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Virtue Ethics and Ubuntu in Leadership towards the Promotion of Ethical Organisational Operations

By Angelo Nicolaides[±] & Nkosinathi Dlodla^{*}

The objective of the conceptual literature study is to assess virtue ethics as a viable ethical leadership theory in African countries, more explicitly South Africa. We pinpoint some deficits in ethical leadership, which could be addressed through adopting a virtue ethics driven ethical organisational climate in order to positively enhance business practices and service to the community and society in general. This paper supports the notion of virtue ethics as being the suitable one for the purpose of motivating an ethical climate which leads to sustainable business. Leaders need to assume core responsibility for promoting ethics and should reinforce the notion of morally correct behaviour at all times through their demonstrable ethical conduct. This necessitates that leaders' must exhibit virtue and possess particular qualities and know how to apply these to workplace situations. Virtue ethics as one of numerous ethical theories, certainly has a role to play in the contemporary discourse in which corruption is rife. In addition, it aligns in many ways with the notion of Ubuntu. We argue that ethical leadership behaviour based on virtue and an Ubuntu spirit, is critical in supporting an ethical climate in any organisation and it promotes sustainability. The study employed an interpretivistic expository methodology of textual analysis based on extant literature. Thus, it is to an extent hermeneutic in nature and leads to insights supporting the notion of using Virtue ethics and Ubuntu to inform practice in African organisations and society.

Keywords: *virtue ethics, Africa, organisations, Ubuntu, sustainability*

Introduction

The purpose of the research conducted in this literature study was to consider the value of virtue ethics as postulated by Aristotle, in the context of efficient business leadership, sound stakeholder relationships and developing a desirable positive ethical climate in which African employees at all levels of organisational hierarchy can operate effectively. Obtaining excellence in the desired virtues is often a life-long task and it is developed over time. Virtue ethics is considered to be an important theory which promotes effective and efficient leadership since an efficacious leader is for the most part an ethical and an effective leader (Nicolaides 2019). Irrespective of the type or size of organisation that one leads, a leader is a critical role player (Ciulla 2004), and should also be a role model in driving the ethical climate the organisation.

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A leader that has ideal character traits has these based on natural internal propensities, but still needs to nurture them so that they become established (Yukl 2013, Nicolaides and Duho 2019). Virtue can be either moral or intellectual, but one should strive for a middle path of obtaining the 'golden mean'. Every organisational environment needs to embrace open and honest communication and especially that relating to ethical issues (Duho and Nicolaides 2015). Where there are ethical lapses and misdemeanours, those responsible must be held accountable and wrongs should be redressed. Virtue ethics is needed in all spheres in the gamut of all African business, where one is called to be of service to others in society.

Key sections of the paper that follow include a brief discussion on Aristotle's virtue ethics; what ethical leadership ought to entail; the issue of organisational culture; Ubuntu culture and its importance in organisational advance; the links between Ubuntu and Virtue Ethics; followed finally by recommendations and conclusions.

Literature Review

Aristotelian Virtue Ethics

The Aristotelian notion of virtue ethics is a significant one when it comes to tackling a plethora of ethical issues in the world of business. Aristotle (384-322 BCE) in his *Nicomachean Ethics* maintained that virtuous and morally upright character allows one to wisely assess situations encountered and to thus apply rules to meet the challenges posed while best serving the common interest of society (Aristotle 2014). Applying virtuous actions leads to the achievement of good societal values which are necessary for effective and apposite relationships between individuals and others as well as between organisations and their wide range of stakeholders. Younkins asserts that one's situation in business is strengthened when virtue ethics is embedded in the organisational DNA since virtuous principles, strategies, and actions will for the most part result in an organisation realizing its values including its mission, purpose, profit potential, and additional objectives (Younkins 2012). The virtues are qualities, which are instrumental and also have intrinsic value most of which are moral based.

Aristotle proposes that all actions should seek to add some value so that the purpose of anything must be to do good and there are numerous things that are good. People need to seek to conduct themselves well as they are driven by their moral values, but this is not always an easy task. However, virtue grows through the habitual practice of seeking to do good all the time and thus striving for excellence as a moral being (Aristotle 2014). The objective of virtue ethics is to realize happiness (*eudaimonia*) or a state of completeness and fulfilment. Leaders need to adopt the cardinal virtues of justice, courage, *phronesis* (practical wisdom) and restraint which are critical in arriving at *eudaimonia*. Organisational success and personal flourishing result where a human being lives well and does well as a matter of course (Whetstone 2001). *Eudaimonia* is the primary and definitive good

which is desirable for its own sake and not for the sake of anything else (Aristotle 2014).

