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Getting the most out of a collaborative Social System Structure in South Africa

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Abstract

This paper draws from research that applied Systems Thinking to the development of suitable social structures that may aid or enhance social learning within the South African context. The South African social system is rigid and top-down. Communities use protest as a bottom-up form of participation to control the lack of procedural clarity that hinders sustainable social transformation. A qualitative research approach was adopted using Grounded Theory methodology to investigate the social system structure in South Africa. Thirty-five (35) participants were interviewed and three focus groups were convened. The analysis showed that the South African social system structure is characterised by a lack of openness, inflexibility, non-adaptability and an inability to learn. Based on the findings, recommendations are shared on the validity of an appropriate social system structure for South Africa that may facilitate stakeholder/citizen participation in social transformational activities.

Key words: *Social system, social system structure, collective social learning, active citizenry, change, Imbizo / Padare Collaborative Framework*

1. Introduction

As people learn together they re-shape their values, learn to appreciate and respect one another in a process that can modify their culture. This process calls for individuals and collectives to come together and share knowledge. Arguably, such a process is of great importance for South Africa to eradicate the socio-economic challenges in order to sustainably improve the general welfare of its citizens. The South African society does not seem to be fully participating in building a sustainable future for themselves and for their children. This paper is an exploration of collaborative social system structures for the attainment of effective levels of active citizenry in South Africa.

The paper focuses on the core of the Imbizo/Padare conceptual framework (Toendepi, 2013) as it presents the fundamental elements of a social system structure where society and its leadership learn together. The core depicts an organic and circular social system structure that relies on the interdependence of its components. The learning process within this core is concurrent, cyclic and there is free exchange and sharing of knowledge. The components of

the core need each other in defining the challenges, exchanging knowledge, tabling needs and aspirations, also putting forward, and implementing the relevant solutions.

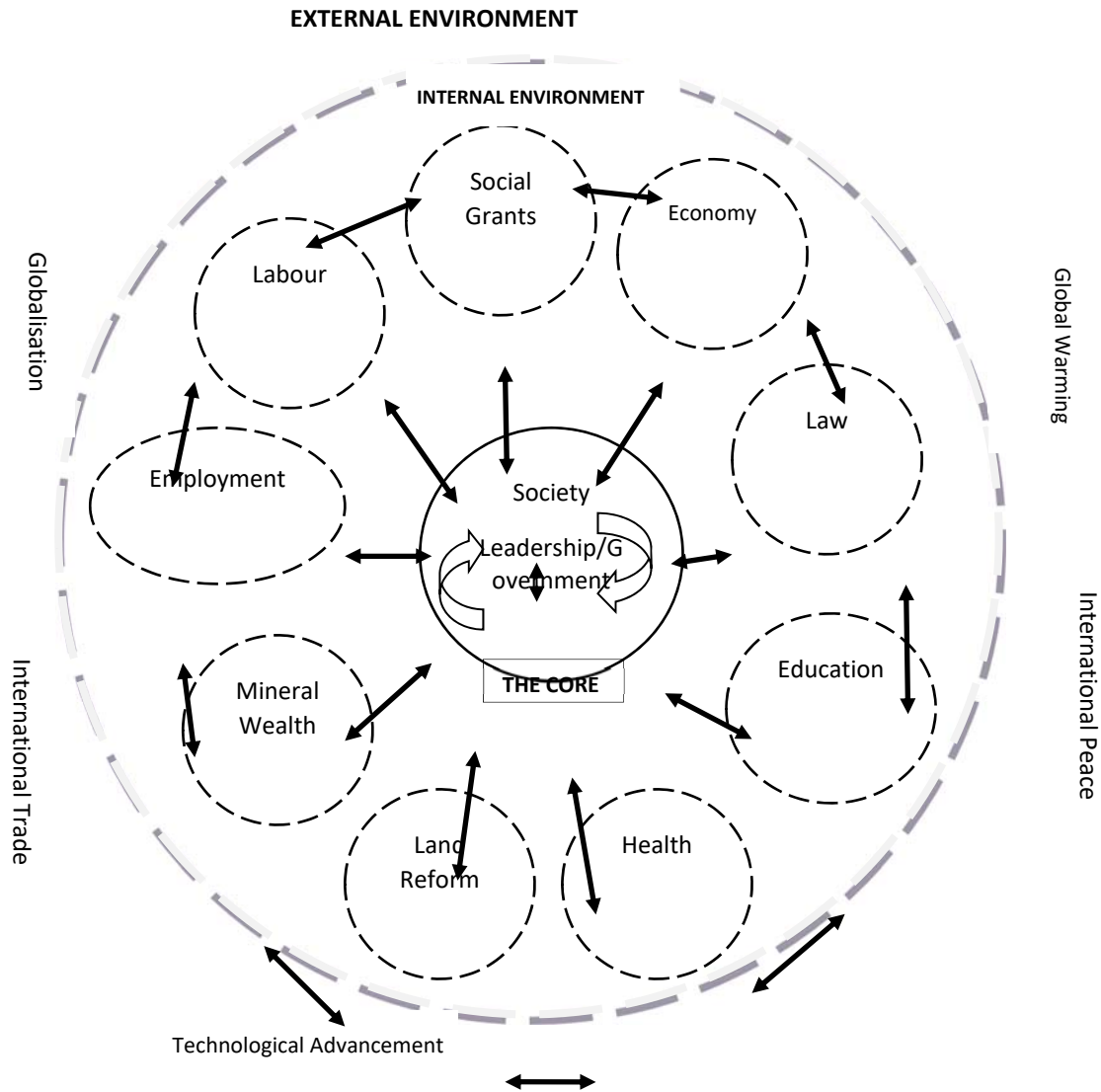


Figure 1: The Imbizo/Padare Framework. Adopted from: “A Systemic Perspective to wealth Creation in South Africa through Learning and Adaptation” (Toendepi, 2013, p. 219).

