# The catalytic role of authentic leadership in raising collective consciousness in the South African social systems

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**ABSTRACT**

*Background:* Continued complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity in the workplace and social environments have posed challenges to leadership. Managing such complexities is demanding more than just technical knowledge, but one's ability in assisting people in adjusting their world views, norms and behaviours. The responsibility of any leader is to stimulate collective consciousness that can eventually lead to societal transformation. Hence, leadership is a social interaction catalyst that requires a particular calibre of individuals or groups who are authentic and specialise in relationship/network building.

*Purpose of study:* The socio-economic challenges of unemployment, poverty, inequality, corruption, crime and xenophobia remain unreciprocated, yet they require heightened collective consciousness for the general populous to be able to contribute solutions. By the end of 2020, the market did not generate sufficient jobs, which exacerbated inequality and poverty levels, hence, the objective of this article is to explore the catalytic aspect of authentic leadership in raising the collective consciousness of South Africans to levels where people can meaningfully contribute solutions to their immediate problems.

*Design/Methodology/Approach:* A qualitative Grounded Theory approach was used for its strength in the systemic integration of data and distinct use of participants' voices in the narrative. Unstructured open-ended interviews were the primary source of data collection and 10 participants all based in Gauteng province were theoretically sampled.

*Results/Findings:* The findings show that a reciprocal relationship between leaders and their followers is critical and that only leaders who can harness complex challenges will pave ways for a sustainable future.

*Recommendations:* It is recommended that in their catalytic role, the leaders should become communication experts who respond swiftly to the needs of the stakeholders.

*Managerial implication*: The findings have managerial implications where catalytic leaders should be network builders fostering social support to wider stakeholder perspectives and being responsive to their needs and aspirations.

**JEL Classification: P26**

# 1.    INTRODUCTION

The desire for social change worldwide has demanded that leadership be re-defined in the context of the prevailing environments. The effects of globalism have given birth to multi-cultural societies with pluralism of norms, values and belief systems. The role of leadership in instituting positive social change requires individuals or groups of people who understand the multiple stakeholder discourse. Patzer *et al.,* (2018) describe leaders as positioned to assume multiple roles and a lot more is expected of them by the range of stakeholders. The transformational movement globally stresses that leadership responsibilities be re-defined. Liddle (2010) argues that leadership is the centrepiece of good governance, yet the challenge of how leadership can foster social transformation remains unresolved. Patzer *et al.,* (2018) reiterate that the role of a leader in postmodern society should include being an "economic actor with additional responsibilities for social integration". This definition requires high levels of interaction for a purpose between leaders and the broader stakeholder perspectives.

Ciulla (2005) states that good leadership has a moral dimension which not only makes it efficient but also ethical and that the leaders are not the heroes' people make them; leadership should be responsible and sensitive to people issues. Leadership and followership have a symbiotic relationship, which can never be understood in isolation (Northouse, 2018). Followers' responses to leadership voices and actions are what makes or breaks a leader; yet followers' voices are rarely heard (Toendepi, 2017). Northouse (2018) stresses the independence of leaders and followers in a shared relationship. Leadership is actually the causal agent for collective consciousness.

Leadership in the South African context requires suitable social structures where conversations and discussions focussed on examining the challenges at hand and creating a range of solutions through an effective and inclusive exchange (Toendepi, 2013). Muthein (2013:135) points out some of the required attributes as "the ability to mobilise the organisation towards the attainment of social goals, stimulating continuous social learning, effective consultative policymaking and efficient service delivery". This article is drawn from the findings of a research study entitled "Transformational leadership as a catalyst to higher levels of consciousness in social systems" (Toendepi, 2017), which explored how transformational

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leadership can catalyse collective/social consciousness and found that there is a direct relationship between heightened collective consciousness, movement towards societal transformation and the level of development. The objective of this article is to articulate the catalytic role of leadership in fostering that relationship and contribute to the theoretical debate on what leadership is.

