



DEVELOPMENT OF AN AFROCENTRIC EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP (AEL) MODEL FOR ZIMBABWEAN SMEs

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ABSTRACT: *Scholars, policy makers and analysts have agreed that the future development of any country rests on the shoulders of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Although SMEs play an important role in developing countries such as Zimbabwe, 85% are expected to fail within the first three years. Many reasons have been outlined as the causes of such a high failure rate with the most notable ones being a dearth in managerial capacity and an inappropriate leadership model. Zimbabwean SMEs have failed to drive economic growth despite the implementation of Western-initiated leadership models. This is why scholars have argued against the applicability of these models and advocated for the establishment and institutionalisation of indigenous leadership models. The current study sought to develop and validate an Afrocentric Effective Leadership (AEL) model for Zimbabwean SMEs. Quantitative research was carried out employing a survey strategy where data was collected using a questionnaire from 241 participants from Bulawayo's Central Business Area. The study concluded that effective leadership in Zimbabwean SMEs is dependent on ubuntu, culture, history of the country and stage of economic development of the country, intermediated by leaders' characteristics. It was recommended that leaders should lead in line with the philosophy of ubuntu. They should value group solidarity, good social and personal relations and believe in consensus and compromise.*

KEYWORDS: Afrocentric effective leadership, Culture, Effective leadership, Leadership model, SMEs, Ubuntu.



INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Scholars, policy makers and analysts have agreed that the future development of any country rests on the shoulders of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). This is as a result of the significant role that they have been playing in both developed and developing economies. Irrespective of the fact that SMEs are important to developing economies such as Zimbabwe, where appalling unemployment rates and colossal gaps between the wealthy and the poor are ubiquitous, only 15% are expected to survive beyond three years (Mudavanhu, Bindu, Chigusiwa & Muchabaiwa, 2011). Although a number of reasons have been proffered as the causes of the high failure rate in SMEs, the most outstanding ones include a dearth in managerial capacity (Bomani, Fields & Derera, 2015; Karedza, Sikwila, Mpofu & Makurumidze, 2014; Chipangura & Kaseke, 2012; Mudavanhu et al., 2011) and lack of an appropriate leadership model (Lekhanya, 2015).

If SMEs in Zimbabwe are to survive and prosper in the long term, they should adopt a sound, effective and relevant leadership model. However, Bailie (2018) and Moghalu (2017) agreed that African countries, except a few, have been plagued by a calamity of leadership despite the continent religiously following Western-initiated leadership models. Scholars such as Okantey (2014), Nkomo (2011) and Ngambi (2004) have argued against the applicability and effectiveness of Western leadership models in Africa due to differences in culture and context. However, the challenge is that it is difficult to resist the persuasiveness of these Western models in the absence of local alternatives (Blunt & Jones, 1997).

The adoption and use of Western initiated leadership models may continue unhindered unless the continent addresses the dearth of leadership research coming out of the continent (Ngunjiri, 2016). This is the reason scholars such as Eyong (2017), Iwowo (2015), Oloruntoba (2015), Nkomo (2011), Mbigi (2005), and Ngambi (2004) have advocated for the establishment and institutionalisation of indigenous leadership models supported by endogenous knowledge production as compared to imported knowledge. As a response to the call, the current research sought to develop and validate an Afrocentric Effective Leadership (AEL) model for Zimbabwean SMEs.

Problem Statement

Zimbabwean SMEs have failed to drive economic growth (Nyamwanza & Mavhiki, 2014) despite the implementation of Western initiated leadership models. The fact that the economy continues to decline while SMEs continue to increase in number (Tinarwo, 2016) points to the inapplicability of these Western initiated models in Zimbabwe. Scholars such as Okantey (2014), Nkomo (2011), and Ngambi (2004) are of the view that these Western initiated leadership models are not applicable and are ineffective in Africa due to differences in culture and context. As such, there is an urgent need for the establishment and institutionalisation of an indigenous leadership model (Eyong, 2017; Oloruntoba, 2015; Iwowo, 2015).



LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership

There exists countless definitions and explanations of leadership (McCleskey, 2014; Vroom & Jago, 2007) because the concept has proved difficult to define (Silva, 2016; Peretomode, 2012). It is one of the least understood phenomena on earth although it ranks among the most important topics in human sciences. Silva (2016, p. 3) defined leadership as “the process of interactive influences that occurs when, in a given context, some people accept someone as their leader to achieve common goals.” In the African context, Gilpin-Jackson (2014, p. 2) defined leaders “as those who selflessly serve their communities for a greater good.”

Leadership should be a two-way process between leaders and followers, where followers believe in the leader’s vision and are inspired to recognise and pursue mutual goals and aspirations (Mwangi, 2014; Youssef, 2013). The quagmire of bad leadership cannot be solely blamed on the leaders alone. Followers should evenly shoulder the blame especially in Africa where Poncian and Mgaya (2015) opined that they are passive when it comes to holding their leaders accountable.

Ubuntu Philosophy as a Basis of Effective Leadership

Ubuntu is an African concept (Ambrosio, 2018) and a way of life that is responsible for keeping together communities of sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) due to its beliefs and practices (Koenane & Olatunji, 2017; Nzimakwe, 2014). The philosophy treasures the importance of community, harmony, sharing and caring. Meylahn and Musiyambiri (2017) believed that ubuntu offers moral guiding values in leadership. It can act as a basis of leadership development and practice in Africa (Galperin & Alamuri, 2017; Ngunjiri, 2016; Msila, 2015). Brack et al. (2003), cited in Nzimakwe (2014), postulated that managers should model organisations and institutions around the philosophy of ubuntu if they desire to obtain buy in from employees.

The Influence of Culture on Leadership

Researches and literature have recognised the link between culture, organisational performance and employee behaviour and attitudes (Warrick, 2017) and between culture and leadership (House, Javidan, Hanges & Dorfman, 2002). This shows that culture is a significant factor in understanding leadership in organisations. Dorfman, Javidan, Hanges and Dastmalchian (2012) observed that leadership behaviours are directly influenced by national cultures through expectations that societies have of leadership. It becomes difficult to increase leadership effectiveness when leaders are taught theories that oppose their cultures (Lutz, 2009). Africa as a continent differs from all the other continents (Thwala, 2018). For instance, in a study by Hofstede in 1980, SSA showed analogous cultural characteristics which are different from other parts of the world (Oppong, 2017).

Traditional African Leadership as a Basis for Contemporary Effective Leadership

The continent of Africa boasts of a rich heritage of leadership although it is not uniform across (Masango, 2002). This has been supported by scholars such as Makahamadze, Grand and Tavuyanago (2009) and Dodo (2013), all cited in Haang’andu and Be’land (2019), who have acknowledged that although Zimbabwe like all other African countries boasted of a tradition of pre-colonial ethnic leadership that could be characterised as rich, the emergence of

colonialism changed the landscape. Although colonisation was aimed at the economic control of the continent, it was not possible without political and cultural control, hence the demonisation of the ways of indigenous people by the colonisers (Makaudze, 2017). Rather than being invested in one person, leadership in Africa was shared by all community members although in some instances this custom was violated through dictatorship (Masango, 2002). This sharing was such that one could be a leader in a certain context while being a follower in another (Eyong, 2017).

The widely cherished management concept of decentralisation was also practiced in Africa. For instance, since the Ndebele state was big, it could not be managed centrally, hence power was decentralised (Ndlovu & Dube, 2012). This was also a mechanism that was used to prevent the king from abusing power. Scholars such as Nicolaidis and Duho (2019), Makaudze (2017), Okantey (2014) and Msila (2014) have exhorted the continent to take a journey back to its roots and adopt relevant neglected practices based on African culture and traditions.