To Aristotle virtue is thus a state of character which makes a person good and drives him or her to work fittingly. In the pursuit of virtue either intellectually or from a moral vantage point one should seek out through reason, sharpened by education the ‘golden mean’ or ‘the middle way’ mentioned earlier so that an excess or deficiency are not desirable in any sense. The cultivation of an excellent character or *arete* makes one inclined to always do the right thing and in a suitable manner. Virtue ethics proposes that what is considered to be the right or wrong thing to do should be grounded on what a ‘virtuous agent’ would do in any given set of circumstances (Oakley 1996).

The desirable character traits of a person said to be virtuous would include *inter-alia*, integrity, compassion, temperance, empathy, friendship, uprightness, courage, kind-heartedness, resilience and generosity. A non-virtuous person would have vices and traits such as *inter-alia*, selfishness, covetousness, manipulation, arrogance, abusive behaviour, exploitation, deceitfulness, malice, and thievery (Timmons 2002, Tanner et al 2010, De Hoogh and Den Hartog 2008).

Yukl et al. claim that the germane principles of ethical leadership include honesty and integrity with consistent behaviour based on espoused values; behaviour which constantly communicates and enforces ethical standards; impartiality in decision-making and in the distribution of any rewards; kindness, compassion, and concern for the needs and feelings of others (Yukl 2013). The world of business is volatile, complex, ambiguous and uncertain and workplaces should allow one to develop humanity through opportunity and training to use one’s reason (Reynolds et al. 2020). It is for this reason that we require values and ideals to guide us in our daily activities (Sakellariou 2015). The virtues that we require are necessary for living a happy life and doing it well and therefore a life of virtue is important. People select their virtues and act on them, thus making them good habits. A morally sensitive person also has integrity and the courage of their convictions guide them to have a conscience and display genuine care for other human beings and carefully consider their feelings and human rights. The virtues can be rationally demonstrated since they are good for people and mankind in general and they need to a good life (Gini and Marcoux 2012).

In South Africa there has been a huge increase in unethical conduct by employees of at all levels of the organisational hierarchy and moral norms are absent as is evident in regular media announcements of corruption in all types of workplaces. This invariably has major adverse effects and repercussions on communities (Van Zyl 2012). These adverse effects *inter alia* include job losses and diminished reputations of individuals and also organizations that lose their credibility, general morale declines and of course huge productivity declines, and financial loss. Employees may become anxious and feel helpless, display low job satisfaction and loss of trust in their leaders, along with a range of other negative consequences for private lives of employees – these all are the products of unethical leadership (Nicolaidis 2016a, 2019, 2017).

In Aristotelian terms, such activities demonstrate a lack of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) which is the principal virtue that directs the rest and allows one to

remain on an ethical course. Ethical behaviour is required for organisations and society to remain sustainable (Mayer et al. 2010). Brown et al. (2005) stress that ethical leadership is sorely needed from a normative ethics perspective so that leaders role model individual ethical conduct and the desired ethical interpersonal relationships in their words and actions (Brown et al. 2005). Virtue ethicists believe that virtues are a wide range of intrinsic goods that one ought to strive for (Oakley 1996). Virtue ethics accepts virtues that balance motives and reasons and sees them as a variety of intrinsic good. There is no singular predominant principle which can be considered the definitive guide by which we should live which may largely compromise any other values in our daily life (Engelbrecht et al. 2017). LaFasto and Larson (2001) propose that a virtuous employee will have the following characteristics namely sound ethical experience, they will be productive problem solvers, open, supportive people who take personal initiative and have a positive attitude.

It is generally the case that modern business for the most part, do not provide a suitable environment in which employees can develop virtues and it is thus incumbent on the leaders to promote a virtuous workplace and virtuous stakeholder relationships. A virtuous corporate character is evident in an organisation that engage in all activities in a spirit of excellence and in which there no corrupting powers of other institutions with which it engages in pursuit of its own *telos* (Moore 2005).