## 2.     BACKGROUND

The objective of the original research by Toendepi (2017) was to explore how leadership is a catalyst to raise levels of consciousness in the South African social system. A social system is a result of patterned series of interrelationships amongst parts of a system that then makes-up a coherent whole (Metcalf, 2014). Organisations and societies are social systems consisting of individuals, teams, leaders and dominant coalitions (Toendepi, 2017). The original study resulted in eight categories namely South African complex adaptive challenges (which include unemployment, poverty, inequality, crime, corruption, xenophobia, land distribution and service delivery protests). Quality education (which involves the acquisition of knowledge that can enable collective shaping of reality, societal values (these are the ethics that guide norms and values), collective shift of mind-set (consensus orientation), good governance (principles of accountability and transparency), the new struggle (the old struggle against apartheid and discrimination was won, the new one is about a united democratic nation). The last two categories of authentic leadership and public engagement are the core categories and the focus in this article. Connelly (2013) and Lawrence and Tar (2013) concur that a core category is the linchpin that appears frequently in data and is connected to all categories and their properties. To Corbin and Strauss (2008) the core categories, in this case authentic leadership and public engagement represent the main themes in this research. Typically, after the research was concluded, the question on what exactly leadership in the South African context entail taking into consideration these challenges of unemployment, poverty, inequality, corruption, crime and xenophobia remained unanswered. Hence this article aimed at exploring the catalytic role of leadership in raising collective consciousness and how this can assist the general populous in contributing solutions to their challenges.

Leaders who can recognise and embrace globalisation, diversity, multiculturalism, internationalisation and the associated complexities will be able to pave positive pathways for a sustainable future (Toendepi & Viljoen, 2019). This particular brand of leaders is able to visualise inclusive growth. Leadership, and how it institutes influence, is critical in the leadership process. According to Fryer (2011), leadership in this respect yields significant power, which requires heightened responsibility because the power differential between

leaders and followers makes the latter a much stronger component in the relationship process. There is an abundance of literature that defines what leadership is, what it does and how it should be practised (Northouse, 2018). This article augments that leadership has a further responsibility to foster social change through catalysing collective consciousness as a causal agent. In South Africa, several public leaders are most visible during election time, engaging with the general populous at rallies, to raise the people's consciousness about the politics of the country. However, the engagement between people and leaders should be an on-going process. Social consciousness is the collective knowledge, values, skills and wisdom of a society (Anderson, 2018). Catalysing collective consciousness is relational and embedded in the sociological theory of social constructionism (Creswell, 2014), where meaning is seen as a co-creation.

Nkuna and Sebola (2015) consider one of the ready to govern objectives of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) as being progressive about the development of a sustainable economy to improve the quality of life for all South Africans. However, 25 years into democracy, its leadership is still challenged at micro level. Issues such as poor housing, poor health, poor education, poor service delivery system and lack of a cohesive social system still prevail in South Africa. In the Global Competitive Index (2019), South Africa is ranked 60th out of the 141 surveyed countries. The country is ranked as one of the worst in education at number 90, health 118 and personal security 135 out of the surveyed 140 countries. Xenophobia is yet another challenge that affects the South African social system. It is a phenomenon which encompasses "attitudes, prejudices and behaviour that rejects, excludes and vilify its targets based on the belief that they are perpetual outsiders" (Burlacu, 2017:89) and cannot be trusted or assimilated into their social system. Xenophobia in South Africa is mainly attributed to socio-economic factors and lower levels of collective consciousness on the challenge.

The triple challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment that face South Africa do not seem to be receiving due attention and have destabilised the social system. These coupled with the service delivery protests where the general populous demand to be heard through destructive demonstrations have entangled themselves creating complex adaptive challenges (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997), which results in social complexity. The various protests have led to property destruction, vandalism of basic infrastructure and business paralysis. This article argues that awakening the consciousness of communities through engagement on the prevailing issues remains the first imperative for leadership. Toendepi (2013) argues that the structures required for such engagement constitute an essential component of the whole

engagement process. It can be argued, in the case of South Africa, that protests serve to draw the attention of the leadership.

Patzer *et al*. (2018) state that the role of a leader in the postmodern society involves being a conscious actor with additional responsibility for social integration. Social integration and understanding of what and where the challenges are; requires heightened consciousness within the communities. This process requires catalytic leadership with distinct competences and capabilities to be able to integrate the nation into a functional social system. In order to surmount these challenges, heightened collective consciousness is required to achieve unity of purpose.

## 3.    THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

### 3.1.    Catalytic role of leadership

The three (3) critical areas that need the attention of leadership in South Africa are related to societal transformation, socio-economic development and social cohesion where heightened collective consciousness is required. Due to the power leaders hold in the leadership process and where followers are concerned, typically, followers conform to their leaders' directives and actions hence, the true meaning of followership is hinged on communication between them and the leaders. Patzer *et al.* (2018) state that what is now required is the integrative responsible leadership, which is not only strategic but also adept at communicating with the stakeholders and facilitating discourses about collective norms and values.