Proposed Conceptual Framework

The study proposed the following conceptual framework highlighted in Figure 1 below:

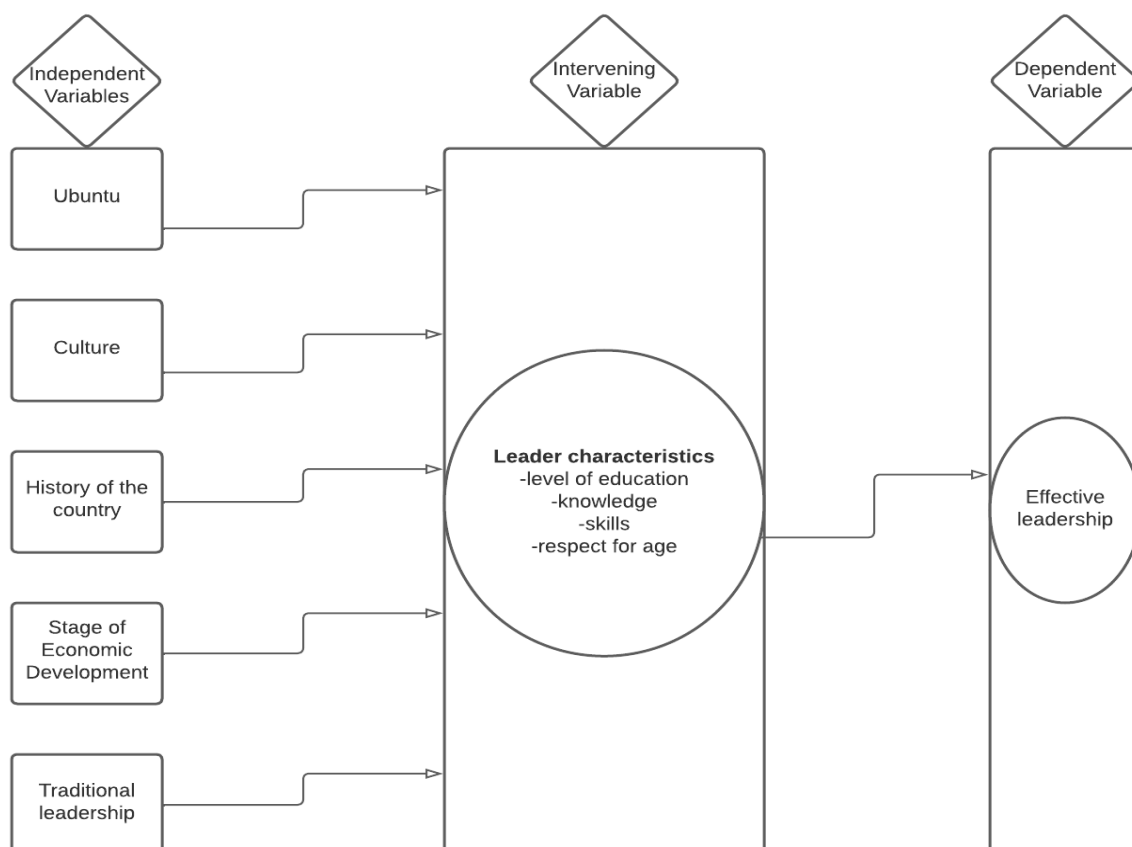


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework



Independent Variables

Ubuntu

Most, if not all of the countries south of the Sahara, Zimbabwe included, cherish the philosophy of ubuntu as part of what makes society successful. Given the widespread acceptance of ubuntu in Zimbabwe, it is inconceivable that leadership can be effective without taking into consideration the philosophy of ubuntu. In trying to link ubuntu with leadership, Regine (2009), cited in Nzimakwe (2014), prophesied that in the twenty-first century, great leaders will have ubuntu. As such, leadership in Zimbabwean SMEs should be based on the values of humaneness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion, honesty, tolerance and hospitality in line with the philosophy of ubuntu.