Virtue theory states that an ethical stance is an integral part of all business and that it is essential to incorporate moral theory into management practices. Thus, the role of the virtues in an organisation is to direct and motivate ethical behaviour towards sustainability (Nicolaidēs 2014, 2015, 2019). Acculturation mechanisms are required to at least constrain unethical conduct given that individuals are often ego-centrally driven in their decision making and this leads too highly questionable corporate activities. It is indeed an indictment on many corporations that they give hardly any thought to developing a moral corporate culture within which the employees can act in an ethical manner. The truth of the matter is that unethical conduct that is perpetrated in many organisations is based on systemic failure, although it can also be argued that in many cases unethical conduct is the result of having some proverbial ‘rotten apples in the barrel’. It is thus essential for organisations to interrogate whether or not their operational structures and functions are systemically sound when it comes to desired ethical behaviour in dealing with all stakeholders. How virtue and morality assist in making a business ‘virtuous’ and relate to quality management and quality service provision as well as sustainability are critical considerations (Nicolaidēs 2015). The many negative outcomes of unethical behaviour necessitate that stress be placed on the things that possibly effect ethical conduct (Engelbrecht et al 2014). To develop an ethical culture in any organisation, the leader should play a substantial role in advancing an operational ethical strategy. The virtues link ethics to business in a positive way and deliver a firm rational grounding for business ethics to flourish. Virtue ethics supports happiness in life is developed over time and is required before and also complements moral reasoning and it drives one to strive for excellence through behaving in a virtuous manner (Whetstone 2001). This also provides a sense of

pride in having done the right thing (Mintz 1996). Virtue ethics enforces the notion that every employee can add value to an organisation however the virtues that are embraced must be reality-based, non-contradictory, integrated, and comprehensive (Younkins 2012).

A traditional literature review which adopted a critical approach was undertaken in which the researchers reviewed apposite literature on the themes of virtue ethics, Ubuntu and ethics and organisational culture. The information was gathered from credible academic articles and studies of relevance, which were both important and valid, and this allowed for the rationale for the study to emerge and the relationships between key ideas, dynamics and variables became evident. The following data bases were utilised: Web of Science, Scopus, DOAJ and EBSCO. The article makes a contribution to the current debate on ethical leadership and ethical practices in organisations.

Ethical Leadership

Ethical culture can be defined as a set of experiences, assumptions, and expectations of managers and employees about how the organization encourages them to behave ethically or unethically. Organisations require quality leadership cognisant of the need for ethical practices in all undertakings related to their missions if they seek to improve their productivity. They thus need to integrate ethics in their daily decision making and taking. Virtue ethics provides a moral underpinning for normative ethical decision-making for both individuals and organisations and should this be embraced in business traditions. It promotes sustainable business activities and is supportive of an ethical climate in the workplace (Nicolaidis 2014).

Authentic leaders are those who are perceived to be sincere, or 'real' and they have a sense of purpose (Nicolaidis 2016a), and sense that they know what they are about and where they want to go (Northouse 2016). George (2010) stresses that the authenticity of a leader, and not their style, is the most important aspect. He posits that the fundamental characteristics that define an 'authentic leader' are knowing themselves, practicing their values and principles, leading rationally at all times and do so with benevolence, establishing lasting relationships and self-discipline. The authentic leader is also ardent, enthused and intrinsically motivated to care about what they do (Northouse 2017). Schein (2004) and also Nicolaidis and Manyama (2020) asserts that culture and leadership are interconnected and co-exist.

Leadership must offer suitable guidance and also orientate employees with the organisational culture. Adam Smith, in his ground-breaking *The Theory of Moral Sentiment*, expressed the opinion that one cannot purport to be human without having a strong moral sense (Young 2001). An organisational leader has the capability to motivate, produce, and role-model the desired culture in an organisation (Keyton 2005) in order for employees become exemplars of the desired actions and mindsets (Nicolaidis 2019). Small and Dickie (1999) contend that leaders who exhibit values such as ethical practice and integrity, as well as

trust and impartiality, become immensely valuable to an organisation in the medium to long term.

Organisational leaders need to assume the responsibility for cultivating ethics in the workplace through ethical leader role-modelling behaviour and by creating a suitable ethical climate in which operations are conducted on an ongoing basis. Effective leaders play vital roles in defining desired ethical employee behaviour (Nasir and Bashir 2012). Ethical leadership offers many benefits in organisations as it plays a role in forging a happy workplace, reducing misconduct such as corruption, employee absenteeism and a range of other misdemeanours that are perpetrated on a regular basis (Piccolo et al. 2010, Mafunisa 2008).