The South African socio-economic challenges demonstrate lack of responsiveness from the leadership, a case in point is the recent Alexandria community demonstration on lack of service delivery and developmental issues where the community demanded to meet with the, then, mayor of the City of Johannesburg. The community was angered by the mayor's failure to respond on time (Pijoos, 2019). The stakeholders' concern should be a priority to responsive leadership. Toendepi and Viljoen (2019) argue that only leaders, who are able to comprehend, influence and catalyse the process of system shift from the narrow short-term approaches to more long-term collaborative and multi-stakeholder perspectives will be able to envision inclusive development. Social integration occurs when leaders are able to raise the consciousness of communities through inclusive conversations, which are sensitive to individual/group differences. In a post-modern society, a leader is an interacting partner who drives the interaction process to achieve consensus and collective consciousness (Patzer *et al.,* 2018). A catalytic leader behaves more like a transformational leader who inspires the followers to do more and has a genuine willingness to empower others. In turn, the followers

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are enabled by the levels of consciousness in collectively understanding the importance and value of outcomes.

Where followers are given an opportunity to voice their aspirations and needs, the conversations yield legitimate outcomes and a collective sense of belonging. In that process, leaders become conscious initiators and moderators of stakeholder dialogues (Patzer *et al.,* 2018). Voegtlin and Scherer (2017) posit that providing participants with an opportunity to voice their opinion leads to legitimate outcomes and an increased willingness to co-operate. Leadership decisions on the social challenges are enriched by the contributions of the affected people (Toendepi, 2013).  It also ensures trust, appreciation and recognition in the social system where the participants relate to the final decisions and own them. Leaders with the right intentions facilitate the conditions for dialogue and involvement of communities and provide guidance towards reaching a common understanding. Fryer (2011) argues that the process of discourse is governed by the leader's power and influence.

## 3.2.    Social Learning

According to Toendepi (2013), the appropriate structures of involvement may unify societal values, interests, needs and communicates preferences of the people. Suitable social structures create neutral spaces, where people feel free to contribute and participate in the conversations. Social learning is a process that results in heightened consciousness in the individuals participating in the social interactions within a social network (Reed *et al*., 2010). Omobowale *et al.* (2013) assert that such a process enhances social consciousness through the socialisation process. A desire to resolve issues affecting a collective may eventually persuade others to participate thereby influencing collective consciousness awakening.

Social learning aims to shape collective goals, norms and beliefs (Van der Wal *et al*., 2014). Social identity theory suggests that people make sense of who they are by classifying themselves into actual or symbolic social groups (Fujita *et al.*, 2018). Jones (2009) concurs that belonging is a fundamental human motive, whereby people remain sensitive to threats of rejection and group acceptance. Therefore, it is the responsibility of leadership to design the suitable structures of involvement (Toendepi, 2013) and to facilitate the dialogues and catalyse collective transformation. In this sense, leaders have to deal with the complexity and often contradictory demands of the stakeholders. However, leaders are expected to follow moral norms of conduct satisfying the various groups of stakeholders in the process (Patzer *et al.,* 2018). Voegtlin *et al.,* (2012) and Maak and Pless (2009) argue that leaders should act as cosmopolitan citizens and that they should engage in societal deliberations. These deliberations may enable people to share knowledge and experiences thereby raising the

levels of consciousness in the communities. Omobowale *et al*., (2013) posit that the gathering of people engenders social consciousness among those with a desire to be abreast with information. Toendepi (2013) states that small discussion groups referred to as Imbizo or Padare (in Zulu and Shona languages of Southern Africa) also represent a place of engendering collective consciousness.

Shared public interests may ignite deliberate discourses, which largely improve social consciousness among the participants as they express their wills, worldviews and experiences (Omobowale *et al.,* 2013). Through communication with others, individuals express their belonging to various groups, assess group image and reputation and use the identity to navigate their lives. The catalytic leader is a network builder who then fosters social support for the community and facilitates their integration into social networks. The exchange of information and sharing of experiences stimulate social consciousness. The sense of embeddedness in a social system, which enables individuals to receive feedback from others, may lead to the feeling of stability, predictability and control over ones' life (Guan & So, 2016).

### 3.3.    Social consciousness

Anderson (2018) defines social consciousness as the collective knowledge, skill, values and wisdom of a society, as reflected in their language, art, behaviour and social organisation. Prinsloo (2012) notes that consciousness reflects the level of awareness or inclusiveness and extensiveness of up taking of new information. Collective consciousness is conceived as an experience-based transcendent structure, shared by groups of people (Pandey & Gupta, 2008). In cultivating collective consciousness, leaders facilitate sharing of experiences and differences, which empowers others, as the subjective experiences become authoritative and valuable sources of knowledge (Pandey & Gupta, 2008).

