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**How Transformative Operations and Ubuntu Values
Impact Organization Performance in Turbulent
Environments: A Literature Review**

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper was to provide organization leaders and managers with an understanding of transformative operations as a practical approach to successfully navigate chaotic business environments in Africa.

Methodology: The researcher conducted a review of available academic literature, journals, research findings, authoritative policy documents, library books and online business publications related to emergent transformative leadership theory, ubuntu values, organization performance and environmental turbulence in the business context. The author used a thematic analysis of text, qualitative interpretivism of published information and grounded theory to develop a conceptual framework to guide future research in the field.

Findings: The author examined modern societal and scholarly calls for transformative leadership as a suitable model to address the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous conditions of a chaotic global environment in the 21st century. The literature and empirical research review suggest that implementing transformative operations, alongside practicing ubuntu values, equips organizations to navigate a strategic path through turbulent conditions. These approaches secure a business organization's survival, sustainability, profitability and

market leadership. The author proposes that leading organization performance in an evolving environment is neither a linear process nor a simple planning routine. Rather, it is a transcendent approach to navigating immediate, disruptive, short, medium and long-term challenges to arrive at desired goals. In the process, organizations change, adapt, innovate and transform themselves in order to thrive in the face of evolving environmental conditions. The study proposes a conceptual model for further empirical research on the impact of transformative operations on organization performance.

Recommendations: The study recommend leaders and managers to 1) adopt transformative operations as a strategy to successfully navigate environmental turbulence, 2) to harness the free social energy available in the ubuntu philosophy to leverage institutional performance in public and private business in Africa, 3) use environmental mapping to configure and navigate surrounding force fields, 4) adopt additional performance measures, alongside financial results, to provide a wholistic picture of business success. And finally, the study invite researchers to conduct empirical tests to evaluate the efficacy of the conceptual framework.

Keywords: *Transformative operations, environmental turbulence, organization performance, ubuntu values, business transformation*

INTRODUCTION

Transformative operations are principles and cultural practices used by leaders and managers to actualize transformative leadership in an organization. Transformative leadership is defined as “an ethnically based leadership model that integrates a commitment to values and outcomes by optimizing the long-term interests of stakeholders and society and honouring the moral duties owed by organizations to their stakeholders” (Caldwell et al., 2012). Transformative leadership has been suggested as a suitable approach to assist organizations successfully navigate environmental turbulence in the 21st century (Montuori & Fahim, 2010). The practice of its principles helps organizations address and overcome the oscillating shifts in global political positions, the emergence of environmental disasters, rapidly changing social trends and accelerating advances in technology driving economics (Sanchez, 2015). Environmental change in recent times is so significant that organizations need to adjust to the turbulence by transforming themselves if they are to survive the long term (Suarez & Oliva, 2005).

Nonetheless, leaders are called upon to give direction to organization growth, development and success initiatives (Nohria & Khurana, 2010), while managers are expected to operationalize business strategy and ensure organizations achieve their goals in the context of a continuously evolving environment (Wren & Bedeian, 2009). However, leaders and managers are vested with institutional power and authority to engineer organization success using appropriate tools, techniques and interpersonal skills. Thus, both play critical roles in ensuring an organization’s survival and success to the satisfaction of stakeholders within the ecosystem.

Global business consultants describe worldwide conditions as chaotic and disruptive. They suggest that the key to organizations successfully navigating these conditions is sustained “transformation” as a present continuous activity of dynamic response, adjustment and alignment to accelerating change (Faeste & Hemerling, 2016). Nonetheless, calls to ensure strategic long term goals are met such as the Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs (United Nations, 2015), Agenda 2063 (African Union Commission, 2015) and Vision 2030 (Government of Kenya, 2007) demand a generous supply of transformative leaders and managers to realize these goals in public and private institutions at all levels of society (Bukusi, 2020).

Scholars have joined the search for new leadership theory to tackle the dynamics of shifting political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental (PESTLE) conditions that defy conventional approaches to leadership (Montuori & Fahim, 2010). Citing societal discontent and public distrust for leaders alongside corporate ethical failures in recent years, scholars call for a new ethical form of leadership called - transformative leadership (Caldwell et al., 2012). Montuori (2010), citing shifting socio-economic conditions, suggests that a transformative leadership approach rather than conventional (normative) practices are required to embrace and successfully navigate the dynamic and chaotic challenges of the 21st century (Montuori A. , 2010). However, the underlying theory of the subject remains novel as scholars endeavour to understand, define and refine its principles (Caldwell et al., 2012). This study proposes that transformative operations underpin superior organization performance in a turbulent environment.

Ubuntu is an African philosophy of existence captured in the phrase, “I am because you are and you are because I am” (Mapadimeng, 2007), as a way of life and principle of socio-economic intercourse that has seen communities in Africa survive and thrive in changing environments for thousands of years. Its principles have been used to unite divided

communities and drive social transformation (Tutu, 2004). This study considers ubuntu to be a reserve of social capital that can be used to power business performance on the continent.