2. Objective

To explore collaborative social system structures for the attainment of effective levels of active citizenry in South Africa.

3. Literature Survey

Poverty levels in South Africa rose in 2015 with the poverty head count increasing to 55% from series low of 53.2% in 2011 (Statistics South Africa, 2017, p.14). Currently the majority of the South Africa population is still living in poverty and deep deprivation in provinces like Limpopo and Eastern Cape (Statistics South Africa, 2017). Some sectors, like the financial sector, institutional environment, business sophistication and innovation that is benefiting from good scientific research institutions perform extremely well and the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) of 2017 ranks others, like education, labour market efficiency and the health sector, extremely low.

The Global Competitive Index 2017-18 calls for a more human centric economic progress that is focused on human well-being. The Index also seeks to help decision makers understand the complex nature of the developmental challenges and how designing better policies is embedded in the process of private-public collaboration. South Africa's economy is almost at a standstill due to low international demands for its commodities and the unemployment level that is at 25% (Statistics SA, 2017) and is rising. Political uncertainty in 2017 affected negatively the business confidence in South Africa (GCI, 2017).

Poverty, unemployment and inequality are the most profound socio-economic challenges facing the majority of South Africans today. Due to a lack of social structures for dialogue, people resort to violent demonstrations, protests, strikes and other unorthodox ways of dealing with social problems in order voice their demands. Active citizenry is a process that involves voluntary participation of citizens and is focussed on the collective problem solving and collective change efforts (Jacobs, Cook & Carpini, 2009). The participation of citizens in the democratic activities requires suitable social structures or platforms where people can make their voices heard. Currently in South Africa, the involvement platforms lack clarity on the operationalisation of the consultation processes (Booyesen, 2009; Buccus, Hermson, Hicks & Piper, 2007). The participation process was allowed to degenerate to a point where today there is no significant participation hence the citizens ride on the protest actions.

3.1 Social Complexity within social structures

At the dawn of democracy, South Africa moved into a complex governing space where the oppressive systems had to be disengaged and replaced by democratic processes and procedures.

Electoral participation levels were very pleasing but the continued institutionalisation of the public participation system created challenges that are persisting 24 years into democracy. Due to government's failure to provide suitable structures and platforms for public engagement, most aggrieved communities have protest action as a form of reclaiming their participation rights. Protest action has become a success if it is measured from the observed government response to protest action where high-level delegations are dispatched to the affected areas. Booysen (2009) argues that South African communities still use protest as a self-initiated bottom-up form of participation due to lack of responsive relationship with the authorities as well as lack of delivery on promised services.

High complexity within the social system fosters the degeneration of social problems into wicked problems. Metcalf (2014) indicates that wickedness is the indeterminacy that lies behind all but most trivial design problems. Wicked problems increase in complexity by overlapping with each other. Social complexity is then a result of the overlap of once discrete problematic situations converging and changing character to become multi-causal problems in a social system (Metcalf 2014). Davis (2015) notes that complexity is now the greatest challenge facing leaders in short to medium terms. Hence, Davis (2015) points out how more holistic and integrated approaches are required to match these complexities. Walton (2016) concurs and state how complex systems stimulate emergent properties that cannot be understood in isolation.

The objective of this paper is to highlight the need for effective structures for active citizenry that are in line with the communities' values and norms. Snowden (2005) acknowledged the complexity of human systems, as they frequently require focus and alignment. According to Senge (1990, p.69), "people are agents, able to act upon the structures and systems of which they are a part. All disciplines are in this way, concerned with a shift of mind from seeing people as helpless reactors to seeing them as active participants in shaping their reality, from reacting to the present, to creating the future." Sanial (2014) acknowledges the challenges of complexity theory as including lack of an explicit definition delineating the theory, yet it is widely used to describe the actions and interactions of the components of complex systems. For Thompson, Fazio, Kustra, Patrick and Stanley (2016) whilst complexity is a characteristic of a system, complexity theory perspective looks at complex systems as wholes that can never be totally understood when reduced to their individual components. The aim of complexity theory is to explain how things are rather than suggesting how they should be. The interaction between the components of the system results in the overall behaviour of the system.

Mason (2009) confirms how the adoption of complexity theory is increasingly becoming a way to understand the management of complex and turbulent operating environments. As stated by Sanial (2014) complex systems self-organise into complex adaptive systems where behaviour of the system is full of uncontrollable surprises in some kind of order. Complexity theory provides insights regarding ways that the behaviour of complex systems can be managed (Samoilenko, 2008). Hence, the insights provided by complexity theory can help improve understanding of complexities of strategy development as well as public policy formulation in South Africa today.