Social consciousness and social action are deniably associated with education; hence, educators play a significant role in stimulating and moulding people's ability to transform social reality. Pavlidis (2015) states that the acquisition of knowledge through schooling is the major contributor to heightened consciousness. Pavlidis (2015:1) views consciousness as a "sense of understanding the contradictions of the present, an integrated form of connection and communication that will impact on people aiming at collective and coordinated activity." Shaull (2005:34) states that the relationship between education and consciousness refers to "education as a practice of freedom which allows citizens to view reality in a more critical and creative manner and allowing them to participate in their transformative process". The learning process integrates thinking and doing, while deeper levels of learning create increased awareness (Viljoen, 2015). The role of leadership in that process is to catalyse and guide

change in individuals and groups. Odora-Hoppers and Sandgren (2014) emphasises that heightened education may catapults to new, equal and just world. Hence, education is a stimulator of social progress by enabling people to understand their world and adjust how they perceive reality.

Vilakati (2019) states that the values espoused in African human consciousness emphasise caring, sharing, belonging, creativity, connectedness, reciprocity, compassion and empathy. At the heart of African spiritual consciousness is a collective analogy of being (Vilakati. 2019; Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009). Africa's past, the present and its future dynamically reinforce this consciousness (Vilakati, 2019), which has evolved over time stemming from the Ubuntu philosophy. Relational and constructionist approaches, which emphasise dialogue and shared experiences, are embedded within the Afro-centric perspective to leadership. These approaches generate shared understanding on the associated challenges, aspirations and well-being of the whole community. Hence, South Africa requires leadership, which intends to achieve inclusive growth. At organisational level, Viljoen (2015) states that leaders have the responsibility of tapping into the talents of individuals in organisations for the benefit of the organisation as a whole.

Anderson (2018) posits that civilisation pertains to the developmental levels of social consciousness where lack of civilisation refers to a society with an underdeveloped social consciousness, which cares little for the well-being of all. Hence, a social system with lower levels of consciousness may engage in destructive protests, fail to embrace diversity and engage xenophobic acts. This article argues that it is the responsibility of leadership to engage people in constructive debates aimed at raising their consciousness levels. High level of civilisation refers to people who have learnt to live and work together (Anderson, 2018); hence, the level of social consciousness is associated with the developmental levels of society. In South Africa, social consciousness lags behind the political consciousness of the majority of individuals given the xenophobic tendencies and violent protests versus the turn up at elections, which is much reasonable.

Leadership should seek to create systems of governance that reflect the will of the people, (through their participation) are free from corruption and are consensus oriented. The relationships between government and people should be dynamic, collaborative and constructive (Toendepi, 2013). Collective consciousness enhances collective identity, purposeful evolution, new knowledge, evolutionary change and makes social change a positive outcome.

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### 3.4.    Authentic leadership

In order for a leader to be able to catalyse consciousness in the social system, they should be authentic, which is a measure of trustworthiness. Avolio *et al*. (2009) state that the composition of authentic leadership includes four mutually inclusive aspects, namely self-awareness, internalised moral perspective, balanced processing and relational transparency. Additionally, Achua and Lussier (2013) emphasise the leader's personal mastery and the use of effective communication channels, building a good relationship exchange with followers. Northouse (2018) further state that the authenticity of a leader is visible when one understands their own values and uses such values in reference to others and, cites the late Nelson Mandela as the best candidate, who fits the description of an authentic leader. Authentic leadership implies that leaders are motivated by higher order values such as justice and responsiveness to community needs, which are also prerequisites for the catalytic role of any leader.

Trusted leaders use effective communication to gain the approval of followers. Hence, Patzer, *et al.* (2018) state that interaction is a communicative action aiming at social integration. Doh and Quigley (2014) then view leadership as a difficult task, considering the heterogeneity of expectations and values of the people in the global business and the absence of a style source of global authority to guide responsible business behaviour. Consequently, responsible leaders may use integrative approaches in engaging with the diverse stakeholders and pursuing organisational goals (Patzer *et al.,* 2018).

Anderson (2018:34) enunciates the values associated with the level of consciousness as "focusing on involvement and gaining consensus, seeking peace with inner self and gaining contact with the inner self of others". These values are congruent to the components of authentic leadership and are also critical in the catalytic role of a leader in raising collective consciousness. Achua and Lussier (2013) also use the late Nelson Mandela as an example of a transformational leader, who demonstrated certain behaviours that catalysed the transformational process in South Africa. Such behaviours included the ability to develop great symbolic power, which influenced followers and passionately communicated future situations superseding the current ones.

