

OPINION LEADERS

They hold influential positions in society and share varied view points every week on topical issues affecting Kenyan citizens.

<http://www.capitalfm.co.ke/eblog>

We're now empowered to Question Mediocrity

September 8, 2011

By MWANGI WANJUMBI



The new constitutional dispensation will most likely bring invaluable change in many spheres of life. Inevitably, it may also change our cultural orientations mostly for the better. Realistically, most of the challenges we constantly encounter may easily be attributable to our own cultural backgrounds.

Sometimes it is about culture of failing to respond to changing times. Other times, we innocently adopt other people's cultures, which may not be compatible with our own situations. The challenges cut across leadership, education and other day- to-day social cultural considerations.

Conversely, one of the greatest drivers of societal behavior is harmonious culture, a derivative from the word harmony. This word refers to a situation of agreement. The same can yield either negative or positive impact depending on the situation at hand. Harmony for example contributes to family unity especially in collectivist cultures, where the "we" rather than the "I" concept generally drives the society. This latter concept is associated with individualism which is symbolised by absence of group cohesion.

Harmony is a desirable attribute especially with regard to organisational performance. Organisational members are expected to work in harmony just like a musical choir. Everybody is expected to read from the same script and seemingly be in agreement with organizational direction and purpose. Organizational goals and objectives are therefore easily achieved when there is harmony. This situation is best when the harmony is driven by influence leadership, rather than manipulative leadership.

Influence or inspirational leadership occurs when the leader encourages the followers to achieve desired common goals. When everybody is guided by shared vision, visionary leadership takes shape. Meanwhile, the power of influence in this case could be derived from such attributes as a leader's character, expertise or charisma among others. Desirable character is more often than not defined by the leader's moral standing especially with regard to credibility. Ideally, harmony driven by positive leadership influence, may lead to benefits that could be of interest to all team members.

Effectively, when whole societies are seemingly in agreement on values, behaviors and similar attributes, they are said to be harmonious cultures. The Africans and Orientals are classified as

harmonious cultures. These cultures can be good and bad at the same time. They are good especially depending on the perspective. When team spirit is desired for achievement of societal interests, the harmony attribute becomes hardy and beneficial.

However, the leadership process in harmonious cultures needs to be right for best results to be achieved. Where the harambee culture is not used as a political tool of influence for example, harmonious cultures in Kenya use the same to raise funds for school fees for the needy, medical bills and more. In fact, the harambee movement was a great source of mobilizing development funds for schools, hospitals and other national facilities, until the advent of the constituency development fund. Can the harmony attribute dog a society?

Inevitably, where the leadership positions are used to drive personal agendas, the society becomes adversely affected. Indeed, when those in authority tend to seek achievement of personal goals (rather than common goals); it spells doom for harmonious cultures. Manipulative leadership though unethical, seems to rule in search situations. Most of the times, it involves arm twisting the followers or even fellow leaders in pursuance of personal goals. Such occurrences are witnessed in board rooms of corporate bodies, government organisations or even social as well as professional associations. The danger therefore occurs when people including other leaders accept to be manipulated.

Manipulative leaders will love to work with harmonious societal groups. The subjects will more often than not unquestionably allow the leaders to have their way. That is how African Societies ended up becoming victims of tyrannical leaders, after having suffered under the earlier colonizers. That is how the ruling families and dictators have for ages called the shots in the Arab World.

On the same understanding, harmony has led to entrenchment of destructive cultures such as corruption. Even when people know the perpetrators of the same, they tend to bury their heads in the sand and do nothing about it. They may not necessarily be excited about the occurrences. Nonetheless, they allow themselves to involuntarily abet on the same.

Consequently, we have ended up allowing leaders who are up to no good, to manipulate their way. And the more we are in harmony with their activities, the worse the situation becomes. That is how poor leadership which leads to deprivation and eventual poverty has become part of our lives. Can we afford to continue in the same spirit?

Seemingly, the new constitutional order has delivered Kenyans from the yoke of poor leadership, hopefully for good. Constitutionally, we are now empowered to vet public servants, demand high standards of leadership character from our political leaders, insist on service and more. Incidentally, we could even hold constituency referendums aimed at sending home non-performing legislators. Further, one can go to court to litigate on any public matter in a rejuvenated judiciary.

Naturally, we should no longer have anybody but ourselves to blame, should we continue suffering 'harmoniously' on any societal matters. Let us all embrace cultural harmony only when it is beneficial to organizational or societal interests. Thankfully, we are now empowered to question not only mediocre services but also, leadership accountability whenever and wherever the situation demands

(Mwangi Wanjumbi is a Management/Leadership Training Consultant and CEO of Newtimes Business Solutions. <http://www.newtimesconsultants.com>)