulate a leadership framework informed by the Ubuntu and Samurai leadership approaches. A framework based on Ubuntu and Samurai can be used to foster growth in SMMEs. A framework that blends relevant aspects of leadership from the rest of the world could be used to encourage local SMMEs to take valuable lessons from countries such as South Africa and Japan. The framework of the study addressed three concerns that are crucial to leadership driven enterprises. These are the South African context of Ubuntu, the Japanese context of Samurai, and the Western context of business competition. A contemporary framework emanated from these considerations to ensure the viability of good leadership practices in SMMEs.

Dube (2016) highlighted the numerous benefits of promoting the Ubuntu principle in developing societies. South Africans are known for being more humane and caring in times of crisis, thus ubuntu. South Africa has contributed significantly to the rest of the world by promoting the Ubuntu principle. Business values and traditions contribute to long-term survival and viability. Ubuntu is closely associated with good leadership qualities, empathy, honesty, personal integrity, and dedication to fellow human beings.

The Samurai Model has been used in Japan for over 700 years (Park, Krishnan, Chinta, Assudani & Lee 2012: 207-224). The code "Bushido" means "to serve with complete devotion, humility and commitment". Adherence to the Samurai code has propelled Japanese businesses to a position of superior leadership on the global scale. The Samurai code ensures that customers are always provided with quality and affordable services by SMMEs. The model ensures loyalty among customers, thereby fostering long-term viability and profitability in SMMEs. The Samurai Model is highly applicable to South African SMMEs as a means of ensuring continued survival. The value system of Japan shows that the Samurai Model is highly dependable and worthy of imitation in South Africa.

SMMEs constitute a significant proportion of business operations in Africa, accounting for more than 90% of the total. These enterprises also play a crucial role in the African economy, contributing to over 50% of employment and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the region (Okafor & Amalu, 2010). Enhanced competitiveness of SMMEs can potentially make a significant contribution towards economic and social development, as well as augmenting poverty reduction efforts.

The empirical literature has examined the impact of SMMEs on economic growth and has endeavored to comprehend their role (Carree, Van Stel, Thurik, & Wennekers 2002). Several prominent corporations have taken proactive measures towards sustainability by creating programmes that tackle corporate, economic, environmental, and social concerns. However, the notion of sustainability remains relatively unfamiliar to the majority of SMMEs in developing nations.

According to the findings of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) (2021) study, Gauteng business owners encounter several obstacles that contribute to business failure. These challenges include restricted market opportunities, frequent fluctuations in commodity prices, ineffective value addition techniques, inadequate access to market-based information in a timely manner, limited availability of capital, reduced bargaining power, as well as insufficient managerial expertise.

This study has the potential to assess and evaluate the extent to which leadership quality contributes to sustainable growth of SMMEs through adoption of novel leadership approaches such as Ubuntu and Samurai. This study led to the construction of a novel framework that will serve to explore ways of ensuring growth and sustainable growth through a blend of the Samurai leadership approach and Ubuntu leadership approach. In this area, there is tremendous demand for original research based on data collected from the key players such as SMME owners and operators in Gauteng Province.

The study contributes to the commonwealth of knowledge in different ways. Leadership in SMMEs is vital for enabling the South African Government to be successful in providing administrative and financial assistance to SMMEs. Marivate (2014), Worku (2016) and Fatoki (2014) have shown that the existing programmes to assist SMMEs have failed so far. The leadership framework developed from this study can be used by emerging SMMEs for the promotion of service excellence and the retention of customers.

The framework will go a long way in terms of assisting emerging SMMEs to adopt transformational business leadership. The study also provided theoretical and practical discourse infusing business leadership models that are based on innovative indigenous ideals and principles among emerging SMMEs. This will enable them to retain customers by way of rendering highly efficient and affordable business-related services to all their customers and clients. The framework will be useful in improving leadership in SMMEs in a way that would ensure sustainable growth.

Literature Review

Ubuntu, like many other African ideas, defies simple explanation. The term is often used to refer to an African worldview and its role in shaping individual and group attitudes and behaviours. It has also been called a "philosophy of life," with its most basic meaning being "personhood" (Brack et al. 2003: 319). In the findings of Praeg (2014), discourses of leadership and Ubuntu are characterized by the broader context of critical humanism. The author further states that we can only start to witness the Ubuntu rich experience when leaders adopt the philosophy as seen by a dynamic way of thinking that brings some level of consciousness in future leaders, specifically the younger generation of leaders.