## 4.    METHODOLOGY

This article is drawn from the main research conducted in 2017 on transformational leadership as a catalyst to higher levels of consciousness. Grounded Theory methodology was used in the main research and eight categories where identified. This article elaborates on two of the categories, which are authentic leadership and public engagement. In Grounded Theory, the researcher derives a general abstract theory of a process, action or interaction grounded in

the views of the participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2014). Grounded Theory is premised in the evolution of theory that is grounded in the data (Cho & Lee, 2014). The process entails the identification by the researcher of themes and patterns emerging from the data through a rigorous coding process. Theoretical sampling was used to identify suitable participants and it refers to a cumulative procedure where the analyst collects and codes the data simultaneously (Glaser & Strauss, 2007). Unstructured open-ended interviews were the primary source of data collection, and all participants were based in Gauteng province. An information letter was sent to all participants before the scheduled date of the interview and each participant was interviewed twice. Grounded Theory also allows for the voices of the participants to be heard in the narrative through their responses in the interviews (Johnson, 2015). Lawrence and Tar (2013) state that theory is grounded when it emerges and generates explanations of relationships and processes, which reflect the experiences of the participants. Grounded Theory has systematic steps in both the collection and analysis of data, which include theoretical sampling, generation of categories of information (open coding), constant comparative method and theoretical saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It is an inductive, comparative, iterative, and interactive method (Charmaz, 2006).

Table 1 reflects the profiles of the participants who were theoretically sampled. A sample of ten participants, seven of them men and three women, all of whom are in leadership positions in varying organisations, ranging from community leadership to executives in civil action groups, private, public and religious organisations. In qualitative research, sample size is usually determined by data saturation and not by the number of participants (Zamanzadeh *et al*., 2015).

**Table 1:    Participants Profile**

| Gender | White | Black | Coloured | Total |
|--------|-------|-------|----------|-------|
| Male | 3 | 3 | 1 | 7 |
| Female | - | 3 | - | 3 |
| **Total** | **3** | **6** | **1** | **10** |

Source: Author's compilation from interviews

Data analysis was based on the Grounded Theory stages of open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Identifiers were used to protect the anonymity of the participants as (MM2P[24]), where MM are the participants initials, the number 2 stands for the round of interviewing and P[24] stands for code number in the data scripts.

## 5.    FINDINGS

The findings are based on the two (2) of the eight (8) categories which are leadership and public engagement from an MPhil minor dissertation, which explored how transformational leadership can catalyse collective/social consciousness and found that there is a direct relationship between heightened collective consciousness, movement towards societal transformation and the level of development. The objective of this article is to articulate the catalytic role of leadership in fostering that relationship and contribute to the theoretical debate on what leadership is.

### 5.1.   Leadership

This section presents the participants' responses to leadership issues in South Africa. It is almost impossible to discuss any form of leadership within South Africa without referring to the legacy of the father of the South African democracy, the late first black president, Nelson Mandela. Nelson Mandela is highly regarded as an example of excellent leadership and praised for his leadership in the country's liberation movement.

> *"Mandela was a real statesman and not just a successful politician. He showed the same respect for all cultures." "Our first democratic president quite apart from being an international icon was a public relations genius who genuinely loved the people and most charmingly embodied the generosity of the African Spirit." LY2P[8]*

Mandela used symbolic power in the process of catalysing collective consciousness. The late Mandela's symbolic element is widely known when he appeared in court in a Xhosa traditional garb at the time of the Rivonia trial of 1963-4 (Mandela, 1994) and also when he supported the world cup in a unifying way by wearing the number nine jersey to the rugby world cup final of 1995. Most of his speeches well before becoming president had an appeal to inclusive social consciousness. The late Mandela led the team that drafted a Constitution with an intent to protect all stakeholders in a non-racist, non-sexist and without discrimination based on colour or creed (Mandela, 1994). One of the participants still remembers how Mandela used to appeal to the whole South African community.

> *"I challenge every South African to intensify the struggle for a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic, progressive and prosperous South Africa…"* ED1P[32a]

Mandela's leadership brand is emulated by many throughout the world. However, it seemed illogical to the participants why the current South African leadership does not emulate the late Mandela. The late Mandela successfully led the transition from apartheid, which was a critical era in the history of the country. The transition involved negotiating with the opposition and

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designing governing solutions to stabilise the country. This meant a number of stakeholders were brought to the negotiating table. From the participants' point of view, it seems the current context leaves no room for consultations with stakeholders.