Culture

Effective leadership depends on the culture of the different parties involved in the leadership process. It also depends to a large extent on the culture of the country in which leadership is taking place. Since in African culture there are both aspects that inhibit and promote effective leadership (Kuada, 2010), the envisioned AEL model should leverage on aspects of African culture that promote and enhance effective leadership while at the same time sidelining aspects that impede effective leadership. As such, effective leaders in the context of Zimbabwean SMEs should be able to value group solidarity, commitment, sharing, compromise and consensus. They should also value good social and personal relations.

History of the Country

Like most African countries, Zimbabwe went through a painful period of colonisation where indigenous people were dominated by colonialists. The people of African descent were also discriminated against and made to look inferior with long lasting effects. Unfortunately, as a result of these behaviours being deeply ingrained, they were adopted and perpetuated by African leaders after the end of colonisation and passed on to subsequent generations of leaders. This is the reason why Ocheni and Nwankwo (2012) have argued that some of the selfish behaviours exhibited by leaders in Africa can be attributed to the effects of colonisation. As such, effective leadership in Zimbabwean SMEs should take into consideration the history of the country.

Stage of Economic Development of the Country

The stage of economic development of a country affects leadership. The way both leaders and followers behave and interact with each other is partly determined by the level of economic development of a nation. Zimbabwe has been undergoing a protracted period of economic challenges spanning more than two decades. Although the economic development of the country had been promising since the first decade after independence, things began to change with the adoption of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) policies in 1991, resulting in companies closing and massive retrenchments (Mavengere, 2015). Although hope had been restored with the adoption of the multi-currency system in 2009, the situation has continued to deteriorate over the years, exacerbated by a number of additional factors. This has seen the development of the country regressing with the standard of living of the majority continuing to plummet. This has resulted in employees desisting from any action that they may feel will negatively affect their job security such as challenging their managers and demanding



accountability and transparency. Employees are afraid that if they lose their current jobs, it will be difficult for them to find alternative jobs. The less developed a country is, the fewer job opportunities will be available on the market. As such, in order to preserve their current jobs, employees desist from challenging their leaders and demanding transparency and accountability even in instances where they have to for the good of the organisation.

Traditional Leadership

Contemporary leadership in Zimbabwe has been greatly affected by colonialism such that traditional systems that used to work and still can work in modern times are easily regarded as backward and retrogressive. Colonialism was meant to subjugate the natives in such a way that they would view themselves and their ways as inferior to the ways and systems of the colonial masters. Leadership development in Africa should take into consideration the indelible mark of inferiority that was left by colonialism concerning traditional ways and systems. There is a need to resurrect some of the noble practices and systems that had existed and used effectively by local people. This is the reason why scholars such as Nkomo (2011) have called for the reclaiming and reinstitutionalisation of indigenous African leadership and management in order to solve developmental challenges that have bedevilled the continent. While scholars argued for the reclaiming and reinstitutionalisation of indigenous African leadership and management systems, there is a need to take into cognisance the fact that we are living in a modern and different era. As such, only those traditional systems that are still relevant as they are and those that can be modernised for them to be relevant to the 21st century and beyond should be adopted.

Intervening Variable

Leader Characteristics

Leaders play an important role in engendering effective leadership. The level of education, knowledge and skills that the leaders possess affect their level of effectiveness. For leaders to effectively lead, they need education, whether it is formal or informal. Studies by scholars such as Bell, Rvanniekerk and Nel (2015) found education to be associated with effective leadership. Education is necessary for the leader to effectively discharge his/her responsibilities. The leader should endeavour to acquire knowledge in relevant areas and skills such as communication, problem solving, conflict resolution, emotional intelligence and decision making for them to effectively lead. The level of effectiveness is also affected by the extent to which the leader has respect for followers who are older than him/her in line with the dictates of African culture.