To Sanial (2014), complexity contains non-linearity and unpredictability; therefore, adopts a broader look of the future. Walton (2016) concurs and said that the self-organising and non-linearity means that the impacts of an intervention on emergent phenomena are not dependent on size of the intervention in terms of resources or effort. What would be required is wider stakeholder participation in order to generate a concerted solution. A complex system is open to feedback from a wider environment within which it exists (Gatrell, 2005). Caffrey, Wolfe and McKevitt (2016) concur and stresses on how systems behaviour is difficult to predict due to systemic interactions with other systems and that unpredictability is usually compounded by the self-organising nature of the system.

Walton (2016) highlights policy-making process as a complex system and affirms that the group and dialectical methods be seen as important for translating complexity theory understanding into action that can change the system. However, processes that determine policy action across multiple perspectives are required and these include sense making (Snowden, 2011) and network governance arrangements (Klijn & Edelenbos, 2013). According to Klijn (2008), network governance is public policy making and implementation that uses the relationship networks between government, business and civil society. Network governance is a process suitable for solving complex problems that require concerted effort (Klijn & Edelenbos, 2013). Morcol (2014) agrees and states that network governance and the complexity frame of reference are in harmony, both put emphasis on the interaction and relationships among members of the network leading to emergent outcomes.

At the same time, these governance networks either can develop from local levels or can be mandated from central government (Heritting & Vedung, 2012). Toendepi (2013:242) similarly suggests miniature structures for networking in South Africa to be introduced from the grass roots level and duplicated throughout society. Walton (2016) asserts that for effective

handling of complex challenges action will always be required across the traditional boundaries. Likewise, Klijn and Edelenbos (2013) identified the central element in network governance as the ability to bring multiple perspectives into the deliberative decision making process. For Walton (2016) network governance brings together a wide range of problem definitions, a variety of preferred solutions and several positions from which value outcomes are drawn. Walton (2016) stresses that the eradication of complex challenges within a social system is aided by bringing several perspectives together at ideation and implementation stages.

3.2 Complex Adaptive systems

According to Yukawa (2015) in an attempt to solve complex adaptive problems the leadership quality and what the leadership does is critical. The engagement of people in confronting the challenges, adjusting their values, changing perspectives and learning new habits are prerequisites for leaders in attempting to dissolve challenges (Yukawa, 2015). MacLeod and Childs (2013) found that nearly one third of the challenges faced by most societies were in the complex domain and required complex adaptive systems thinking to solve them.

However, managing complexity calls for more than just technical knowledge, it requires fundamental shift in peoples' thinking systems, beliefs and attitudes (Yukawa, 2015). Senge, Hamilton and Kania (2015) agrees and state that systems change needs more than data and information; it requires real intelligence and wisdom. In South Africa it also requires the realisation that the theories of engagement created within and for individualistic cultures are not at home within communal cultures (Heleta, 2016). Public management practices that are consistent with the local culture will bear solutions that are more fruitful.

Yukawa (2015) and Sirisett (2006) attest that the adaptive leaders have to first engage in a paradigm shift and uncover the questionable assumptions. Sirisett (2006) went further to say successful organisations have often resulted from leaders who thrive on chaos and take pride in finding innovative and creative solutions. Such leaders who use scapegoating, denial and blame can never solve adaptive challenges. Yukawa (2015) states that it is only those leaders who are honesty, fearless and self-aware who will see the challenges clearly because one's personal beliefs and assumptions influence what one sees and does.

Jordan (2011) argues that the capacities to handle complex societal issues does not necessarily reside in individuals but in organisations or networks of people working together in order to create capacities that reside in collectives. Van der Wal *et al.*, (2014) advocates for participatory approaches that involve stakeholders in the development of integrated solutions. Yukawa (2015) quote Conklin (2006) pointing out how solving complex adaptive challenges is a social process because of the social complexity involved. van Wart (2013) concurs and attests that participatory leadership becomes essential when the jobs have been made difficult by complexity or change. At certain times, the challenges become overwhelming to leaders that some derail or stagnant (van Wart, 2013).

3.3 Social system

Metcalf (2014) refers to systems as having a lot to do with collective parts in some spatial relation to each other. Merriam-Webster (2015) refers to a social system as patterned series of interrelationships that result in a coherent whole. Whole societies and organisations are social systems consisting of individuals, teams, leaders and dominant coalitions. Metcalf (2015) states that what distinguishes these elements of a system is not their physical or spatial proximity but the fact that the elements are interdependent and behave as part of a system. Most approaches to social systems design place emphasis on the participation of the stakeholders.

A social system involves interactions and interdependencies among its parts that have different functions and characteristics. As a result, it is the parts' collective behaviour in relation to each other that matters (Metcalf, 2014). Societal transformation is not an event within any social system; it is a cyclical process with a reviewable middle stage (Toendepi, 2013). The systems scientists that include Ackoff, Banathy and Christakis discuss about the purposeful designing of human social systems.

To be able to think systemically and holistically about the total transformation of a society, leaders need to first understand the properties of their social systems and lead from within the system. System members interact in order to produce results (Henning & Wan-Ching, 2012). Viljoen (2015:25) concurs and state how inclusivity enables organisations to tap into the gifts and contributions from a diverse workforce. Members of the system require each other in order to achieve their goals, hence within a social system people exist in relationships (Wan-Ching, 2012). As a result, leadership decisions need the input of those affected by such (Toendepi,

2013). South Africa arguably displays progressive trends on some of the macro indicators in the Global Competitiveness report (GCR) (2017) which favour total societal transformation through more human-centric economic progress and growth.