> *"Leadership in South Africa today exists outside us. It is something out there. It is not something within us." "There is need to create collective leadership in trying to bring the country into a coherent state. Collective leadership is more than a skill or a gift from God, it is something we also can learn, you are trained, and you learn how to lead collectively."* ED1P[3a]

> *"What is needed are good conversations on the economy because a lot of what is happening is dishonest"* ED2P[5]

The participants bemoan the lack of authenticity in their current leadership and the lack of suitable structures of involvement to the extent that people resort to strikes and demonstrations in order to draw the attention of the leadership to immediate critical issues.

> *"The numerous protests especially those on service delivery are a sign of communication breakdown between the state and its citizens"* PD1P[14]

> *"Service delivery protests are the only way we can be heard not so much the best way but how else can they be made to listen"* NW2P[2&3]

The participants expressed anger and disapproval of their leadership at all levels of society, *"time for diplomatic conversation in the society is over."* They feel that technology is at least enabling them to voice issues and to reach-out to each other on certain challenges.

> "*The bottom of the pyramid now has means to challenge the top through social media and other inter-connected networks." "The internet and social media are now a realty which is feared by the leadership weary of power of a disgruntled and united society."* MM1P[16]

The responses show that participants are aware of social media and are using it for information dissemination, thereby raising collective consciousness of the people. At times, however, "fake" news distorts the process and mislead people. This shows that if the leaders play the role of catalysing collective consciousness through dialogue and frequent communication using social media, social cohesion can be achieved faster.

> *"People should be conscientised by their leadership about safety, the state of the economy, job losses".* PD2P[26]

> *"Leaders no longer represent the reality of most people in words and action"* CG2P[9]

Some participants said they look up to their leaders for solutions to societal problems. They expected the leadership to solve the urban housing challenge. Twenty-six years into democracy, the majority of urban dwellers are still in informal settlements (shacks) without municipal services.

*"Some families were allocated plots across to build shacks but the Red Ants arrived and dismantled them"* NW1P

*"….still no sanitation, we have just 2 tapes for more than 12000 families. 2 municipal skips which they empty once in a month. Some people are no wet land and children always sick"* NW2P[9-12]

Participatory governance entails social learning and engagement, but participants raised the issue of non-involvement of communities in devising solutions to their challenges.

*"…we definitely require civic renewal across the whole country, this means going beyond engagement at voting only to engagement that entails bringing people together to deliberate on problems that affect them and decide on solutions"* CG1P[15&15a]

*".. it is called citizen centred approach, this helps people to promote their own decisions, self-organising of the social system, it also focuses on cultural change not short term results, and goes beyond local communities to wider populations in the country… I am talking about cultural change so leaders must lead it"* CG1P[21 &27]

All participants were aware of what is expected of leaders to be able to raise collective consciousness. The challenge is the non-availability of the structures of involvement to facilitate the process of engagement and social learning.

*"We need to harness collective experiences even in organisations it works that way* NN2P[1]

*"Is it a learning process which is collaborative…."* CG1P[40a]

*"Need for unity cannot be over-estimated, cohesion…"* Leadership needs to lead cohesion, democracy, solidarity it all starts with leadership"* NN2P[1a&3]

## 5.2.    Public engagement

The findings show how the participants fully comprehend the challenges at hand and are very much willing to contribute to devising suitable solutions. Some participants proposed solutions to how leadership in the country should approach the process of galvanising consciousness. The theories of engagement and inclusive growth were singled out.

*"Ordinary people need opportunities to connect with others who also feel isolated or powerless and we want to work collectively towards the common good." "Every time we disagree with government, the apartheid story is retrieved, yet we are protecting democracy and representing the minority in their role to participate." CG1P[34a]*

*"…commitment to build common purpose, Unity of purpose with diverse groups in the country, it appears leadership at times divides people", "People driven governance is also an issue at the moment" NN2P6[6& 8]*

*The challenges we are faced with need honest dialogue and…." NN2P[11]*

*"Public opinion is important in policy formulation…." ER2P[4]*

All the participants stressed that it is time for suitable approaches, which can foster consciousness in people. The violent protests are almost an agreed approach of summoning leadership to a discussion table.

*"…protests are the only way we can be heard. …not so much the best way but how else can they be made to listen" NW2P[2-3]*

*Collaborative problem solving through debates and dialogues, how can communities participate more meaningfully...leaders can use strategies like collaboration to expand civic engagement CG1P[36-37]*

*"…the people on the ground must have power to air their voices or make the changes if they are not happy with the leadership." ED2P[30]*

Some participants view effective public participation as one of the solutions. However, Booysen (2009) posits that only in a democratic political system do all members of society have an opportunity to influence public policy.