Problem Statement

As an example of environmental turbulence threatening economic recession in Africa, the global COVID-19 pandemic adversely affected organizations in three strategic elements, 1) social distancing; causing major shifts in work routines, 2) disruption of supply chains; causing discontinuity in service delivery, and 3) travel bans; causing lockdowns of persons and products. This meant that organizations had to make rapid and drastic changes to their structures, staffing, systems and operational strategy to survive the resulting environmental disruption. However, organizations around Africa were unprepared to cope with these drastic changes and faced collapse and redundancy (World Bank, 2020).

Other emergent global conditions affecting businesses in the 21st century include unstable political alliances, looming environmental and natural disasters, changes in generational social trends, accelerating technological change, inadequate legal framework to address new realities and erratic economic performance that affects resource management and strategic planning (Suarez & Oliva, 2005). While one may argue that these conditions are no different from changes in previous times, the suddenness, magnitude, unpredictability and often confluence of these events cause leaders and managers to reactively scramble to put in place measures to mitigate the negative impact of these phenomena on performance. Equipping leaders and managers with knowledge of transformative operations will enable them to take proactive initiatives to ensure their organizations are positioned and primed to successfully navigate chaotic environmental conditions.

Many modern leadership and management theories are developed in western capitals. However, these models require costly contextualization in order to yield meaningful results in Africa. Others are rendered inefficient, because of their reliance on high levels of technology unavailable on the continent (Kaplan & Norton, 1996). The transformative operations model lends itself to the African way of life and would ease adoption challenges and ease its uptake amongst firms seeking to secure competitive advantage, survival and success on the continent (Karsten & Illa, 2005).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership Theory

Leadership theory has evolved with time as human learning has enabled the understanding and mastery of the evolving environment. The prehistoric Darwinian disposition of leadership is based on the principle that only the strong members of a species survive and adapt to the changing conditions of their environment. This meant that community survival was dependent on the stronger members of the community. Later, the “Big man” theory explained that leadership was provided by the all-powerful, usually positional, head of the community. The trait theory came to explain that leadership was provided by those who exhibit special or unique traits. Those with these traits or endowments used them to wield power and authority over their communities. While the practice of these theories still exist, their efficacy in handling the complexities modern day organizations face is inadequate (Northouse, 2016).

In 21st century leaders are inundated with multiple challenges on a global scale that include politics, technology, social change, globalization and global warming. These leaders need more than strength, position and traits to effectively lead the survival of organizations (Johns & Moser, 2001). Leaders need knowledge, skills, technique and method in their positions that

equip them to provide profitable direction to those they lead. Thus, the emergence of contingency, transformational and systems theories in the last century have emerged to empower leaders to address the complex, disruptive and often chaotic environment. Contingency theory suggests that leaders need to carefully consider their context and the unique circumstances they face before making decisions. Transformational theory calls attention to the value and social energy people bring to bear in resolving organizational survival and sustainability challenges. Systems theory brings out the interconnected nature of social issues, circumstances and events. A single event can lead to a series of discordant changes and adjustments within an ecosystem. These later theories emphasize that the evolution of leadership thinking is in itself influenced by environmental advancement (Nohria & Khurana, 2010). Transformative operations draw from transformational, contingency and systems leadership theories.

Transformative Operations

Transformative operations are leadership principles and cultural practices that underpin the practice of transformative leadership. Transformative leadership is a new, needed, ideal and aspirational set of principles pursued by leaders to achieve excellence in their endeavours (Caldwell et al., 2012). Shields (2011), suggests the need for transformative leaders to be open and sensitive to ethical and social concerns to initiate internal organization equity and inclusivity (Shields, 2011). Langlois (2011) proposes an ethical frame that considers the concept of “followers who lead” and “other centeredness” as important in leadership engagements. The author draws attention to the principles of “reflection” and “moral courage” as critical to the success and effectiveness of transformative leaders. The author suggests that ethics without action is wishful thinking, while ethics with action is transformative (Langlois, 2011). Transformative leadership suggests that everyone in a business has a leadership and followership role to play. One is from time to time called upon to take up role depending on the nature, expertise, need, and scope of a specific business initiative (Montuori & Donnelly, 2017). This participative model of leadership suggests that organizations can drive and respond to environmental change through adopting dynamic culture, strategy, systems and structure. The authors present a distinct departure from the central, dependent position of the “leader” to the co-dependent participation of everyone in the organization. The authors imply that “leader” and “follower” are transferable roles, rather than “permanent” positions assigned to specific persons. Transformative leadership is depicted as flexible and facilitative in form rather than prominent in character or frontal in position. The authors point out the dangers of “hero” worship as an unsustainable leadership solution.

Langlois (2011) calls on the need for ethical reflection, creative enquiry and collaboration as keys to instigating transformative leadership in a business. Montuori and Donnelly (2017) also draw ethical frames of human existence of being, relating, knowing and doing as essential for effecting transformation. These principles align themselves with ubuntu. The authors, Montuori and Donnelly (2017) further suggest that creativity is not limited to a specific discipline, but rather urge transformative leaders to draw on all the resources in the arts, science, music and material world to create a new whatever needs to be transformed. While other forms of leadership favour specific character traits or charismatic typology, transformative leader does not necessarily fit into any particular stereotype or mould, but rather pragmatically employs emotional intelligence, effectual leadership styles and approaches as needed with a goal to embrace and create order out of chaos. The authors introduce the concept of a “transformative moment” in a turbulent environment as a fertile condition for leaders to facilitate needed business transformation.