The ethical leader inspires employees to work as a team and this enhances performance and allows objectives to be reached and furthermore promotes a positive workplace (Yukl 2013). Ethical leaders are critical to organisational success (Nicolaidēs 2016b, Conrad 2013), and by driving a virtue ethics approach they can promote the concept of *eudaimonia* in their organisations and can thereby drive the notion of the *telos* of business presence as being value-based and serving the interests of stakeholders in society (Nicolaidēs 2015). An ethical leader influences their underlings positively through their ethical acts and general demeanour (Flynn 2008, Yukl 2008) and obtain the attention of their underlings by being virtuous and demonstrating ethical decision making in a constant fashion.

An Ethical Organisational Culture

An ethical organisational culture can be defined as experiences, assumptions, and expectations of both managers and employees as to how their organization encourages them to either behave ethically or unethically. It thus relates to aspects such as for example, values, leadership and recognition (Nicolaidēs and Duho 2019). It is incumbent on the leader in an organisation to communicate the desired ethical stance and thus an effective and operational code of conduct and leading by example are important issues to be addressed. The leader needs to stress aspects including accountability, responsibility, transparency and adherence to set guidelines and related procedures (Naidoo 2012). Crafting a code of ethics is an important prerequisite in creating an ethical organisation. Once this is in place the code should be backed up by effective communication and the necessary oversight and enforcement of desired behaviours through workshops and other training provided to all employees. A code of ethics or conduct, should not be a mere tick-box exercise but rather serve as a living and working document which requires training and regular review. The desired organisational rules and its responsibilities and values as well as its philosophy and what employees should do and not do when dealing with stakeholders needs to be stressed in the document (Nicolaidēs and Duho 2019). There are some minor differences between Codes of Conduct and Codes of Ethics, and yet both guide proper ethical decisions and conduct. Codes of Conduct are inclined to address the values of an organisation and how those values reflect the values of society and often comprise appropriate actions and behaviour in most situations. They are generally linked to the mission of an

organisation. Codes of Ethics, conversely, are commonly more universal statements about operational values and beliefs that define an organisation (Brandl and Maguire 2002). The majority of leaders who act ethically are considered to be transformational and charismatic role models and they tend to inspire their underlings to participate in moral practices systems (Brown et al. 2005, Tanner et al. 2010).

The document should also clearly explain that illegal or unethical actions are unacceptable and sanctionable. The rules of desired conduct must be clearly spelt out. A code of conduct should highlight any unacceptable practices such as corruption, bribery, unacceptable accounting practises, use of company resources and other possible problematic areas. Clearly not all unethical actions can be captured in a code of conduct and thus some important issues may be omitted. This is because there will always be some grey areas where individual employees should use their discretion.

The code of conduct should provide a carefully crafted set of guidelines to assist employees in making ethical decisions (Tassiopoulos and Nicolaides 2017). Ethics, by its very character, is part of the discretionary behaviour of individuals and organisations and deals with a hierarchy of values and how individuals and groups may comply with them. The values of organisations must be passed on to all employees if ethical business conduct is to prevail and all employees need to know the consequences of unethical conduct (Nicolaides 2015). An organisation that conducts itself ethically is differentiated from others by its stakeholders and is able to gain a strategic competitive advantage in its operational space by not only communicating its values to its stakeholders but also by its authentic ethical behaviour (Small and Dickie 1999). Employees should thus be encouraged to adopt and embrace a virtue ethics approach to life. This aligns with the African philosophical notion of Ubuntu in which individuals must act with integrity and be responsible for their actions while supporting the general community in which they operate.

Employees must believe that the organisation will stand behind them when making important decisions which should of course align with the organisation's ethos. An efficacious leader is an ethical leader and he or she should role-model desired behaviours and attitudes so as to forge a strong ethical climate in an organisation (Sims and Brinkman 2002, Nicolaides 2014). The leader plays a huge role in whether or not their business operates ethically. In Socrates Republic, the "Guardians" are the leaders who tend to view their status and high office in terms of their ethical stance. It is mandatory for them to serve society by endorsing ethical practices (Gini 1996).

