



Ubuntu as an Integrating Principle for Leadership

As TCC moves into an expression of our organisation as the Integral⁺ Africa Institute (watch this space in 2018), leading integral leadership and coaching into the future, our multi-diverse community holds itself to the value of deepening this experience of being fully human. We do this through creating fields of experience for organisations and for individuals in the work of being fully human. This is about the work of integration. To this point, we hold the philosophy of Ubuntu deeply in our souls, and our work is to express this through you into the world.

Merlinda Abrahams, Director of the Ubuntu Coaching Foundation and I, recently went to the Mind & Life Dialogue at the Botho University in Gaborone, Botswana. It was a gathering of multicultural people – a beautiful mix of our humanity – who came together to look at the connections between mind and spirit: how brain science and spiritual pathways could meet! And how they can do this through the essence of Ubuntu.

Ubuntu – a term that is bandied about for show, for commercialization, identity and pride, though African in name and with unique expression of itself in Africa, is also a universal

principle of connection as a *way of being*: 'I am because we are'. And we, believe it to be an integrating principle for Integral Africa.

INTEGRATION

inti'greɪʃ(ə)n/

noun

1.

the action or process of integrating.

"economic and political integration"

synonyms: combination, amalgamation, incorporation, unification, consolidation, merger, fusing, blending, meshing, homogenizing, coalescing, assimilation,

Integration is the bringing together of diverse parts of the whole, and it holds more than economic or political domains of experience: it also includes an integration of the parts of ourselves that are disowned or repressed, all the way to an integration of parts that we project onto others and don't want to own. The negative shadow result: separation, and the need to maintain alienation through conflict, tribal mentality, power, envy, greed and hate. We only have to look at our current political landscape, the extremes in socio-economic standings, and the rise of ideologies and banding together, to display some of the most limited, protective and ego-driven behaviours at individual and collective levels, to see that those who can see need to raise their voices and actions towards the better way – the 'good of humanity' way. Divisive mindsets stop us from seeing our connection and sameness within the human condition. This thing called ego – which serves to protect our sense of self – can become rampant and completely disconnected from the whole.

The ego needs an identity, it stands alone – at all costs – as it needs to have the eyes of the other on it at all times; best political party, best company, best leader, best athlete and so on. This expression of 'I' is in its most limiting and narcissistic form, with a very small capacity to see; see how it shows up in leadership in our organisations of work and in our governments. This is not the way for beauty, and truth and goodness to arise. This is not the way to lead, to be alive! It is not sustainable and it will not let our world and its people truly thrive.

While there were excellent presentations and dialogue around the contribution of brain science research and its findings and spirituality, what was foreground to the three days were the philosophical meaning-making dialogues which put forward many questions. Young and old, wise and more wise, east and west and south. These were:

How have you changed the world for the better?

How do we tell the African narrative – through collective conversations?

How do we share the philosophy of Ubuntu as a pan African narrative?

And how Africa must claim the term Ubuntu – not in a contracting (limited) ‘holding on’ way – but as part of necessary distinction and contribution to the world as a universal principle.

An excellent piece was presented by Prof Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela who spoke of how our humanness exists because ‘I am witnessed by others’. When that need to be witnessed is turned into vanity, greed, and becomes about an overinflated self/or group, we get distortion. When it is enacted as evidence of our connection we get co-operation and thriving communities which are creative, productive and generative.

We need to recognise that we are embodied subjects and need to take into account our bodies’ expression of our values. That is to say – as we think, so do we act! We in South Africa need to find a way to forgiveness at massive levels; a practice so hard to do in our everyday lives. In a society of hurt and wounding, we need to be aware that we bring ourselves to our lives as we are daily, and to shift that, we need to do conscious and intentional work; the work of mature adults. For forgiveness to take place we have to go beyond a mental activity, for this act needs to follow through into the body behaviours. Pumla suggested that to start, we need to draw on different perspectives and really understand them. Our work is to constantly invite our clients into doing this. It has to be part of leadership practice. It’s not just an act of mind, it’s in the body, it’s cultural and it is a systemic thing. To access all of these perspectives allows us to penetrate beyond, to see each other’s humanity. And this starts with truth-telling – something that the immature ego finds very hard to do.

Mandaza Augustine Kandemwa, a spirit-medium and medicine-man from Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, spoke of the need to meditate over your story and get proper insight; to ask the question: ‘Are you comfortable with what you have done?’ For many people, to even entertain this question would be so difficult that it would push itself out of consciousness and be totally avoided or denied. Our identity is primarily cultivated in the relational space – between you and I and all others – whether in the work place or at home. It is embodied and shows up in the ways we act or lead or coach. This sense of connecting is what we feel first at birth and in the gaze of a loving mother. If this is disrupted time and time again over our lives, what we feel is a total disconnect, and it creates the ground from which all suffering rises. If this shared experience is corrupted – the experience of being loved by our parents as the first point of contact, or by our groups, or society – this results in a massive contraction and protectionism. Corruption, for example, is not sharing, but an act of grabbing what is felt to be deserved and

so the expression of being as part of a shared humanity in love, at its most distorted, becomes a way of governing.

U-muntu is the soul. Ubuntu/Botho is a way of being. A break from this central integrating principle results in in-groups and out-groups. When this happens one has to ask, “where is humanity?” The distortion is ‘I am because I have’. Ubuntu on the other hand is the way of deep ethical and moral principles which ironically are not written into our constitution. And there is way out – for as the deep wisdom traditions knew, and our scientists have now ‘proved’ (given that there is a limited and mostly western consensus that truth exists only if objectively proven), our brains have plasticity. In our current context where we see the rise of separatist behaviours and a focus on difference through limited ideologies and nationalism, we can, as a path to our own growth and maturity, look at how we can hold both the part and the whole in great reverence. Neither can exist completely without the other. We are because of each other. We practice connecting at the heart of Ubuntu; which is both deeply African and completely universal. This enables the very foundation for that path to integration, and to do this we all have to own our disowned parts; thoughts and actions and take on full accountability for its impact on the collective. If we can truly see how we are both self AND other, we can find our humanity and a way out of our madness.

In order to lead into new worlds, and unlock the potential of individuals and teams, in order to lead with vision, and do things smarter and in a more integrated/connected way, leadership today has to evolve and become more than management practices. Leadership for today’s ever-changing ever-demanding world has to be *present* and simultaneously draw on wisdom traditions such as Ubuntu to hold the complexity of today’s world. Smart leadership in today’s world recognises the “I”; not at the expense of the “We”. Smart leadership witnesses the other, and is embodied in an ability to explore the alternative perspective. Smart leadership invites. Smart leadership is accountable and enables an embracing of all that is in identity and experience.

TCC invites you into this space of learning to know yourself and others in an integrated way. We invite you to explore new ways to lead through the *Leadership Maturity Framework (1-4 Nov 2017 in Cape Town & 28 Feb-3 March 2018 Johannesburg)*. We invite you to learn a proven way to truly grow yourselves and others as leaders and coaches through the *Diploma in Practitioner Coaching (new cohort starts in Feb 2018 in Cape Town & March 2018 in Johannesburg)*. Join us to access smarter, transformational growth and leadership!

For more information on these and other life-changing experiences offered at TCC, visit our website at www.thecoachingcentre.co.za or write to us at info@thecoachingcentre.co.za or call us at (021) 715 0525.