Yet twenty-four years after attaining a democratic rule, South Africa is crippled by the micro-level factors like inequality, poor service delivery, unemployment and xenophobia (SAHO, 2015). Corruption, crime and theft top the list of problematic factors for doing business in South Africa (GCR, 2017). In complex adaptive systems like the South African social system, solutions do not reside with the executive but in the collective intelligence of people at all levels. Such systems can self-organise when collective intelligence is utilised to foster commitment and willingness to change (Senge, 1996).

The retarded rate of social transformation in any society creates conditions that stimulate social tensions that can ignite global consequences (World Economic Forum, 2015). Muthen (2013:126) is of the view that the key challenges that are hindering the building of “a capable developmental state” in South Africa not only stem from lack of capacity but also from lack of coherence in galvanising consciousness necessary for the achievement of consensus for the development of such a state.

It appears the current paradigm is not able to resolve the current socio-economic challenges. The current paradigm is actually the cause of the messes. Yukawa (2015) points out that solving wicked problems is actually a social process. Therefore, leadership in the South African context need to encourage continuous learning through active citizenry/stakeholder engagement. During such a process, leaders have to ensure an inclusive co-creation culture that is sensitive to individual differences such as personality, value system, gender and thought process (Viljoen, 2015).

3.4 African Social System

The African traditions such as Ubuntu have a huge role to play in an African social system by determining its structure (Mbigi & Maree, 1995). According to Mangena (2016); Broodryk (2008); Mbigi (2005); Mokgoro (1998), Ubuntu is generally defined as a world-view of African societies and a determining factor in the formation of perceptions which influence social conduct. The Ubuntu philosophical discussion is relevant in African social systems debate because of the dire need to re-engage with the indigenous knowledge and practices that seem

to be overshadowed by western thinking systems. In the academia there now is a great call on the decolonisation of the curriculums in order to bring the content and the context together. Heleta (2016) concurs with Molefe (2016) in alluding to the fact that time has come for the South Africans and the continent as a whole to end the domination of western epistemological traditions, histories and figures and incorporate more relevant South African perspectives and African epistemologies to how Africans can govern themselves. The African philosophy of Ubuntu forms the basis of most African thinking systems or worldviews. Heleta (2016) quotes Ngugi (1981) stating that the fundamental shift required in the curriculums must have something to do with how relevant it is to our situations and how it can contribute towards understanding ourselves.

According to Mbigi (2002:20), in its most fundamental sense, Ubuntu represents:

- “ respect for dignity of others;
- group solidarity - an injury to one is an injury to all;
- teamwork- none of us is greater than all of us;
- service to others in the spirit of harmony; and
- Interdependence – each one of us needs all of us”

In describing Ubuntu, Mokgoro (1998) emphasized personhood, humanity, humanness and morality. Ubuntu is a metaphor that describes group solidarity where such group solidarity is central to the survival of the community (Mangena, 2015; Mbigi, 2005; Mokgoro, 1998). Ubuntu is based on the premise that “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” in Zulu/IsiNdebele, or *motho ke motho ka batho ba bangwe* (Sesotho) or *munhu munhu pavamwe* in Shona. All this literally means a person can only be a person through others (Mangena, 2016; Broodryk, 2008; Mokgoro 1998). Alternatively, “I am what I am because of you” (Mbigi & Maree 1995). Mangena (2016) and Mbigi (2005) points out that central to Ubuntu ethics is the relational aspect which is the opposite of the western individualist perspective.

The application and meaning of Ubuntu in the context of this paper is that an individual’s existence only makes sense when viewed in relation to the group. The group is taken to mean the community or the society. In essence, Ubuntu is the foundational element that shapes the structure of the African social system. Block (2008) mentioned how the major determinants of structure are the social mechanisms like beliefs and practices.

African socialisation may appear as overshadowed by modernity, yet it still bears great effect in shaping the behaviours of the youths. An example is when growing up; eating from the same plate was symbolic in that it fostered sharing, dialogue, negotiation and appreciation of one another. The Ubuntu ethics are dialogical, consensual and spiritual according to (Mangena, 2016), who further elaborates that the dialogue goes beyond being localised among the humans but involves the creator and the ancestors. Hence, the community spirit engraved in the African worldview should form the basis of the social structures suitable for collective engagement. The spirit of Ubuntu that embraces the shared values maintains the social relationships and practices within an African social system. The collective unity or group solidarity and conformation tendencies of Ubuntu hold the system together as a whole (Mokgoro, 1998).

Mbigi and Maree (1995) observed that the African society can never be restored to a pre-colonial stage, but it is possible to establish contacts with familiar landmarks of modernity under indigenous impetus. The philosophy of Systems Thinking (Senge, 1990; Baldwin, 2001; Ackoff, 2004; Baldwin, 2008; Levesque, 2007) is also based on the premise that “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” Most Africans did not lose their indigenous/cultural values to colonialism (Mbigi & Maree, 1995). In fact, when life conditions are threatening to be worse, most humans regress back to their essential coping systems in order to deal with those conditions (Beck, 2004). An African social system can still be described as bearing elements of the traditional African values like Ubuntu. Mokgoro (1998) argued that there still exists opportunities to align these cultural values to the present day.