Aristotle strongly proposes in his *Nicomachean Ethics* that morality is not merely learned by reading about it, but by perceiving the behaviour of a morally sensitive person who operates as a role-model worth emulating (Aristotle 2014). However, on its own, and from a philosophical perspective, role-modelling is simply inadequate to satisfy the basic needs of an ethical business at either the normative or descriptive levels. Jean-Paul Sartre posits that all people are by definition morally bound because they share the planet with others whom they need to contemplate in the daily choices and decisions made (Sartre 1960). The

principal paradigm of evaluation is always the self in relation to others. People should then be basically always acting on the behalf of the interests of others as Aristotle suggest (Gini 1996), and this also aligns with Ubuntu, but sadly this is not the case. According to More and Webley (2003) there is a widening gap between the presence of company ethics and what transpires according to the media reports and the embedding of ethical practice ideas and values into the 'blood stream' of an organization. Virtue is undoubtedly a gradually developed disposition that endorses distinction in how one acts actions. To behave well and to justify behaviour and decisions made, one must live a virtuous life based on a rational activity of the soul in harmony with virtue (Timmons 2002).

The Enron fiasco established that ethical transgressions soon become cataclysmic events which can bring any major organisation to its knees if not checked (Salter 2004). Consequently, many organisational leaders are now adopting clearly formulated Codes of Conduct in their workplaces and making these part and parcel of their ethos and culture. Organisations are morally bound to engage in activities beyond the bottom-line and serve society ethically as they consider all their stakeholders, environmental care, the welfare of employees and above all acting ethically in all their business activities (Nicolaidis 2017). Global media increasingly features reports describing fraud, corruption and other criminal activities emanating from a wide range of public and private organisations (Nicolaidis 2015). Clearly then, attaining desired virtues takes practice and one needs to absorb how to best act in given circumstances. Some writers argue that ethical codes of conduct are unlikely to stop unethical behaviour and that it is in fact better to indoctrinate employees with ethical attitudes and virtues for guiding their conduct as they are faced with a myriad of challenging situations which test their ethical astuteness on a daily basis (Raga and Taylor 2005).

Accountability and transparency must be articulated in the body of any Code of Conduct based on the vision of an organisation. Leaders and also employees at lower levels in the hierarchical matrix of an organisation must be accountable and responsible for their behaviour in the workplace. Each of them must be driven by their own internal sets of values and their virtuous actions and communal spirits are important to develop via a code of conduct. Thus, common set of values must be implanted in employees and introduced via comprehensive programmes and documentation such as a Code of Conduct or a Code of Ethics (Lovitsky and Ahern 1999).

The ethical climate of an organisation is what sets the tone for valuable work-related behaviour and it has the effect of safeguarding an organisation against a range of challenges that seduce employees to behave in an unethical manner (Smith and Hume 2005, Eisenbeiss 2012). The ethical climate provides information to employees on the policies, practices, and procedures that are required to be adhered to. Ethical leaders set the tone for their organisation's pervading ethical climate (Schminke et al. 2005). A leader needs to be consistent in how they operate and should never seek to place organisational profits over values while communicating desired norms to their stakeholders (Simha and Cullen 2011). Employees must be given the opportunity to comply with desired operational

norms, identify with them through training and codes of conduct workshops, and finally internalise them (Kelman 1958).

Ubuntu Culture and Organisational Advance

The key question to pose is a metaphysical one. Do people in a society live in self-sufficiency or do they invariably depend on their relationships with others in order to realise their ambitions? (Gyekye 1987). Ubuntu is an African worldview which promotes the notion of group consciousness in people. It accepts the notion that people are by nature social beings (Mafunisa 2008). One is called upon to take a firm stand for other people in the community by demonstrating empathy for them and their plight through a sense of duty which reveals a higher level of consciousness. The virtues which need to be expressed and demonstrated include *inter alia* respect, loyalty sympathy sociability, munificence, conviviality, hospitality and patience (Prinsloo cited in Coetzee and Roux 2000). One cannot disagree that these virtues align with those posited by Aristotle. Community life promotes a rational and moral sense of behaviour and indeed universal brotherhood through which people are treated with due respect (Mbigi 1992). In such a mindset participatory management is promoted and employees are encouraged by organisational leaders to participate and express their opinions on how especially problematic aspects of operations could be solved. The key aspect is cooperation and integration of the basic cultural attitudes of employees into the core principles of managing an organisation. This enables employees to better identify with the vision and mission of an organisation and it nurtures a collaborative environment in which harmonious relationships and sustainability are promoted.