An individual person is mainly identified by how he or she relates with others rather than individualistic traits. That is the aspect of interrelatedness (Du Toit 2004:33). With an understanding of the fact that Ubuntu values follow kindness, compassion, altruism, and respect, Msila (2014) views Ubuntu as democratic way of solving several problems that may arise in the society. This way there is a sense of involvement such that employees will be motivated by the fact that they are part of the solution. The Ubuntu approach is well related to how effective a leader can be (Brubaker 2013:123). The findings are that leaders who incorporate Ubuntu in their leadership style tend to achieve results because they have motivated followers. Once the followers are motivated, their main goal becomes winning thus achieving organisational goal and sustainable growth.

The Samurai Model is highly applicable to South African SMMEs as a means of ensuring continued survival. The value system of Japan shows that the Samurai Model is highly dependable and worthy of imitation in South Africa. Kock (2008:56) states that managers today are looking back in history to solve modern day problems. Thus, the old credible views like the Bushido can play a crucial role in shaping modern day leadership. He further states that managers are also looking for affirmation from military scholarly guidance due to principal values in military, thus the Samurai being one of the commendable militaries cannot be left out.

Chen and Cheng (2017) state that leadership behaviour affects performance. Samurai leadership is more focused on people through caring for the people while making money in an ethical way. Where one would behave in an honourable manner, the followers will also behave honourably by ensuring that they accomplish their task and positively contribute towards organisational goals. The future leadership style will be more focused on team leadership. This shares the same notion of the Samurai and Ubuntu leadership where goals are achieved through unity, shared objectives, and teamwork.

Today's challenges require each member to be creative, innovative, and competitive as well as willing to take risks to succeed (Hendriwinaya 2016). The Samurai believed that honour would only come by taking risk to win the battle no matter how fierce the enemy may be. Kock (2008) states that to succeed in leadership, one must take both the way of the pen and the way of the sword and that helps to find a balance. The Japanese culture values team honour and it is that honour that would drive the warriors towards achievement. The Samurai would strive for honour to an extent of willing to sacrifice their lives to protect their country and their homesteads. It is team spirit that contributed to the "Japan is number one" movement in the 1980s (Chen et al. 2016:146-148).

Hypothesis

The ***null hypothesis (H0)*** states that leadership quality can be improved by leadership models such as the Samurai and Ubuntu leadership approaches.

The alternative hypothesis (H1) states that leadership quality cannot be improved by leadership models such as the Samurai and Ubuntu leadership approaches.

Research Methodology

The study design was descriptive and cross-sectional one (Bell, Harley & Bryman 2022:19). The study was exploratory or descriptive in nature. The study made use of quantitative or statistical methods of data collection and analysis. Raosoft Online Sample Size Calculator (2022) was used for sample size calculation and level of significance of test was set at 5%. The aim of the study was to formulate a leadership framework informed by the Samurai and Ubuntu leadership approaches. The two leadership approaches were not necessarily employed because they are Japanese and South African leadership styles. They were employed due to their unique practical values that can be well adopted from the military perspective (Samurai) to the boardroom and from the society to the boardroom (Ubuntu).

A survey was conducted gathering data from owners and executive managers that are involved in decision making (Directors and CEOs) of SMMEs, thus primary data was gathered. The findings of the study can be used by business experts in the government policy making decision positions to improve SMME leaders, accordingly, thus sustainably growing them. Though the study has unearthed fundamental information, there remains a need to explore further on areas such as SMME governance which remains a challenge in SMMEs.

The total number of SMMEs in Gauteng Province was set at 917 043 (Business Tech 2022). Thus, the population size was 917 043. After using the Raosoft Online Sample Size Calculator the realized sample size of study was 377. The sample size of study was adjusted upwards to 410 with a view to make up for potential dropouts from the study and to be able to perform robust parametric data analysis such as structural equations modelling for data analysis (Keith 2019). However, on practical data collection, the responses went beyond the planned sample of 410 because the questionnaires were being completed online, and the respondents became 415. Thus, the online response form was locked at 415 after which 5 additional respondents had already sent in their responses.

Stratified random sampling (Levy & Lemeshow 2013) was used for selecting eligible businesses included as participants of the study. Stratification was done by type of business activity. Eleven types of business activities that are commonly used by SMMEs were used as strata. From each category of business activity, eligible businesses were selected by using simple random sampling (Levy & Lemeshow 2013). Table 2 shows the details.

Table 1: Stratification of SMMEs by type of business activity

Type of business activity	Number of SMMEs
Manufacturing	45
Trade and Accommodation	75
Finance and Business Services	55
Transport and Communications	50
Agricultural businesses	20
Retail Businesses	45
Construction businesses	20
Procurement and Logistics	30
Information technology	25
Health care businesses	25
Other	20
Total	**415**

The questionnaire was adapted from Laguna, Mielniczuk and Gorgievski (2021:1543-1571) who also conducted a similar study. Data were collected from each one of the 415 eligible business enterprises by using an online self-administered questionnaire. This procedure was essential for ensuring content validity and is commonly referred to as face validity (Bell, Harley & Bryman 2022: 43-44).