A thematic analysis of the theoretical models put forward by Caldwell et al (2012), Shields (2011), Langlois (2011), Montuori & Donnelly (2017), Keeney (2010) and Ncube (2010) identified eight core operations of transformative leadership. The first, “Inclusion and participation” engenders engaging all members in recognized roles and responsibilities that lead directly to the attainment of organization goals, celebrating diversity, and interdependence. The second, “creative inquiry and innovation” encompasses habitual creative reflection, adjustment, entrepreneurial improvement and innovation of organization processes, evoking possibility, creativity, enterprise and engaging in “transformative conversations” to construct a new reality. The third, “Engaging the environment”, is the ability to challenge and push boundaries and limits of internal paradigms and external barriers, thus continuously creating a new operating environment, embracing nature, collectivism and community. The fourth, “embracing a guiding philosophy”, entails the exhibition of superordinate virtues, values and ethics guiding participation and pursuit of organization goals. It seeks the greater good of humanity, spirituality, questioning assumptions and reality, favours consensus and solidarity.

The fifth, “Transformation: pursuing aspirational goals” is always examining the prospect of possibility and pioneering opportunity to create a new reality, improvisation and transformation. The sixth, “Excellence, mastery & high ideals” involves relentless pursuit of operational excellence, open to new learning, adoption of new improved techniques, dissatisfaction with the present, pursuing mastery and modelling. The seventh, “Courageous visioning & transcendent leadership” involves courageous, flexible, collaborative, sharing of leader/follower roles and responsibility to navigate challenges, facilitate goals, transcending dichotomy and promoting shared vision. The eighth, “Embracing change, challenge and complexity” involves being results oriented, emotionally intelligent, embracing complexity, absurdity, ambiguity and uncertainty in driving change, performance and corporate growth. These eight operations promote a dynamic culture that ensures a business is always learning, responding to and engaging its environment to navigate external conditions (Bukusi, 2021).

Empirical Studies

Empirical evidence of a relationship between transformative operations and environmental turbulence is found in a study conducted by Psychogios, Psychogios, & Garev, (2015). They investigated complexity leadership behaviour in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) that operate in a turbulent business environment in south Eastern Europe. This study suggests that a “correct” response to environmental turbulence enables a business to effectively transition through transformative moments (seasons of change) and survive the long term. It also suggests that by continuously adjusting its internal health (operations) a business is able to successfully reposition itself to survive in a turbulent environment (Psychogios et al., 2015). This research draws our attention to the terms “complexity leadership behaviour” which would suggest that there is a suitable leadership behaviour that enables a business to survive a turbulent environment. While the researchers focus on SMEs, their study does provide insight on the internal workings and adjustments organizations make to successfully respond to turbulent environments.

Sondaite and Keidonaite (2020) investigated the experience of subordinates of transformational leadership demonstrated by supervisors during a period of change and transition in two international organizations in Lithuania. The findings suggested that transformative leaders introduce change as a natural and positive process. Transformative leaders also encourage employee commitment and willingness to be part of the team. They set an example of constructive knowledge sharing and seeking better cognition of each team member.

Transformative leaders also promptly react to an ongoing change (Sondaite & Keidonaite, 2020). Grin, Hassink, Karadzic, and Moors (2018) studied how to manage change and transition to establish how external change influences internal transformative leadership in Portugal and Netherlands. The study findings suggested that vision and ambition help mobilize change internally and externally by indicating how problems can be fruitfully resolved through behavior change and trust (Grin et al., 2018). Tatlah and Aslam (2012) investigated how emotional intelligence empowers transformative leaders to drive sustainable change among school leaders in Pakistan, their findings suggest that this needs to be accompanied by individual transformation and structural change in institutions (Tatlah & Aslam, 2012).

Xu, Caldwell, Glasper & Guevara sought to validate transformative leadership as comparable to other established models and present it as a viable leadership construct in South Florida. The study findings suggested a positive association between the six transformative leadership perspectives and the five leadership roles described by Kouzes & Posner (2012), (Xu et al., 2015). Regier (2017) investigated transformative leadership as a key to access Africa's human capital and unlock barriers to progress in Kenya. Findings of the study identified, "(1) Need for leaders able to transform situations (2) The positive impact of the modelling of transformative leadership (3) need to hire transformative leaders for [the realization of] Vision 2030" (Regier, 2017).

These global empirical research findings suggest that transformative operation initiatives have a universally positive effect on both insitutional cultures and organization performance. Nonetheless, the specific actions and initiatives that a transformative leader needs to put in place to derive organization survival inspire the purpose of this study.

Ubuntu Values

Ubuntu is an African philosophy of life whose core ethos is the continuous relational and productive engagement of humanity as a, "way of life" and of, "being alive". One cannot be "alive" or "human" without the spirit of ubuntu. Its core values are captured in the statement, "I am because you are and you are because I am" (Mapadimeng, 2007). Ubuntu acknowledges that all humanity is related and coexists and succeeds in harmony. Individualism for individualism's sake is shunned. Sacrificial service is recognized as a keystone of ensuring the survival and success of a community (Tutu, 2004).