3.5 Collective Social Learning

Social learning is gleaned as a genuine exchange of ideas between individuals, groups and communities (Van der Post, Franz & Laland, 2016; McCarthy, Crandall, Whitelaw, General & Tsuji, 2011). Such a process can create networks and wider societal structures that allow those who share same epistemological beliefs to come together and define their challenges and table solutions influenced by their societal norms and values. Therefore, social learning is a learning process that surpasses individuals to be located within social structures such as organizations and institutions (Reed *et al.*, 2010:1). (Van der Wal, De Kraker, Offermans, Kroeze, Kirschner & Ittersum, 2014) likewise referred to social learning as the convergence of stakeholder perspectives on problems as well as on innovative solutions. Social learning is a process that

stimulates collective social transformation. It brings people together to share experiences and ideas for the benefit of the group (Keen, Brown & Dyball, 2005).

McCarthy *et al.*, (2011) states how social learning occurs as people share their experiences, ideas and environments with the group for mutual benefit. As a result social learning stimulates raised levels of consciousness in individuals participating and at the same time spiralling up the learning from the individual level to the collective through social influence (Toendepi, 2017; Bener, Caglayan, Henry & Pralat, 2016; Reed, *et al.*, 2010). However, Cundill (2010) argues that higher levels of interaction of stakeholders should not be confused with social learning. Social learning goes beyond interaction to the deliberation and negotiation of common rules, norms and power relations (Cundill, 2010; Reed, *et al.*, 2010).

Therefore, some of the characteristics of social learning include active collaboration, cyclical in nature, adaptive, knowledge creation, synthesis of various knowledge streams, changes in the social structure and social interaction and social influence (Bener, *et al.*, 2016; McCarthy, *et al.*, 2011; Reed, *et al.*, 2010; Cundill, 2010). All of which are active, socially based and results in sustainable common goals. Cundill (2010) contributing to the debate said collaborative processes result in collective shift of worldviews as well as behaviour within a social system as people question the validity of their thinking systems. Yukawa (2015) concurs and state that the transformation of the thinking systems makes them more flexible, inclusive, open and reflexive so that they generate consensus to guide action and a way forward.

The circular structures (Dawson, 2007; Ackoff, 2004) are functional hierarchies that emphasize process in time and are a conceptual tool rather than a physical arrangement. According to Senge (1990) human systems structure include how people make decisions, that is the operating policies that translate perceptions, goals, rules and norms into action. Environmental factors influence social systems, yet when the social system is rooted in local beliefs and norms, external cultural influences do not overshadow learning and adaptation.

In South Africa, there is a need for suitable platforms/structures that can allow society to converse and share information freely. Social learning in the South African context would result in the co-creation of meaning only if it is facilitated by suitable social structures that take cognitive of the people's values and norms. Social learning is a process of social change in which people learn from each other in ways that can benefit wider societal systems. Yet still there has to be a suitable and functioning platform allowing people to interact. Structure here

represent the concrete relationships among society and determines what is to be done and how to achieve consensus. The participating people continually transform the structures through interplay and exchange of knowledge. Knowledge actually resides in the citizens and it is only those participating in the learning process who push for more knowledge.

Effective social learning takes place when there are suitable and effective social structures that embrace democratic processes of engaging society. The major concern of this paper is to explain the importance of an organic and flexible structure of engaging people with various ideas and interests so as to benefit the majority of people who are living in poverty and avail them an opportunity to participate in matters that concern them, their life/ development and that of their children.

4. Research Method

A qualitative research was conducted, which depended mainly on eliciting personal experiences, and oral history of the participants through phenomenological based interviews that focused on what the participants knew and/or have experienced individually or collectively, which informed their realities. The sample constituted of mature South Africans who had lived in both periods of during and post-apartheid and were in the age group of between 35-65 years in 2010-2011 when most of the data was collected. Thirty-five (35) participants were identified through theoretical sampling. There were 23 males and 12 females drawn from across all races. All the 35 participants were from Gauteng province of South Africa. The data was augmented by data from the three focus groups.

Each focus group had an average of seven (7) participants. The first focus group participants were drawn from high/medium income area of Johannesburg; (7 participants, 2 males and 5 females; 3 members of this group were black and 4 were white). Members of the second focus group were drawn from the low income and urban area of Johannesburg. The group had eight participants, all women and all black. The third focus group consisted of participants drawn from rural Limpopo province. All participants in this focus group were black (3 male and 4 women). Data was collected over a period of 10 months from September 2010 to June 2011. On average, each interview lasted for 50 minutes and each participant was interviewed at least twice with a two months interval between the interviews.

Grounded Theory, as cited by Strauss and Corbin (2008, 1998), was the main methodological approach for the research. All data collected was analysed from a Grounded Theory orientation. Theoretical sampling allowed this researcher to simultaneously collect, code and analyse data before deciding what data to collect next and where to find it (Glaser & Strauss, 2007). The data analysis relied on iterative coding using the three coding techniques of open, axial and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Concepts were created from codes with similarities and the concepts with similar properties formed the categories. Broader categories were developed through the constant comparative method (Allan, 2003; Glaser & Strauss, 2008).

5. Findings

Twenty-seven (27) categories emerged in the main research from the constant comparative analysis. This paper only dwells on one category of leadership.