The main traits required of leaders and their followers, according to Mbigi (1992) include trust, credibility, sharing, caring, cooperation, participation and a striving for continuous improvement of everything in the organisation by all stakeholders on an ongoing basis (Coetzee and Roux 2000). Epistemically speaking, for Ubuntu to be of relevance in a modern Africa in a globalised world, African organisations need to be able to at least to an extent, assimilate with western notions having similar values and conceptualisations, and yet strive for pragmatic and rational Afrocentricity. In Western societies a leaders strengths lie in things such as technical innovation, and planning and control based on rational analysis while in Africa there is a great stress on the solidarity of people. It is important to integrate these elements so that leaders are able to define and mould reality for employees while simultaneously seeking to meet their culturally diverse needs and display genuine cultural sensitivity.

Transformational leaders are required in an African context, as they are conscious of the need to uphold principles of human dignity and worth, human rights, good social values, and individual and socio-political transformation (Mwambazambi and Banza 2014). They can also distinguish and supplement the needs and demands of their followers (Burns 1978).

Compatibility between Ubuntu Principles and Virtue Ethics

The Aristotelian teleological approach in philosophy in general and in this instance of virtue theory in particular, makes it more compatible with Ubuntu ethical theory. The Aristotelian major work in ethics, *Nicomachean Ethics*, opens with a line, “Every art every inquiry and similarly every action and pursuit is thought to aim at some good” (Aristotle 2014). While several moral philosophers would say being moral rests largely in abstinence, that is, when one abstains from engaging in certain action or activities is being moral (Locke 1990, Rawls 1972, Gauthier 1986). For Aristotle, exercising virtues or acting in the virtuous manner is not merely moral, but it leads to happiness or flourishing or achieving in the Aristotelian term ‘*eudaimonia*’ which we touched on at the outset. This ties in well with the Kantian Categorical imperative formula of the end-in-itself (Kant 1990). According to the Kantian formula of the end-in-itself, it states that one should never treat another as a mere means. Treating another as a mere means is equivalent to using a person in question as an object for one’s gain or benefits. Kant holds that an action is right if and only if it is universalizable. Van Zyl (2013) seems to maintain a position that virtue ethics theory fails to account for our actions towards others. Both the virtue and Ubuntu theories can be universalizable. However, there appears to be a difference in accountability for our actions towards others with virtue theory, while Ubuntu broadly spells out specific actions to avoid and practices to engage in to become a person.

The ethically conducive environment for an organisational climate in which there is a smooth functioning and good relations among employees may require an ethical culture that is grounded in each of the mutually compatible Aristotelian virtue and Ubuntu moral theories. The Kantian categorical imperative does not sharply contrast with what the Aristotelean virtue ethics and Ubuntu offer in the ethical culture or climate of organisations. The Aristotelian contribution to the ethical organisational culture and climate would be to exercise virtues, or to put it bluntly, serve as an exercise in virtues that model an ethically ideal organisational climate of good conduct. The Aristotelian notion of virtue is agent focused (Van Zyl 2013). This means that a virtuous agent in the character of a manager or leader can but only inspire virtues in his or her team. The ideal state of a virtuous spirit amongst workers, managers or leaders, hinges largely in the team’s collective efforts to behave in such a manner that each individual team member is virtuous (Van Zyl 2013). A virtuous agent, for example, would encourage others to develop traits for flourishing (Van Zyl 2013). These traits might be embedded in such values as caring for another, optimism about one another’s efforts, respect and celebration of diversity, promotion of a friendly spirit of oneness within an organisation and with stakeholders or as the organisation’s context determines.

In a similar vein, Ubuntu theory is founded on the similar principles to those espoused in Aristotelian virtue theory. A simple understanding of Ubuntu would start off with the prevalent literal interpretation of the Ubuntu principle or maxim, that is, ‘*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*’ (A person is a person through other people). To be conceptually, philosophically and contextually proper, Ubuntu is intertwined with African personhood in the sense that Ubuntu is something one

achieves rather than a given that each human being would have by merely being born into the human species (Tempels 1959, Mbiti 1970, Menkiti 1984, Kaphagawani 1998, Matolino 2014, Molefe 2019). It is the same with personhood in which one becomes a person as an achievement of one's ethical or moral behaviour within the community. Metz (2007, p. 331) views the Ubuntu maxim as "a call for a person to develop personhood". The interplay between Ubuntu and personhood may deserve attention in the African philosophy literature since one is not exactly the other. Mbiti (1970, p. 141) says, "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am". While this captures the essence of Ubuntu, it equally expresses the African conception of reality. Thus, it borders Ubuntu and personhood. It 'straddles the horse' and underpins the significance of Ubuntu in human relationships within the community. Ubuntu informs what those relationships ought to be. This view of African reality from Tempels to Mbiti is highly criticised by contemporary philosophers who tend to dismiss it as being less rigorous, less analytical, less critical and at worse, philosophy viewed from the colonial perspective. Matolino (2014) holds that view. This view may overlook the certain fundamental elements of what it is to be an African especially when it totally ignores that Africans too are individuated creatures who may achieve certain dreams and ambitions which are independent of the community, and equally hold views that may not entirely be that of the community. Nonetheless, it would be wrong to dismiss this view in its entirety as some aspects of it even though they may be exaggerated notions of African reality, remain a reality in that an African child raised within an African community tends to cultivate and develop aspects of this view into adulthood.