Organizations are by nature a community of humans that have agreed to work together for the achievement of specific goals. Thus, one of the principles that hold a business together is "unity in community participation". Indeed, long surviving and successful global organizations have been known to adopt and cultivate cultures that have grounded their excellent business performance over many years (Collins & Porras, 2005). Similarly, philosophies of African communities have enabled them to survive seasons of hardship, plenty, prosperity and poverty over millennia (Meredith, 2014). There are over 2000 ethnic communities (tribal) groups in Africa with each country having an average of 60 local communities within its national borders (Study.com, 2022). Strong ethos and values hold the communities together to date.

Nonetheless, while businesses in Africa draw employees from different ethnic communities within a country, each organization has its own operating values that are not necessarily the same as the values espoused by ubuntu. Similarly, government institutions, local and international companies, religious organizations alongside professional and civil society groups each have their own independent vision, mission and values statements that are not necessarily aligned to the principles of ubuntu. While ubuntu is an ethnic based community philosophy, it does not follow that businesses in Africa intuitively practice ubuntu values,

neither are ubuntu values seen as a required corporate ethos in these institutions. Indeed, “ethnicity” and “tribalism” are often shunned as retrogressive practices. Thus, while ubuntu values thrive among ethnic communities as a tool of instruction, survival, cohesion and corporate success, they are not officially promoted in modern African organizations as a tool of business transformation (Merriam & Ntseane, 2008).

However, in the book, *Understanding Organization leadership through Ubuntu*, Malunga (2009), discusses the power of proverbs in transforming an organization, “a changed place cannot transform an individual, but a transformed individual can change a place” (Malunga, 2009). This would suggest that the process of successfully navigating a changed environment lays in the ability of a business to change and adapt to its external circumstances. The power of proverbs lays in their witty capture, expression and effective communication of a community’s accumulated wisdom and reflective experience. Proverbs are simple, instructive phrases that articulate explicit values and communicate beneficial behavioural norms that everyone, at every level of society, can identify with. Indeed, African proverbs form instructional material for children, but also communicate wisdom and sagacity in decision making among leaders in a community.

Thus, the author goes on to articulate how ubuntu empowers the systematic mobilization of human resources in an organization. It also enables the people participation in leadership, ownership in decision making, the pursuit of excellence as well as the management of conflict. The application of ubuntu values can therefore be integrated into modern African organizations to facilitate their survival in challenging times, business sustainability and profitability of business operations (Malunga, 2009). More recently ubuntu has been used as a worldview in which to enrich the study of women leadership globally (Ngunjiri, 2016). Ubuntu has also been argued to be an anthropogenic intervention to rolling back the negative effects of climate change (Ayayia, 2022). These studies indicate the emergence of ubuntu as a global impact philosophy of leadership and management.

Nonetheless, the indigenous African philosophy of ubuntu has been cited as a facilitator of transformative change based on six values identified by Ncube (2010). These are, (1) modelling the way; this value challenges members of a community to act as leaders in their own right with the understanding that there will be other (younger) ones observing and copying their behaviour, (2) communal enterprise and shared vision, suggests that all members of the community are bound to work to achieve community goals such as survival, (3) change and transformation through consensus rather than democratic polling; while acknowledging that change will come in the environment from time to time, it is necessary that this change be collectively interrogated for value addition before it is embraced by a community. Change should not be forced upon the membership for them to work constructively through whatever challenges may arise in the process, (4) interconnectedness, interdependence and empowerment of others; this value suggests an advanced form of teamwork where members share roles and responsibility in such a way as to ensure the community is optimally positioned to engage its highest possible performance, (5) collectivism and solidarity; where members of the community look out for each other and acknowledge that in the whole is the greater power of existence, and (6) continuous integrated development; where the experience of one grows, empowers, enlightens and advances the development of others within the community (Ncube, 2010).

Environmental Turbulence

Environmental turbulence “refers to the degree to which a firm’s external environment is characterized by unpredictability, uncertainty, and volatility” (Rego et al., 2022). These conditions indicate that the chaos in the once predictable organization development and planning environment of the previous century are well past. Today, organization leaders and managers appreciate that environmental conditions affect the very survival of a business.

The concept of environmental turbulence is captured by authors Faeste and Hemerling (2016) in their evaluation of the disruptive business environment in which leaders have to abandon conventional practices. This is because the environment has become so unpredictable and dynamic that long range planning is impractical. The authors suggest that to survive in such an environment, leaders are better positioned for success if they embrace change and remain flexible to navigate the turbulent environment. They point to eight factors driving change and creating environmental turbulence, “1) Intense competition and extreme events including natural disasters and financial crisis, 2) Digital disruption - changing the way in which work is done, 3) Increased regulation hampering planning and operations, 4) Geopolitics – forcing companies to consider the risks of investment, 5) Public spending- pressure to reduce costs, 6) Manufacturing economics – where it is more practical to outsource and employ robots rather than people, 7) Energy dynamics – demands for green energy away from fossil fuels, and 8) Variable rates of growth – these demand that companies need to maintain growth in different economic environments whether underdeveloped or developed countries” (Faeste & Hemerling, 2016, p2). Leaders and managers need adequate organization response mechanisms to address these external challenges.