Dependent Variable

Effective Leadership

For SMEs in Zimbabwe to achieve sustainable success, leadership should be effective (Daka et al., 2017; Lekhanya, 2015). When leadership is effective, employees will be satisfied (Dalluay & Jalagat, 2016) and excited to come to work and provide their all. Effective leadership will result in employees being committed to their work (Naile & Selesho, 2014) such that they willingly go an extra mile and work beyond what their traditional job descriptions prescribe (Gabriela & Dorinela, 2017). Effective leadership is shown by employees being committed to the decisions of their superiors. Effective leaders support their



employees in career development (Litano & Major, 2016) and engenders superior performance that enables organisations to consistently achieve its goals (Madanchian & Taherdoost, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

The current study adopted a quantitative research design so as to analyse relationships between variables which were measured numerically and analysed using statistical techniques (Apuke, 2017; Greener, 2008). The study opted to use the survey strategy so that standardised data could be collected from research participants in an exceedingly cost-effective way which allowed for easy comparison. The population of the study comprised non-managers, supervisors, managers and owner-managers of SMEs domiciled in Bulawayo's Central Business Area (CBA). A sample of 300 participants was chosen using proportional stratified sampling technique. Firstly, the SMEs were divided into relevant and significant strata based on the sector in which the SME operated; then a random sample was drawn from the different strata proportional to the relative size of the stratum in the target population. Proportional stratified sampling was chosen because the researchers possessed knowledge concerning the population under study (Jawale, 2012) and the technique improved the representativeness of the sample in relation to the population (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 and Smart PLS version 3 were used to analyse the data. Structural Equation Modelling was used as a comprehensive way of quantifying and testing theories.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Of the 300 questionnaires that were distributed, 241 were returned and were enough to allow for statistical analysis of data (Saunders et al., 2016; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). This gave a response rate of 80.3%.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

62.2% of the respondents were non-managerial employees while 26.1% were supervisory employees. 5% of the respondents were managers while the remaining 6.6% were owner-managers as shown by Table 1 below:

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Demographic characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Position	Non-managerial	150	62.2
	Supervisor	63	26.1
	Manager	12	5.0
	Owner-manager	16	6.6
	Total	241	100

The fact that non-managerial respondents were the majority followed by supervisory respondents was consistent with the structure of most organisations. Owner-managers were



more than managers because most SME owners in Zimbabwe start their businesses and become actively involved in managing those businesses.

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

SEM, a statistical and arithmetic modelling procedure that integrates regression path analysis and factor analysis (Hair, Hult, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2017) was used to validate the proposed model using data that was collected from the respondents, and the model results are shown in Figure 2 below:

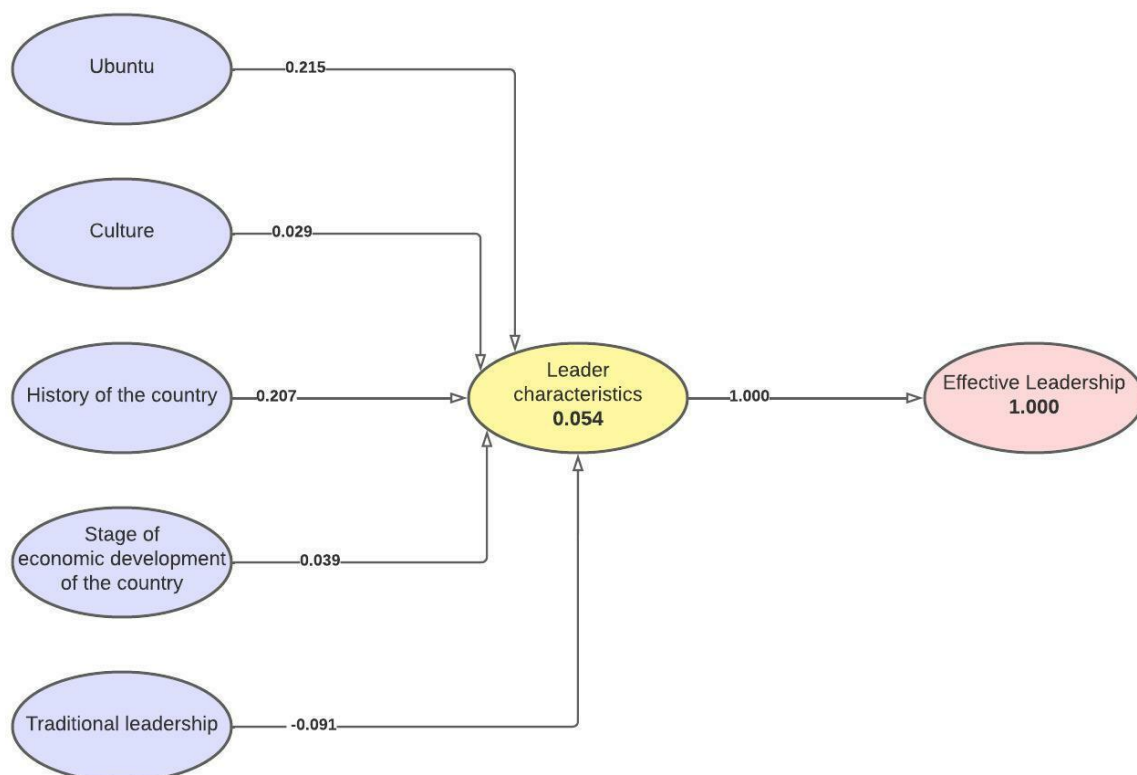


Figure 2: Structured AEL Model adapted from Smart PLS

Figure 2 above showed that four independent variables namely culture, ubuntu, history of the country and stage of economic development of the country had a positive influence on effective leadership mediated by leader characteristics, while traditional leadership had a negative influence.

Model Assessment

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

VIF was used to measure the collinearity of the latent variables and the VIF values ranged between 1 and 2.015 and were all greater than 0.2 but lower than 5 (Hair et al., 2017). If the



VIF value is lower than 5, it shows that the model has no collinearity problem (Maware & Adetunji, 2019). As such, the results showed that the AEL model had no collinearity problem.

Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

The coefficient of determination (R^2), which is the square of the correlation of definite and predicted values of the model, was calculated and the values for culture, ubuntu, history of the country, traditional leadership and stage of economic development of the country were 0.873, 0.804, 0.679, 0.402 and 0.875 respectively. The R^2 value for traditional leadership was the lowest at 0.402. The results indicated that the model explained the association between the factors more precisely. The higher the coefficient of determination, the better the model because a higher coefficient of determination means a better prediction of the dependent variable (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2014). Therefore, it means that the AEL model had a higher degree of predictive accuracy. As such, culture, ubuntu, history of the country and stage of economic development of the country had a good influence on effective leadership.

The Stone-Geisser's Analysis (Q^2)

The Stone-Geisser's (Q^2) analysis was used to further regulate the accuracy of the model by showing the predictive relevance of the model (Famiyeh et al., 2018). The Q^2 values are shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Stone-Geisser values

	SSO	SSE	Q^2
Culture	645	401.933	0.386
Ubuntu	501	308.145	0.376
History of the country	357	256.140	0.511
Traditional leadership	476	208.112	0.189
Stage of economic development	410	278.934	0.460

The Stone-Geisser's values for the model were all above 0, ranging from 0.189 to 0.511. The lowest Q^2 value for the model (0.189) was for traditional leadership. These results showed that the AEL model had relatively high predictive relevance (Firmansyah & Maemunah, 2021).

Discriminant Validity

In order to measure the degree to which a construct was uniquely and truly different from other constructs due to observed empirical standards, two measures namely Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio were used.