Leadership has been widely researched and the consensus on what it is; is premised generally on the leader, the followers, their aspirations and the environmental complexity. On the African continent, the Ibrahim Price for Achievement recognises leadership excellence. The prize is an annual award given to any African leader who strives to excel at exceptional leadership.

“The award is given for exceptional leadership, not for reasonable performance.”

PRR27

Previous laureates of this award include former South African President, Nelson Mandela, former Mozambique President, Joaquim Chissano, former Botswana President, Festus Mogae, former President Hifikupunye Pohamba of Namibia, Former President Petro Pires of Cape Verde and the 2017 laureate Ellen Johnson, the former President of Liberia. She is the 5th to be awarded the price since its establishment in 2007 because the late former president Nelson Mandela’s was an honorary. For the years 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2015 and 2016 none of the political leaders in Africa met the established criteria. Complex social issues that include unemployment, poverty, high corruption levels, disease and jihads challenge the political leaders and impacts negatively on social transformation in individual countries.

“The challenge of leadership in our complex society is how to make the vision of our society come alive in the lives of ordinary citizens” PRR4

“Leadership in complex societies requires wisdom to hold together shared goals and forge ways of being and doing that demonstrates congruence between the personal, the professional and the political.” P_{jr}7

South Africa has been slipping into despair and restlessness due to the “triple challenges” of unemployment, poverty and inequality. Service delivery protests, cash heist, students’ unrest, corruption and xenophobia are the complex social issues that require excellence in leadership.

“Leadership in complex societies require wisdom to hold together shared goals and forge ways of being and doing that demonstrates congruence.....South Africa can however get itself back on track through “selfless leadership,” i.e. leadership that is willing and humble enough to reconnect with the needs and aspirations of the general populace.” P_{RR2}, 4, 5.

Former President Jacob Zuma was described as being very good at identifying and articulating the problems that are facing the nation and even better at:

“...tabling proposed solutions to these problems, but he needed to come clean on the Government’s abilities to play a meaningful role beyond policies and regulations in the fight against unemployment and poverty.” P_{jr}3

The leadership in the country is being blamed for focusing more on political patronage rather than empowering the poor. Data gathered from the groups showed that ordinary citizens are well aware of the socio-economic problems they are facing at a grass root level and are willing to tackle these developmental problems together with the leadership.

“Yet the leadership assumes people want and are happy with handouts.”P_{cg}64

Most participants agreed that handouts are for deserving cases such as people with disabilities and the elderly.

“Leadership in complex societies needs to embrace the involvement of citizens in the planning and implementation of programmes that are for their own development.”
P_{RR}45

The problem noted was that the leadership strongly believe they can design solutions to people issues. Yet the participants want the leadership to consult them and allow the general populace to participant in developmental issues.

“Government assumes a mantle of all knowledge and forgets that ordinary citizens are aware of their problems and have solutions that are compatible with their culture and beliefs. PRR45a

“The biggest export for South Africa is its Ubuntu P_{min} 54 “I am what I am because you are” P_{min}54

“The idea of delivering development to the poor on a silver plate is at the heart of failure to close the gap between vision and reality”. P_{sd1}25

Participation is a human right that gives the people a voice. Generally, citizen participation is a concept focuses on “shared governance” where the citizens are engaged in discussions that examine their challenges and result in a range of agreeable solutions. Most participants were aware of this process but did not give ideas as to how this participation process should be conducted.

“...That’s the nature of engagement... in that process what must happen is that we must engage. There is not just other alternative; we know this from three decades in Trade Unions movement. Disputes are settled around the table, that’s the end of every conflict in a normal society P_{sd3}17, 17a 17b

“Leadership in complex environments need to embrace the involvement of citizens in the planning and implementation of programmes for their own development” PRR45

“Solution to better governance is citizen involvement” PRR17

Through inclusive exchange of ideas, research has proved that as communities learn together, they influence each other on their common values and reach consensus on a way forward.

“Experience has shown that we succeed when we work together” P_{sd4}19

“It is about building growth coalitions between business, government and the Unions. When did the latter champion the former” P_m37

The FIFA world cup of 2010 is a good example in South Africa where consensus was reached. During the world Cup the country was said to have worked together to achieve a dream of greatness.

“...Therefore rallying behind common goals is not a challenge to this nation what is needed is to always be on one accord, Oneness as at Pentecost where everyone was rhythmically in sync. Pentecost enabled communication even if people were speaking in their own languages. It is amazing how such people understood each other. Therefore, all markers of identity that we hold on to are irrelevant, what we need are conversations.” P_{sd29a}

“2010 FIFA World Cup was undoubtedly the most exciting project” P_{sd419}

“During World Cup we worked together to realize our dream of greatness” P_{RR22}

“The MGD’s represent the most determined national and global effort to galvanise action towards shared common goals. Goals are unlikely to be achieved without the active involvement of civil society and other critical stakeholders such as academia and business, these critical partners in development will similarly discuss and work towards developing innovations that will ultimately help us all make decisions that are in the interest of all SAs” P_{jz64}

However, some participants voiced a concern on how the leadership often abuse the participation process.