Suarez and Oliva (2005) classify four types of environmental change; Regular, Hyper turbulence, Specific shock, Disruptive and Avalanche. A regular “environment” experiences gradual change of low intensity. Hyper turbulent environments experience frequent high-speed change in one dimension such as competition. A specific shock in an environment is registered with high intensity with a narrow scope such as deregulation. Disruptive change occurs infrequently, but develops gradually such as caused by technological advance. Avalanche change is high intensity, high speed and triggered from multiple directions (Suarez & Oliva, 2005).

In their research Kiple, Helm-Stevens and Lookinbee-Kiple (2018) noted that “Ansoff and McDonnell (1990), define environmental turbulence as the combined measurement of the changeability, instability, and predictability which is reflected in the complexity and novelty of change in the environment”. Furthermore, “Environmental turbulence refers to the amount of change and complexity in the environment of an industry. The greater the amount of change in environmental factors such as technology, globalization, socio-economic, governmental regulations, and/or the greater the number of environmental factors that must be considered, the higher the level of environmental turbulence.” (Kiple et al., 2012). The authors refer to Ansoffs (1979) five levels of turbulence based on environmental changeability, predictability and instability as, 1) Repetitive and no change, 2) Expanding; in which change is slow, incremental, visible and predictable, 3) Changing; defined as fast change albeit still incremental and fully visible, 4) Discontinuous; in which future within the industry will likely be very different from the historical past, 5) Suprisesful; when change occurs without notice, without visibility, completely unpredictable, and extremely rapid” (Kiple et al., 2012). Thus, organizations facing turbulence need to be open, flexible, innovative, and adapt new technology to succeed. Environmental turbulence creates a business condition in which an

organization is forced to examine its internal operations and adopt transformative measures to successfully address the external environment (Daft, 2010).

The accelerated advance of technology in the 21st century has created a shorter use time of equipment to the extent that it can become outdated within six months to a year. This forces businesses to update their production technology annually and causes short-term disruption and discontinuity of business operations every few months. Globalization forces organizations to standardize their goods and services in order to trade within a block (OECD, 2004). International expansion forces businesses to change and adjust their products and services to meet local cultural requirements. Shifting societal demands cause businesses to align their operating strategy to conform to those trends to survive. Global economic pressures such as experienced by countries around the world during the global COVID-19 pandemic caused many organizations to cut back on staffing and adjust their spending patterns to mitigate against the pandemic's negative impact on their survival. However, economic pressures can arise from anything from population growth to drought and crop failure. Government regulations are another source of environmental turbulence that make demands on businesses to change and transform their internal operations. Nonetheless, Richtner and Lofsten (2014) quote Lengnick-Hall et al. (2011, p. 244) who define organizational resilience as, "a firm's ability to effectively absorb, develop situation-specific responses to, and ultimately engage in transformative activities to capitalize on disruptive surprises that potentially threaten organizational survival" (Richtner & Lofsten, 2014). This definition would suggest that business survival can be facilitated through implementing transformative operations.

A digest of the reviewed literature on environmental turbulence suggests that there are at least five dimensions of environmental turbulence, 1) Natural catastrophes; such as caused by global warming and the COVID-19 pandemic, 2) Economic shocks or impellers; these include competition, regulation and nature which offers its own form of inertia, 3) Socio-political shifts; including trends that create diversions to linear development and growth initiatives, 4) Technology advances that must be navigated even those that do not always work in favour of achieving business goals, and 5) Globalization; which provides organizations with new horizons such as new and expanded markets. These five dimensions independently accelerate or decelerate environmental turbulence. A business may find turbulence in one dimension manageable. However, experiencing turbulence in two or more dimensions at the same time can be a complex event that requires substantial transformative leadership competencies to control.

Environmental Mapping

Figure 1 illustrates the journey of organization, "A" navigating its way through environmental turbulence as it advances towards the desired position "B". At every encounter with each force in the field, the organization must make a strategic determination of its trajectory to overcome, take advantage, integrate or create value from the turbulence in its path. Organization "A" will, in effect change direction and transform itself, in order to survive the challenge and advance towards "B".