It cannot be disputed that Africans are individuated creatures who from time to time evolve to espouse new ideas. Wiredu (1996, p. 157) states that, "through the possession of an *okra*, *mogya*, and *sunsum* a person is situated in a network of kinship relations that generate a system of rights and obligations". Ubuntu and personhood are epitomised in the exemplary leadership of Nelson Mandela as both an oppressed prisoner and a liberating state president. Mandela's ethical values were developed and cultivated within an African community in which he was to play a critical part. At the Rivonia trial, he espoused and defended his individuated ideals of democracy and unity, that were non-existent in any of the African communities that raised him. These are ideals he was prepared to lay down his life for. This has a long-term implication for forging of ethical climates and cultures in organisations. The possession of the *okra* is, "God's spark that serves to link the individual with the rest of mankind (sic)" (Matolino 2014, p. 29). This spark generates feelings of obligations towards all of humankind (Matolino 2014). The interrelationship between Ubuntu and personhood that we draw on in the discussion of ethical organisational cultures and climates seems to lean more heavily on the normative conception of personhood.

There is a very old debate in African philosophy of personal identity between leading philosophers of liberal and communitarian persuasion in the West. This debate centres around the question, how much of a role does the community play in socialising and developing a personal identity? (Molefe 2019). The liberals tend to see the role of social relationships as being insignificant while the

communitarians value social relationships, and the terms and concepts, they use tend to highlight this fact (Molefe 2019). Mbiti (1969) and Menkiti (1984) believe that one is a product of one's environment which safely locates them within the radical communitarian group of scholars. While Gyekye (1992), Matolino (2014) have adopted either a moderate or limited communitarianism in which human rights have a special place in their moral perspectives. Human rights are a centre of primary focus between radical and moderate or limited communitarianism. The radical communitarians see no relevance or place for human rights in the distinctly African notion of personhood. While the moderate or limited communitarianism attempt to feature human rights for reasons of their global relevance and dominance (Molefe 2019).

Ubuntu and virtue ethics share values of the common good. They both present a sharp contrast to the theories that, Lutz (2009) argues, miscomprehend the common good of our human nature due to their self-centred individualistic nature. These are stakeholder and social contract theories which are mainly driven by owner-wealth maximisation (Lutz 2009). For Lutz (2009) not even the contemporary contribution to the social contract tradition by Rawls, seems to succeed in rehabilitating the moral goodness common to our human nature by the serious welfare consideration of those worse off amongst us. However, Lutz's attempts to consolidate the virtue traditions of Africa, Asia and Europe to produce a global management theory consistent with the common good of our humanity as a whole. Lutz succeeds in opening up a debate to broaden an all-encompassing virtue globally relevant that can lead to efficient, effective management. As for the Ubuntu virtues for organisations, they are personified in the iconic exemplary personality and leadership of Nelson Mandela who embraces both contesting positions in personhood and Ubuntu debate positions in his person and vision of a democratic South Africa in which all South Africans would rather be in a democratic state rather than an authoritarian one in which the majority meekly submits to the dictatorship rule. This thinking offers us great value when considering how leaders ought to serve their organisations.

Imparting the Spirit of a Code of Conduct/Ethics

In order to set the desired ethical tone it is imperative for organisations to develop and implement a code of ethics or conduct - terms are used interchangeably. When crafting a code of ethics there should be a very careful interrogation of the range of attitudes that are desired relating to each of the roles that employees play in serving an organisation and its stakeholders. First and foremost, the employees should concern themselves with always operating within the ambit of the laws of the country strive to serve in such a manner that the basic moral rules of society are not transgressed through corrupt activities, deception, theft or any other unacceptable behaviour (Piccolo et al. 2010). Such issues need to be clearly spelled out in the code of conduct which should manifest a desire for employees to serve in a virtuous way as they safeguard their interests and those of all stakeholders (Tassiopoulos and Nicolaidēs 2017). It must be stressed that egocentric goals are

unacceptable. It is specifically the role of senior employees to promote ethics in the workplace as well as to strive for an ongoing ethical climate. The leaders of the organisation at different levels of the organisational hierarchy are the ones who ultimately set the tone for virtue ethics in the workplace (Flynn 2008). There is no place for ambiguities in the code of conduct we should clearly state the organisations core values and ethical observances that all employees are expected to follow. As stated earlier, it is imperative for the leader echelon to model desired ethical behaviour.