“Voter turnout does not show that citizens are involved....Voter turnout does not give quality participation by citizens...That’s actually abuse of citizens at polls” P_{RR18, 23, 20}

“Citizens should act like stakeholders in companies” P_{RR20a}

Citizens have a right to participate in matters that affect them despite their intellectual capacity. However, their views are often criticised as simplistic and detached from empirical reality. Some participants argued that they are often side-lined in decision making because they live in poverty, yet...

“Material poverty is not necessarily lack of capacity for creativity” P_{RR}23

*“Mobilize inventiveness of ordinary people. We forward to an on-going collaboration”
P_{sd}20, 21*

“Poor governance breeds corruption and political instability.”P_{sd}129

Most participants are aware of “poor governance” but do not hold the Government accountable mainly because they view themselves as being responsible for the Government since they voted it into power.

“It seems the only time Government can be punished for poor governance is at the polls. People are not sure of the next Government’s performance and therefore are okay with what is going on currently and just keep hoping for improvement.”

Complex social challenges need to be acknowledged because a problem that is not acknowledge is a problem that is not understood in its entirety.

“African governments must move away from harping on about their liberation efforts of the past and should start looking towards the future and focus on delivery.P_{RR}2 24

“As a society built on principles of democracy and solidarity” P_{jz}53

“The Nation now wants action; it is now time to act quickly and decisively.” P_{jt}23

The findings showed that the South African society is not fully participating in building a future for themselves and that of their children. The participants discussed income and material poverty but were hopeful that they could work with Government to solve these challenges. The majority of the participants want to participate in devising alternatives to dealing with these challenges but do not know how and where to table their contributions.

The society was found not to be learning together with its leadership or together as a nation. It was revelled in the findings that there is a disconnection between the leadership and the general populace. In the current South African social structure, learning was seen to be from the top to the bottom where the top assumes to hold all the knowledge and analyses, design and implement solutions for the people, with little or no consultation. The current social system structure is hierarchical and emphasizing on positions and power.

An ideal social system structure has communication in all directions and its society occupies the centre. Learning is inward and outward, from the periphery to the centre and the centre to the periphery. Such a social structure regards people as a source of knowledge and experience, and is participatory and flexible. That structure enhances accountability, transparency and efficiency. The findings also revealed that generally the South Africans still abide to the African traditions like Ubuntu. Ubuntu is a world-view of African societies and is treated as a major determining factor in influencing social conduct. This came out as a fundamental item that could play a huge role in designing an organic social structure to facilitate active citizenry in South Africa.

Due to lack of suitable platforms or structures of involvement, the findings showed that people resort to protests as the current consultation procedures lack clarity and are severely affected by internal politicking.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the findings the following conclusions and discussions are drawn. Structure unifies societal values, interests, needs and communicates preferences. The core of the Imbizo/Padare framework (Toendepi, 2013), illustrates a designed suitable structure that can provide space for people to share knowledge within a South African context. Although its organisation is depicted as a diagram, in fact structure is virtual. According to Giddens (1996), structure is seen as similar to a code or set of rules that govern possible selections of social action.

The fundamental element of the core of the framework is that it links the people/society processes and aspirations to leadership on one hand and to social learning on the other. These elements were deemed critical to improving the current state of the South African social system. It therefore means that structure is the tool used to organize the practices of the social system as it defines the rules, procedures and the communication channels (Giddens, 1996; Senge, 1990). The manner in which the knowledge is shared, developed and shaped into societal norms exerts pressure on any existing structure so as for it either to transform itself or to re-organise itself in order to accommodate the aspirations of a wider participants' base.

As the social learning process is cyclic and educative it is repeated until society moulds, it into a cultural practice and cultural adaptation then takes place after the individual needs are

satisfied. This then influences the attitudinal shifts of the collective society as a unit through collaborative social learning. The cyclic nature stimulates a process of learning from one another and sharing information and knowledge, as society begins to trust each other in the creation of a unified value system. Moreover, repeating makes such practices clear and robust to everyone and guarantees the processes' continued existence.

Most importantly, the conceptual framework engaged the leading idea that collective /social learning in the South African context needed structural changes, and that it is the responsibility of the leadership to design such structures that should involve the general populace. For such structures to be effective, they have to be informed by the social mechanisms like culture and beliefs (Yukawa, 2015; Block, 2008). Sustainable societal transformation is achieved when the social system, its components of structure, people and leadership are learning together. Hence, this core of the framework emphasized the linkage between the three components. Once people are unified around shared values and interests, it becomes easier to motivate collective action towards positive outcomes of an integrated social system (Burnham, 2013).

In Figure 2 (the core of the Imbizo/Padare Conceptual Framework) below it has been shown that society and leadership/Government should learn together in an ideal environment. The two need each other in defining the problems, exchanging knowledge, tabling needs and aspirations and in putting forward and implementing the relevant solutions. The cyclic and concurrent learning in the framework is showing how the basic structure influences what is to be done by the society whose interactions in turn re-shape the social structure in order to be more accommodative. Thus moving from control were those at the top purport to know all to an inclusive debate and collective solutions. The aim of the framework is to assist South Africa in the renewal of social relationships.