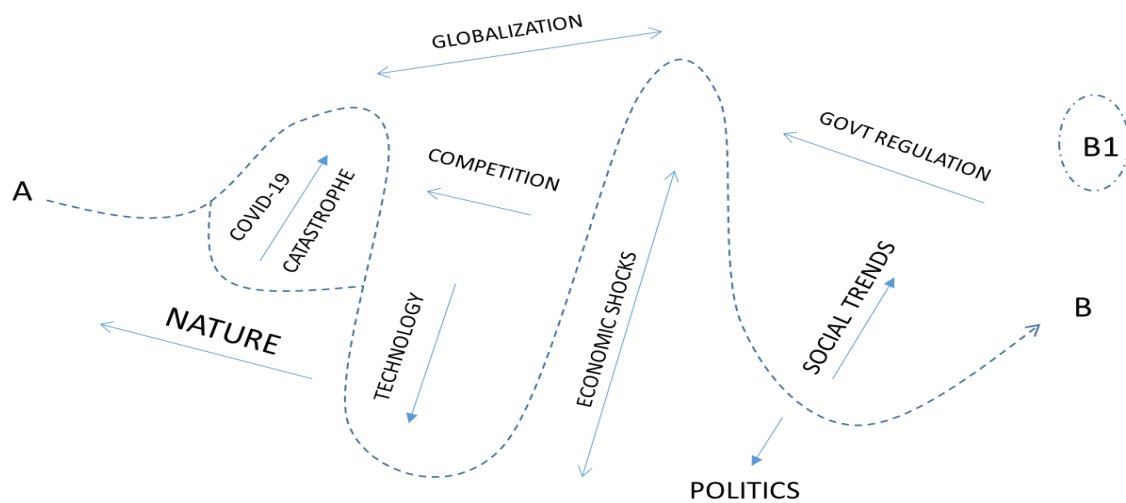


Figure 1: Environmental turbulence map (source: researcher notes)

However, the depicted turbulence is neither linear nor sequential. Rather, Figure 1 is an illustration of events and forces in three or more dimensions (depicted by multidirectional arrows) that account for the turbulence faced by organization “A” on its journey to “B”. Nonetheless, “B” is not the same organization that left “A”. Indeed, the predetermined location of “B”, may turn out in reality to be “B1”. Lastly, the forces of turbulence in Figure 1 are not exhaustive and we suggest that each force can have an impact in multiple dimensions. For example, accelerating technology can be classed as an “impeder” of old traditions and culture as well as an “expander” of new product opportunity for the advancement of technology. Each organization is individually impacted differentially by the same set of forces facing every other organization in its ecosystem.

Drawing an environmental map allows leaders and managers to outline the immediate, short- and medium-term environmental forces in its path. It allows them to map out a strategic path to navigate the individual and combinational effects of these forces on their business. However, leaders and managers need to draw on their creativity to identify, include and accurately depict the topography of the forces operating in their ecosystem on the organization strategic business trajectory.

Organization Performance

This research defines organization performance as a measure of a transforming organization. According to Daft (2010), “Organizations are (1) social entities that (2) are goal-oriented, (3) are designed as deliberately structured and coordinated activity systems, and (4) are linked to the external environment” (Daft, 2010, p. 11). This definition emphasizes that organizations have their own internal ecosystems. Internal organization structures, systems and activities are aligned to external environmental challenges. For example, marketing departments are set up to help the business keep up with external social and economic trends. In other words, organizations always lag behind their environment.

The key elements of an organization are the people and the nature of the structured relationship they use to engage with one another in pursuit of business goals. This observation highlights the need for the internal dynamism and demand for organizations to continuously evolve to survive, remain relevant and thrive in an environment. Businesses that fail to make internal adjustments to external change are unlikely to experience long term success (Montgomery, 2013).

There are three stages to motivating people to higher performance in organizations. Getting them to participate, involving them and empowering them. This process requires participation (Robbins et al., 2009). In terms of structure, “The specific effect of structural designs on performance and satisfaction is moderated by employees’ individual preferences and cultural norms” (Robbins, Judge, & Sanghi, 2009, p. 590). This insight on organization design indicates that form, nature, structure and culture influence productivity and organization performance. Businesses that wish to implement transformative operations may need to evaluate whether their structures, systems and set up will allow them to benefit from heightened employee engagement. It may be that existing structures actually dampen organization performance.

Describing organization culture “as the set of shared, taken for granted implicit assumptions that a group holds and that determines how it perceives, thinks about, and reacts to its various environments” (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2010, p. 64) contextualizes a business within an external environment, but also suggests that it regulates its internal environment as well. The authors further define four broad categories of institutional culture, a) “Clan culture” that promotes collaboration, cohesion and commitment among the people, b) “Adhocracy culture” that is creative, adaptable and agile promoting innovation and growth, c) “Hierarchy culture” that emphasises control, process measurement and efficiency, and d) “Market culture” emphasising competition, customer focus productivity and achievement. Nonetheless, elements of transformative operations are mirrored in all four cultures.

While noting that “Organizational cultures are a vital part of any company’s environment and provide employees with the necessary tools to integrate themselves into the overall organization dynamic” (Guillaume & Austin, 2016), these authors point out the need for strong cultures for employees to work cohesively through seasons of change. In the organization context, “Transformation means to transcend from a static state. The translation of “trans” means to transcend or rise above. When an organization transforms, it is going through a transformation process” (Rothwell et al., 2016). This definition introduces the dynamic state of business transformation. Nonetheless, introduction of transformative operations sets in motion a dynamic state that raises productivity, engagement and enables it to rise to a new heightened level of performance. This change is “so significant that it requires a shift of culture, behaviour, and mind-set to implement successfully and sustain over time” (Rothwell et al., 2016). In this context, business transformation is not a “process”, rather it is an acquired and cultivated organization competence. Thus, a transformative organization can be argued to have a “transformative culture” as an active ingredient of success.