While conducting this research, the researcher adhered to the requirements of face validity method to increase validity levels of the data collected and analysed. Assistance was sought from various experts in related fields to conduct the face validation of the instrument.

Results

The empirical results obtained from the administered survey questionnaire. The results are displayed in a tabular layout, accompanied by a brief explication of the categories employed to delineate the leadership styles assessed, before conducting an in-depth analysis of the data.

The common attributes in both Ubuntu and Samurai leadership were explored. These were adapted in the data collection instrument to gather results on the key concepts of ubuntu and samurai based on the day-to-day work practices of the leaders. The findings are compiled in Table 2.

Table 2: Leadership Qualities

Attributes of Leadership qualities	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have a very good working relationship with my employees/subordinates	1 (0.2%)	6 (1.4%)	306 (73.7%)	102 (24.6%)
I appreciate all employees for the work they do	2 (0.5%)	3 (0.7%)	283 (68.2%)	127 (30.6%)
I value comments and suggestions given to me by my employees	2 (0.5%)	4 (1.0%)	287 (69.2%)	122 (29.4%)
I have genuine respect for my employees	1 (0.2%)	5 (1.2%)	272 (65.5%)	137 (33.0%)
My natural tendency is to understand a problem that has been po	2 (0.5%)	17 (4.1%)	267 (64.3%)	129 (31.1%)
I am quick to acknowledge my mistakes	2 (0.5%)	30 (7.2%)	242 (58.3%)	141 (34.0%)
I easily apologize to an employee that I have offended	2 (0.5%)	27 (6.5%)	244 (58.8%)	142 (34.2%)
I am accountable enough to my colleagues and superiors over my	1 (0.2%)	10 (2.4%)	261 (62.9%)	143 (34.5%)
I am transparent enough while taking decisions	2 (0.5%)	11 (2.7%)	277 (66.7%)	125 (30.1%)
I am objective enough while taking decisions	1 (0.2%)	9 (2.2%)	263 (63.4%)	142 (34.2%)
I am fair enough while taking decisions	1 (0.2%)	11 (2.7%)	262 (63.1%)	141 (34.0%)
I make the effort to have myself educated continuously	2 (0.5%)	10 (2.4%)	243 (58.6%)	160 (38.6%)
I support my employees in having them trained	2 (0.5%)	8 (1.9%)	238 (57.3%)	167 (40.2%)
I give my employees service bonuses as an expression	4 (1.0%)	22 (5.3%)	265 (63.9%)	124 (29.9%)
I take my time to help out employees who encounter personal pr	3 (0.7%)	19 (4.6%)	268 (64.6%)	125 (30.1%)
I consider myself loyal to my employees	1 (0.2%)	6 (1.4%)	296 (71.3%)	112 (27.0%)
I respect business ethics principles at all times	9 (2.2%)	0 (0.0%)	267 (64.3%)	139 (33.5%)
I attend to requests for help from my employees after completion	1 (0.2%)	14 (3.4%)	283 (68.2%)	117 (28.2%)
I ask my juniors to handle requests for help from my employees	10 (2.4%)	32 (7.7%)	265 (63.9%)	108 (26.0%)
I conduct business with due	1 (0.2%)	10 (2.4%)	265 (63.9%)	139 (33.5%)

The examination of the residual characteristics adheres to a comparable structure. It is noteworthy that a significant proportion of participants exhibited concurrence or a high degree of concurrence with

favorable leadership attributes, including but not limited to the recognition of employee feedback and recommendations, the demonstration of gratitude towards employees, and the manifestation of authentic regard for employees. These are the very attributes cognizant of both the Samurai and Ubuntu characteristics. The findings indicate that the participants possess a favorable disposition towards employee relationships and demonstrate leadership attributes that foster employee engagement and contentment. Thus, the findings indicate preference for Samurai and Ubuntu leadership approaches.

In general, the data presented in this table provides insight into the attitudes and perceptions of the participants regarding their leadership abilities in the specific context of small and medium-sized enterprises.

Ubuntu and Samurai values represent distinct cultural frameworks that possess distinctive leadership attributes. Nevertheless, it is possible to discern shared characteristics and establish a leadership framework that integrates principles from both cultural contexts. The Ubuntu and Samurai values offer valuable insights into key leadership qualities.

The framework below summaries the values emerging from both leadership contexts.