*"Engagement is a way of bringing people together for the common good" CG1P[26]*

*"The leadership should consult the citizens' regularly about policies and this can help build broader support for economic policies and reduce the conflicts." ED2P[32]*

*"Yes, communities must be enabled to work together, in diverse groups addressing their day to day problems not burning or looting from foreigners" CG1P[37]*

*"Therefore, government leaders must consult citizens regularly about policies" ER2P[9]*

All participants agreed that it is a business' responsibility of leadership, whether in the public domain or in organisations, to catalyse consciousness. Management cannot know it all, they have to tap into the gifts of the people in the organisation in order to achieve the super-ordinate

goals of the organisation. However, the level of education is connected to the levels of consciousness.

> *"The young generation needs good education to be able to participate in the inclusive debates about the economy"* NM2P[32]

> *"Science needs to assist society but should be assisted by non-scientific experiences"* ER2P[8]

> *"Consciousness is awareness, being enlightened, leaders should lead people in this"* CG1P[40a]

> *"…we need higher levels of consciousness to be able to be relevant in the future"*
>
> NM1P[4]

One of the participants felt that in order for the deliberations, which inform consciousness to be meaningful to the people of South Africa and the sub-Saharan region, they have to be in line with the cultural beliefs and norms. Ubuntu as an African philosophical foundation is premised on consultation and collective consensus such that if built on such customs the levels of consciousness can rise significantly. The participant stated that using Ubuntu can generate the commensurate wisdom required in resolving the current challenges.

> *"… we have the spirit of Ubuntu embedded into our culture……..we are Africans…..same as consciousness, we are made aware of the surroundings"* MM1P[13] *"wisdom enables us to play significant roles in our communities"* MM1P[31]

> *"Starting point is to think how we can all positively and openly contribute to the ideal local scenario to achieve our collective objectives. This requires our commitment to re-build our common purpose and rejuvenate the spirit of Ubuntu as a fundamental and sustainable unity of cohesion."* NM2P[30]

## 6.    DISCUSSION

The findings show that most participants are aware of the responsibility of leadership to catalyse levels of consciousness through public engagement and open communication channels. Achua and Lussier (2013) concur with Avolio, *et al.* (2009) on the composition of authentic leadership that includes use of effective communication channels, relational transparency and internalised moral respect. Further, Northouse (2018) elaborate that at the heart of authentic leadership is the high-quality relationship exchange with followers facilitated by open communication, and a high responsiveness to stakeholder needs. The way the late first black president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, led the social system was singled out

by some participants as having left behind a real leadership legacy. The participants widely discussed how the late Mandela was a public relations genius who genuinely loved his people and was concerned about the levels of consciousness in the system. The authenticity of a leader and their leadership is embedded in the desire to genuinely lead others (Achua & Lussier, 2013; Northouse, 2018).

Faced with the complexity of socio-economic challenges, exacerbated by globalism and often contradictory demands of the multitude of stakeholders, South Africa needs to rethink new paradigms to stimulate higher levels of consciousness (Musgrave, 2014). Patzer *et al.,* (2018) point out that leaders should act as initiators and moderators of the stakeholder discourse and that the various social and environmental objectives of stakeholders should be incorporated into the decision-making process.

All the participants in this study identified communication breakdown between them and their leadership as the major reason why people resort to work stoppage and violent protests. They reported feeling that leadership no longer represents the reality of the ordinary people. This is the case regardless of the fact that the catalytic role of a leader demands that a leader be an adept communicator. Patzer *et al.,* (2018) state that interaction with the stakeholders is primarily communicative and leaders should be initiators and moderators of stakeholder dialogue. The responsibility of the leadership is to facilitate the conditions suitable for the communicative action and guide participants towards consensus. However, Toendepi (2013) argues that suitable structures of involvement, which are in line with the general culture of the society, or a particular organisation should be established. Providing participants with an opportunity to voice their concerns, aspirations, desires and experiences may improve the quality of the outcomes, while increasing the willingness to cooperate (Voegtlin & Scherer, 2017).

Solutions to the people's challenges lie with the people themselves and through social learning people reshape their behaviour through collaboration with others and they gain access to group image and reputation, which they can use to navigate their lives (Guan & So, 2016). Collective consciousness is fostered through engagement and sharing of knowledge as people gain new knowledge, which they may use to modify their behaviours and preferences. The aim of social learning is reshaping of goals, norms and beliefs (Van der Wal *et al.,* 2014). Through dialogue, the participants become empowered, transformed, enlightened and educated, resulting in collective consciousness awakening (Omobowale *et al.,* 2013; Mbigi, 2005). Unfortunately, this process depends on the catalytic role of the leaders who should create the structures for involvement, as well as engage and influence stakeholder participation.