In summary, organization performance can be appraised as the extent to which it achieves four measures; 1) Survival; An organization ability and tenacity to continue to exist in spite of environmental turbulence. A surviving organization operates a viable business model (adapted to its environment) that enables it to continue to grow, expand and, or diversify, 2) Sustainability; its ability to remain a relevant, value adding player or contributor within the ecosystem. A sustainable organization retains the production capacity, management, ethical value proposition and learning environment that enables it to remain a relevant player in its ecosystem, 3) Profitability; a business ability to earn a reward for services it provides within the environment. A profitable organization is able to garner financial reward, create wealth and accumulate capital, maintain efficient operations and generate a return on investment (ROI) for stakeholders, and 4) Market leadership; is achieved positioning through excellence, niche service provision or innovation and taking up corporate social responsibility within and beyond its operating environment.

Conceptualization

The conceptual framework below is a synthesis of the relationship between the four core variables; transformative operations, ubuntu, environmental turbulence and organization performance discussed within the literature review. It lays out a framework within which the interaction of the core variables can be studied, observed and evaluated in an organization operating in a turbulent environment.

Conceptual Framework

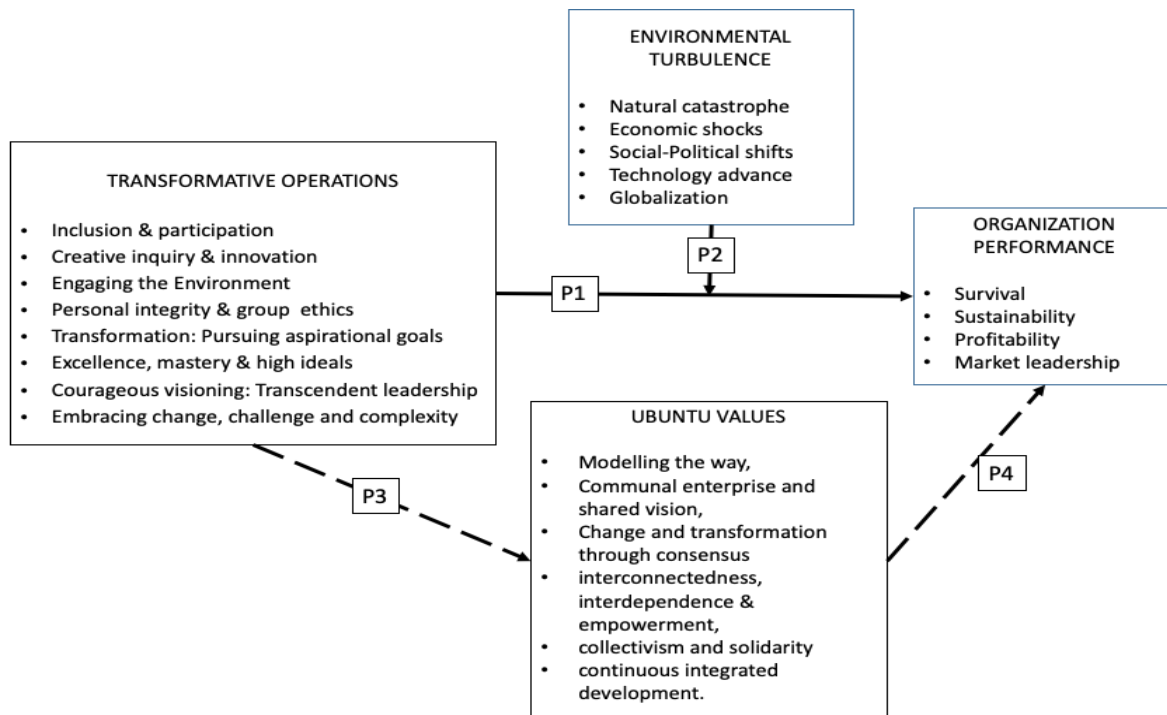


Figure 2- Conceptual framework of the relationship between transformative operations, organization performance, ubuntu values and environmental turbulence. (Source researcher notes)

Given the strong indicative relationship between transformative operations (independent variable) and organization performance (dependent variable) within environmental turbulence (moderator variable) and the exercising of ubuntu values (mediator variable), we put forward the following propositions.

P1: Transformative operations positively influences organization performance.

P2: Environmental turbulence has a moderating effect on the relationship between transformative operations and organization performance.

P3: There is a correlation between transformative operations and ubuntu values.

P4: There is a correlation between the practice of ubuntu values and organization performance.