Having a code of conduct is not good enough unless there are workshops or other carefully developed strategies to promote ethics in the workplace. It is only through regular training sessions that the organisations expected standards of conduct can be effectively promoted and actioned by attendees. In any training that is undertaken it is important to present case studies that relate to ethical dilemmas that may arise from time to time in a range of operational areas (Kelman 1958). If employees are to ultimately make virtuous ethical decisions at work, they need to know when and to whom the code of conduct is applicable and what the organisations core values or ethical standards are. When employees have their annual performance appraisals these should include assessments of how their actions measured up against the organisation's code of ethics. What is needed is transformational organisational leaders who are authentic that can drive such initiatives (Zhu et al. 2011).

There must of course also be formal processes which permit employees to examine ethical dilemmas and through which they can report unethical behaviour without fear of any sort of malicious backlash or admonishment. This is where having ombudsmen/women or ethical officers is important.

We have formulated some basic questions for a virtue driven employee to ask in daily activity which could include *inter alia*:

- How can I act today in a manner which promotes service quality excellence?
- Does my behaviour comply with relevant national laws and regulations and does it align with the organisations mission as expressed in the code of ethics and any other internal policies?
- Does my actual or intended behaviour truly reflect the organisation's core values or ethical guidelines?
- Does what I am considering in my decision-making respect the rights and happiness of other stakeholders?
- Do I know who to speak to if I am uncertain about what to do in certain tricky situations?
- Do I strive to demonstrate sound ethics in all of my role/s based on being objective, sensible, and logical?
- Do I maintain personal and interpersonal connections that are crucial for a 'good' life?
- Are my actions a good moral guide and do they have a positive influence on my co-workers?
- Do I develop value-generating goals and endeavour to realize them?
- Do I possess the needed virtues of honesty, compassion, fairness, trust, transparency, openness, and courage that are important in the workplace?

Is virtue ethics the moral foundation of my work activities and am I realistic in what I do or intend to do?

Do I demonstrate a commitment to co-create value with my colleagues?

Am I a responsible individual that is proud of what I have achieved?

Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of all organisations should be to make all stakeholders happy by producing quality products and through the provision of service excellence. Virtue ethics is an important ethical approach to possess in forging an ethical organisational climate towards sustainability of an enterprise and ultimately in making for happy individuals more effective in their workplace and private endeavours. It requires morally astute individuals with ethically sound characters who operate in terms of the organisations strategic focus. A virtuous organisation will gain greater esteem and financial value in the eyes of its stakeholders.

Ubuntu and virtue ethics undoubtedly share common good values. Each offers a contrast to the theories that, Lutz (2009) argues, misinterpret the common good and which are based on narcissistic worldviews of ‘me, myself, I’ and what are self-centred individualistic ambitions. Wealth maximisation may be important but not at the expense of communities and broader society such that unethical practice becomes an operational norm. The lawful, governance related, and economic responsibilities of leaders should always be buttressed by ethical principles which support responsible conduct and illustrate how individual values can play a critical role in effective leadership. Leadership remains an ongoing and often gradual developmental process of human maturity which guides organisations and changes them so that they are able to attain excellent accomplishments. However, for this to happen, all management decisions must be based on virtues that are helpful and which sustain an organisation’s *telos*. A virtue driven employee carefully considers their actions and places right conduct in the forefront of decision-making. He or she drafts plans which are carefully integrated into their actions so as to add value to all stakeholders. While the ethics of altruism regards others in society, we should nonetheless not disregard the value of an individual either such that ethical egoism has a place. Within this place, leaders should operate in their organisations and with all stakeholders with beneficence, benevolence and fairness while keeping their promises and being truthful. In a nutshell, leaders need to observe the biblical Golden Rule and “do unto others” because if they do, others will be more likely to “do unto them.” Each person’s happiness is equally important to consider, all the time.

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