Social integration requires heightened consciousness in the system through engagement with the general populous on the value systems. Patzer, *et al.* (2018) argue that the use of societal values is highly effective in co-opting, uniting and engaging critical stakeholders. One of the participants was adamant that since the majority of South Africans subscribe to the Ubuntu philosophy, the latter would facilitate engagement with them with the aim of re-building their common purpose and sustainable unity of purpose. The African human consciousness is a collective analogy of being (Vilakati, 2019) and the Afro-centric perspective to leadership is relational and uses constructionist approaches, which emphasise dialogue, shared experiences and collective decision-making (Msila, 2015; Mbigi, 2005). These approaches generate shared understanding on the associated challenges, aspirations and the well-being for the whole community. Hence, South Africa requires leadership, which intends to achieve inclusive growth.

All participants agreed that it is the responsibility of leadership whether in the public domain or in organisations to catalyse consciousness. As management cannot know it all, they have to tap into the abilities of the people in the organisation (Viljoen, 2015), in order to achieve the super-ordinate organisational goals. However, the quality of participation is dependent on the level of education (Pavlidis, 2015). The participants pointed out how the younger generations require good education to enable them to participate meaningfully in the inclusive debates. Both Odora-Hoppers and Sandgren (2014) and Pavlidis (2015) stress the role of education in social consciousness and social action, arguing that schooling is a major contributor to heightened consciousness. South Africa ranks considerably low on education and skills level (84th out of 140) on the Global Competitive Index (2019); hence, this element requires particular attention.

Viljoen (2015) states that deeper levels of learning create increased awareness. The role of leadership in that process is to catalyse and guide change in individuals and groups. Odora-Hoppers and Sandgren (2014) stresses that high levels of education can catapult people to new, more equal and just world. Hence, education is a stimulator of social progress by enabling people to understand their world and adjust how they perceive reality.

Hence, the catalytic role of leaders requires that they be responsive to broader stakeholder challenges, aspirations and must be good listeners and an adept communicators. The catalytic role requires that leadership appeal to the higher visions of all conscientious people (Anderson, 2018). In that role, leaders focus on collective societal transformation through great symbolic power, which can influence followers and passionately communicate future situations (Achua & Lussier, 2013). A catalytic leader uplifts followers and encourages them

to do more by awakening their consciousness on the importance and value of the designated outcomes and associated methods.

# 7.    MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Managing organisations in the current environment, which is characterised by complexity, ambiguity, uncertainty and contradictory stakeholders' demands requires that leadership at all levels in an organisation adopt more roles than usual. Catalytic leaders should be network builders fostering social support to wider stakeholder perspectives and should be responsive to the needs and aspirations of same. There should be a reciprocal relationship between leadership and their followers, where the former provides an enabling environment as conscious initiators and moderators of stakeholder discourses. Management work with people concentrating on the efficiency and effectiveness, creating order and consistency, hence should be catalysts in raising collective consciousness which galvanises collective understanding of the challenges at hand and a way forward. This interaction with stakeholders is primarily communicative hence, management is reminded to be adept communicators and specialists in relationship/network building, so as to foster inclusive growth. The catalytic role of authentic leaders requires that they be good listeners who practice good governance.

# 8.    CONCLUSION

The study did not have serious limitations except that all participants were drawn from one of the nine provinces of South Africa which may affect the transferability of the findings. Future research should be on how the effects of Covid-19 pandemic catapulted collective consciousness in South Africa and explore how that level of consciousness can be sustained.

The major concerns of all participants in this study were that there is no meaningful citizen engagement on their immediate socio-economic and environmental issues. That disconnection negatively affects the levels of collective consciousness in the system. The findings showed that people would like to participate in devising solutions to the issues that affect them, and to learn new knowledge, which can shape their behaviour in a globalised world.

Peaceful protests are possible, when the leaders are able to catalyse raised levels of consciousness in the collective. It is recommended that in their catalytic role, the leaders become communication experts who respond swiftly to the needs of the stakeholders. As leadership is the causal agent for collective consciousness, they should engage people in constructive debates that stimulate raised consciousness, which in turn assists society to participate in developmental issues. They also have to be authentic leaders who are morally

grounded (Northouse, 2018) and have trustworthy relationships with a multitude of stakeholders. Stakeholder participation stimulates social learning, which may guide and shape the collective knowledge, values and wisdom of a social system. As long as the levels of collective consciousness are low, the challenge for leadership remains as to how to galvanise this consciousness to a level where societal transformation and cohesion are possible.

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