According to this conceptual framework, a company that scores highly in terms of organization performance, should show correspondingly high scores in the implementation of transformative operations. While the environment may play a moderating role on organization performance, the mediating effect of ubuntu values has a positive impact on performance outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher reviewed authoritative published sources and scholarly and empirical literature on transformative leadership available library and online journal publications. These journals and published articles were reviewed for content relevance and subjected to thematic text analysis. The researcher used qualitative interpretivism and grounded theory to identify core elements that characterize the description of transformative operations from select models. Quoted empirical studies were reviewed in regard to their research purpose, methods, conceptualization, findings, gaps and limitations. The study reviewed literature on, 1) transformative operations as underlying principles of transformative leadership theory, 2) ubuntu values as practiced in African communities and modern organization culture, 3) global environmental turbulence models, and 4) organization performance measures of long term success to propose a conceptual framework to guide future empirical research in the area.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this review suggest that the capacity of a business to effectively manage its internal operations and culture, equips it to navigate its external environment. Nonetheless, transformative operations maintain a business in a dynamic state of reinvention as it advances towards its goals. Adoption of transformative operations facilitates the internal turbulence and state of continuous, flexible, dynamic transformation needed to survive external turbulence. Appropriate managerial attitudes and leadership styles are needed to support a business through a season of dynamic change or “transformative moments”. Findings also suggest that a business operating in a turbulent environment would do well to maintain flexibility in assigning leadership, managerial staffing roles. These roles need to be functional, futuristic rather than positional and permanent. Thus, appointment to a leadership or managerial role is more than one of being a good leader or effective manager. Rather it includes a responsibility to ensure the organization successfully navigates environmental turbulence to accomplish its goals.

Operationalizing ubuntu as a success philosophy is key to keeping members alive to their independent and collective responsibility to help it navigate a path to its goals. This calls for a transcendent leader mind-set to look beyond the present and prize the end enough to appropriately steer current operations to achieve desirable performance outcomes. Implementing transformative operations is therefore an empowering organization strategy to navigate turbulent environments. However, each business needs to develop its own road map because the same environmental conditions affect different organizations differently. For example, two companies in the same line of business may be affected differently by a general rise in bank interest rates. One company may be well capitalized and have no need for cash, while the other business may be forced to review its staff levels to position itself to overcome the environmental challenge. Organizations may learn from each other, but may not meaningfully replicate each other’s strategy.

The “evolving” nature of turbulent environments evoke a present, progressive, dynamic reality where conditions shift abruptly or incrementally, but never again return to a previous frame of existence. That means business leaders and managers need to remain alive to the reality of leading a transforming organization that is constantly adjusting and re-adjusting itself to survive environmental change. However, with regards to their response to environmental turbulence, organizations fall into at least four categories 1) conservative; unwilling to change, 2) normative; values driven organizations that only change in line with their values and not necessarily in response to the environment, 3) constructive; progressive and innovative organizations driven by their own definitions of success, but may also ignore environmental

shifts and, 4) transformative; pragmatic, sensitive organizations that consider harmony with the environment key to long term survival. A fifth, *destructive* category may be added of organizations that measure performance at the expense (pollution) of the environment.

Nonetheless, Organization stakeholders are more often than not quick to demand that leaders and managers secure and safeguard the gains of the past rather than risk the promise of an unknown future. Transformative leaders and managers, particularly in successful organizations, have an uphill task to transcend (ignore) the call to take the business back to the “good old days” and challenge the organization to move on to a new future. Ubuntu is a social energy that magnifies the performance of communities in Africa. It has been used to mobilize socio-economic resources among women’s groups in rural communities and improve the quality of life of people in urban areas. Ubuntu virtues have driven beneficial political and peace initiatives amongst communities across Africa. This rich resource can be mobilized to advance business transformation. However, more research needs to be done to identify, unlock, extract and deploy the “keys to life” ubuntu offers organizations to leverage and revitalize the performance of public and private institutions on the continent.

Transformative leaders and managers emerge as pragmatic change directors who come to terms with the fact that they are not in control of the external environment. They maintain a business in a state of dynamic readiness to change, adapt and adjust to evolving market conditions. These leaders have transcendent vision, but also realize they can only get to their goals by navigating a path through the challenges the market presents to them on a daily basis. On the other hand, the organization crew, followers, staff members and stakeholders must also be ready to take up the challenge of accepting new and diverse roles and responsibilities to keep the business in business. Followers need to get comfortable with change, leading, de-skilling, up-skilling and re-skilling, not as a directive from the boss, but as a requirement to keep positioning and repositioning the organization for success in evolving markets.

CONCLUSION

This paper put forward transformative operations and ubuntu values as pragmatic approaches leaders and managers can use to successfully navigate turbulent environmental conditions. The author suggests that leading organization performance is neither a linear process nor a simple matrix planning routine. Rather, it is a transcendent approach to navigating immediate, disruptive, short, medium and long-term challenges to ensure the organization survives, remains sustainable and profitable and a market leader in its ecosystem. In the process, leaders and managers oversee a dynamic state of internal turbulence to overcome the external challenges facing the business. Indeed, the purpose of this paper was to provide leaders and managers with transformative operations as an authentic African approach to successfully navigate chaotic environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that;

1. Leaders and managers apply the principles of transformative operations to stimulate staff performance, participation and teamwork to maintain the business in a state of dynamic readiness to overcome market disruption and turbulence.
2. Leaders and managers evaluate the alignment of institutional and ubuntu values as a means of leveraging and harnessing the peoples’ social capital to achieve business goals.
3. Organizations need to expand their use of business analysis tools to include environmental mapping to strategically plan and navigate turbulent market conditions.

4. Organizations should use several measures of performance alongside the conventional measure of profitability to obtain a comprehensive forecast of a business sustainability, short term survival and long-term success.
5. Organizational researchers use integrated mixed methods (convergent design) to capture both statistical business data and personal experiences to explain the correlation between transformative operations and organization performance.

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