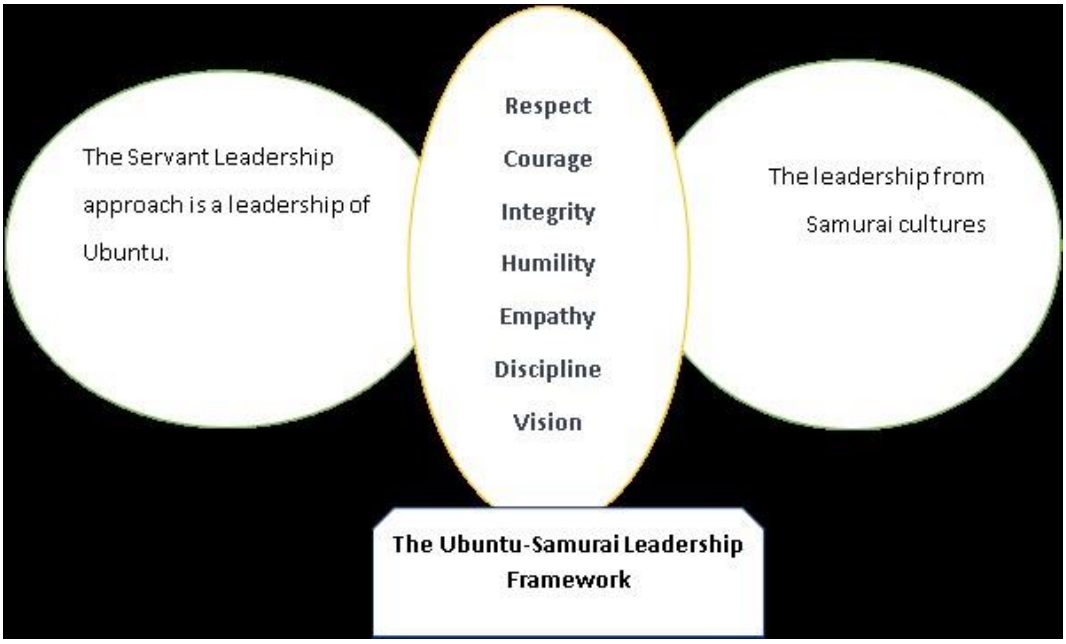


Figure 1: The Ubuntu-Samurai Leadership Framework

The Ubuntu culture prioritizes honesty and trust, whereas the Samurai culture values loyalty and honour. A leader is expected to exhibit honesty, trustworthiness, and integrity, even in challenging circumstances.

Discussion and Conclusions

Success leads to growth and empowerment leads to sustainable growth because the empowered employees will drive the business further in future post retirement of owners or other managers or even in the event of death. SMMEs also experience failure among other challenges towards their growth as well as sustainability due to several challenges including skills shortage (SEDA, 2016). The two leadership approaches of preference in this study are somewhat from extreme perspectives. The Ubuntu leadership approach is more humanistic putting people first through values such as respect, cooperation and togetherness. On the other hand, the Samurai leadership approach has a staunch approach being more focused on core values such as honor, ethics and discipline. Therefore, a combination of the values from these two models gave a good blend of a strong leadership framework. Unlike the leadership approaches from the western countries that are mainly job focused, these two approaches focus on the people and the required values.

The aim of the study was to formulate a framework informed by the Samurai and Ubuntu leadership approaches. The design of the study was descriptive and cross-sectional (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022). Data was gathered from the various SMMEs identified as the target population of this study, hence the design used was a cross-sectional one. The study made use of quantitative or statistical methods of data collection and analysis. Raosoft Online Sample Size Calculator (2022) was used for sample size calculation. The level of significance of test was set at 5%.

A survey was conducted gathering data from owners and managers of SMMEs, thus primary data was gathered. The findings of the study can be used by business experts in the government policy making decision positions to improve SMME leaders, accordingly, thus sustainably growing them. Though the study has unearthed fundamental information, there remains a need to explore further on areas such as SMME governance which remains a challenge in SMMEs.

Limitation and Directions for future Research

The study was only limited to leadership approaches that are centred on core values aligned to ethics and honour(Samurai) and humanity and co-operation (Ubuntu) hence leaving other pool of leadership styles that are focussed on other areas unexplored. There is need to further explore other types of leadership as this may earth out a deeper insight.

It is also worthwhile to conduct further investigation into the attributes that exhibit a stronger coherence on the two leadership fraternities. They may serve as potential avenues for enhancement for leaders operating within SMMEs, including but not limited to the recognition of errors, the establishment of career advancement trajectories, and the optimization of communication channels.

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