Why one-size leadership model does not fit Africa

Motivational talks or retreats for employees should result in specific performance outcomes within the businesses. PHOTO | FOTOSEARCH

By SCOTT BELLOWS

Posted Wednesday, September 28 2016 at 17:35

Instead, ask them where is the research that shows if 400 people tried the same actions, what proportion of them would get the same results as their one specific example.

We must not fall victim to a medieval way of thinking. Doctors in the middle ages would prescribe cures to vast population based on one observation that it worked a certain way with only one patient.

In the modern world, we do not tolerate such minute data in our medical professions. Extensive trials must take place with numerous patients and well thought out controls established before any new medicine or procedure receives approval for the general population.

So why in our management and leadership discussions and practices do supervisors and executives tend to adopt the medieval approach by modelling their own actions.
Mountains of research from tens of thousands of social science studies and analyses show what managerial practices lead to what specific performance outcomes within businesses.

Researchers know the answers, but business practitioners rarely tap such knowledge and make mistakes over and over again that stand as entirely preventable.

Now, the issue gets more complicated when looking here in Africa. Over 99 per cent of the research studies into management and leadership business practices were tested outside of Africa and have never been validated on the continent.

Prolific African researchers Fred Walumbwa and Samuel Aryee alongside Bruce Avolio highlight the dire need to test Western and Eastern concepts of management and leadership within our African context.

Want to know whether motivational talks work amongst employees in a retreat setting? Look up dozens of tests to see if such scenarios result in long-term performance and profit improvements.

But African academics and researchers must still validate these to our local environment.

Kenya’s very own Micheal Muchiri, based at CQ University in Australia, explores the explosion of leadership research on the African continent in the past 10 years, but mammoth gaps still exist.

Ken Kamoche ponders the effect of power distance, paternalism, filial piety, collectivism, and deference to authority in many sub-Saharan African cultures and to what extent those differences might impact the successes or failures of our managerial and leadership efforts.

So let today’s Business Talk article endure as a call to African researchers. Do not make assumptions about the world around you. Prove it. Figure it out. Let us not approach social science with the pretence that Western or Eastern causes and effects will translate into managerial or leadership success for us here on the continent.

On the other hand, CEOs and other executives should not leap through life making decisions with gut feelings. Know the science of causes and effects and what the power of knowledge can do to your business.

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