Fornell-Larcker Criterion

The Fornell-Larcker criterion was done by comparing the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values with the latent variable correlations, as suggested by Hair et al. (2014) and Kuo and Lin (2021). The values obtained for the model are shown in Table 3 below:

**Table 3: Fornell-Larcker criterion values**

	Culture	Ubuntu	History of the country	Stage of economic development	Traditional Leadership
Culture	0.784				
Ubuntu	0.606	0.767			
History of the country	0.598	0.633	0.677		
Stage of economic development	0.654	0.412	0.523	0.661	
Traditional Leadership	0.671	0.367	0.486	0.455	0.604

The Fornell-Larcker criterion values for the model showed that discriminant validity was achieved. This was because four variables namely culture, ubuntu, history of the country and stage of economic development of the country accounted for more variance in their associated indicator variables than they shared with other constructs in the same model (Henseler, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2015). However, the square root of traditional leadership was lower than its highest correlation with culture. This showed that four variables (culture, ubuntu, history of the country and stage of economic development of the country) explained better their own indicator's variance as compared to other latent construct's variances (Hamid, Sami & Sidek, 2017).

Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio

As a remedy to the shortfalls of the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the between-trait correlations to the within-trait correlations were calculated and the values for the model were between 0.452 and 0.818. These values were all below the suggested threshold of 0.90 (Hamid et al., 2017) which showed that discriminant validity was achieved by the model. This demonstrated that measures of constructs that were found to be highly related were indeed supposed to be highly correlated.

Model Fit

Table 4 below shows the model fit statistics for the AEL model:

Table 4: Model fit statistics

Fit index	Prescribed threshold	Obtained value	Acceptable fit Yes / No
Relative Chi-square (CMIN/DF)	<3 = Good <5 = Sometimes permissible	1.347	Yes
Root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA)	<0.05 = Good Fit <0.08 = Acceptable fit	0.017	Yes
Chi-square difference	p>0.05	0.129	Yes

The model had a relative chi-square (CMIN/DF) of 1.347 which was within the acceptable threshold of <math><3</math>. This is good and acceptable for the model (Hooper et al., 2008). A root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) value of 0.017 was obtained and is within the acceptable good fit threshold of <math><0.05</math> (Hair et al., 2014). The chi-square difference for the model was 0.129 and was above the acceptable threshold value of $p>0.05$ which symbolises a good fit for the model. The model satisfied all the fit indices that were tested for the final AEL model and as such the AEL model is considered acceptable and validated.

CONCLUSION

The study sought to develop and validate an AEL model for Zimbabwean SMEs. The study concluded that the AEL model shown in Figure 3 below is acceptable and validated:

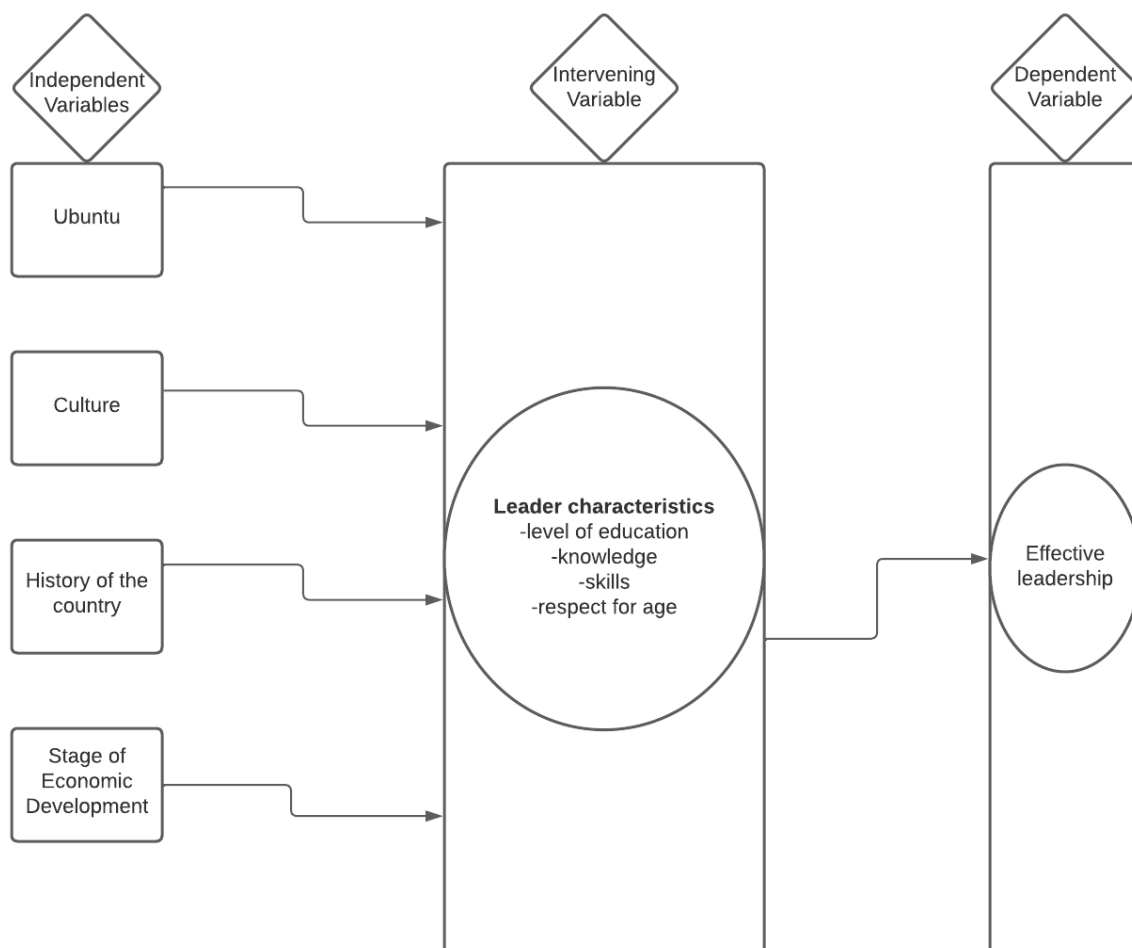


Figure 3: AEL Model



The study concluded that effective leadership in Zimbabwean SMEs is dependent on ubuntu, culture, history of the country and stage of economic development of the country, intermediated by leader characteristics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to engender effective leadership in Zimbabwean SMEs, leaders should lead in line with the philosophy of ubuntu. This requires that leaders should care for their employees and respect their dignity. They should allow employees to freely express their opinions without any fear of negative retribution and when the opinions are expressed, leaders should embrace the divergent views that emerge. Organisational members should stand together as a group, with the interests of the group taking precedence over the interests of individual members. Above all, leaders should always exhibit the value of humaneness.

If effective leadership is to be entrenched in Zimbabwean SMEs, leaders should value group solidarity together with good social and personal relations. Leaders should believe in consensus and compromise. Effective leadership requires that leaders become less dominant and avoid unnecessarily discriminating employees for reasons not associated with employee performance. Leaders should also desist from doing things that make employees look inferior. Effective leadership requires that employees should gain the courage to challenge their leaders where necessary, demanding transparency and accountability from them. Leaders should in turn understand that it is not a crime for employees to challenge them, demand transparency and accountability. As such, leaders should desist from instilling fear in employees or engaging in retributive behaviours.

However, in order for all this to materialise effectively, leaders should continuously improve their level of education and engage in programmes and strategies that are aimed at improving their knowledge and skills. They should always respect employees who are older than them irrespective of their positions because that is what is expected and accepted in the African culture.

Future Research

Future researchers may do a qualitative study or a mixed methods study so that findings are compared to establish whether the model can be validated from either a qualitative or a mixed methods approach. Since the study focused on SMEs in Zimbabwe, future researchers may try to assess the applicability and validity of the AEL model outside SMEs and in SMEs in other African environments.



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