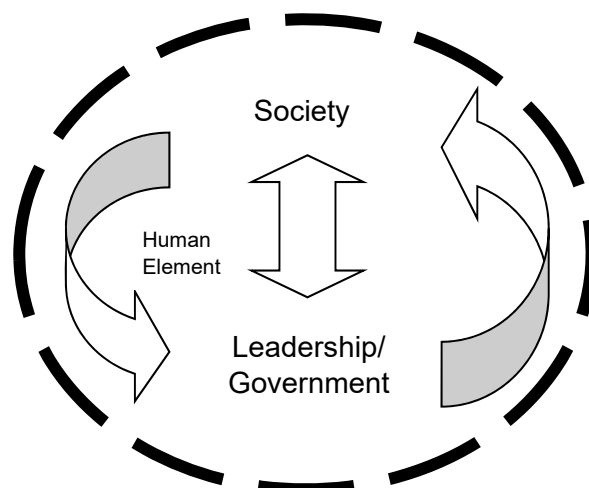


Figure 2: Social Learning in the Core. Adopted from “A Systemic Perspective to wealth Creation in South Africa through Learning and Adaptation” (Toendepi, 2013, p. 215).

In this respect, social practice is the primary activity and collaboration through continuous participation and engagement are its characteristics. According to Kotlarsky and Oshri (2005), collaboration is a social practice. The core of the framework needs to push the desires and aspirations of the people, agreed upon in the continuous dialogues that ensue because society knows exactly what their problems are and hence must be part of the solutions. The beauty of an effective collaboration strategy is that everyone wins. Governments will begin to create policies with a greater alignment with social values of its constituencies.

The African traditional values of Ubuntu influenced the above framework through the emphasis on group solidarity, humanistic and collective unit principles (Mangena, 2016; Mbigi, 2005). Ubuntu is not a concept to be learnt by the human element of an African society. It is engraved within African people and is the spirit that maintains social relationships and practices in their day-to-day functioning. Therefore engaging people on a familiar platform stimulates ownership and facilitates social cohesion and inclusivity.

The core of the framework suggests the embracing of a circular structure as a conceptual tool (and not a physical arrangement) to facilitate direct communication, feedback, engagement and invitation of all stakeholders. In this instance, the circular structure acknowledges the relevance of social values and norms of the African society. It is non-hierarchical and proposes democratic processes and procedures through participation and involvement. In other words the core of the framework is calling for a radical restructuring of the fundamental relationship between the leaders/government and the governed (Toendepi, 2013).

The framework suggests bringing about a societal transformation through involvement and voluntary participation of the human element in the social system. The circular structure helps people to develop themselves as they participate with others in devising solutions to societal problems. In doing so, members earn recognition, appreciation, respect and a sense of belonging. Belonging is a fundamental human motive (Jones, 2009) and participation is rooted in the African cultural traditions (Lessem & Schieffer, 2009).

In this regard, the framework assumes that this can be much easier to adapt for an African social system. After being included and afforded an opportunity to engage and contribute, people can never be the same. They will be empowered, transformed, enlightened and educated. The framework views society as an open system where people of different views and interests live together in harmony participating in building their future together. There is a need for and a great opportunity to learn from others experiences. It is however also acknowledged that human systems are different and that there are no utopias in social systems (Forrester, 1995), but social learning presents an opportunity to see beyond our own boundaries.

The findings showed that the South African society is aware of the socio-economic challenges facing them and hence leadership cannot say that it knows better what society wants and that it purports to have ideal solutions. Ideal solutions must not be delivered to society. Society must participate in shaping the solutions to their own problems. Therefore, the right information required in making accurate decisions is with the people and can only be brought to the fore through suitable collaborative social structures of involvement. By understanding people's communication requirements, how knowledge and information is disseminated in a social system, the leadership can spearhead effective collaborative social learning that can shift the current controlling system to a more collaborative and integrated one.

What is required in South Africa is collective learning (McCarthy et al., 2011; Cundill, 2010; Reed et al., 2010) which will facilitate the sustainable collective societal transformation. The structural hierarchy is seen as being the major obstacle to South African societal learning as it is rigid, concentrates on positions and power, and excludes the people in its decision and policymaking. In the circular structure, everyone's views are valid. In order to achieve successful collaboration South Africa need to introduce structures that allow space for free exchange of information and facilitate engagement and participation. An appropriate structure could create the mechanisms that can establish social ties especially when such structures are informed by local values and norms in order to minimize conflict and distortion. There has to be a paradigm shift in response to the changing landscapes, from control, to integration and collaboration. The African tradition of Ubuntu incorporate the circular structure as it fosters and encourages group solidarity because group solidarity is central to the group's survival (Mangena, 2016; Mbigi, 2005).

7. Limitations and future research

This research's limitations stem from the fact that the data used was localise around Gauteng province because of the convenience sampling techniques used. Arguably, that 80% of the South African population is homogenous hence; people in other areas are able to relate the findings to their situations. The challenges that the core of the framework might have are also acknowledged. These challenges include how to deal with information overload as the various conversations are ensued. The framework is prone to generating vast amounts of data which, if properly analysed can provide valuable information. However, the challenge is not only about volume, but also about timeliness, and whether the leaders are able to act on the insights gleaned from the collected conversation data.

Based on the limitations of the core of the framework an area of further research emerges. An extension of this research has to do with testing the practicalities involved in implementing the organic miniature structures. Through the "participatory action research" (Lessem & Schieffer, 2009:175) the practicalities of the circular miniature structures can be tested. One of the major tenets of participatory research is that the problem has to be defined, analysed and solved by a community.

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