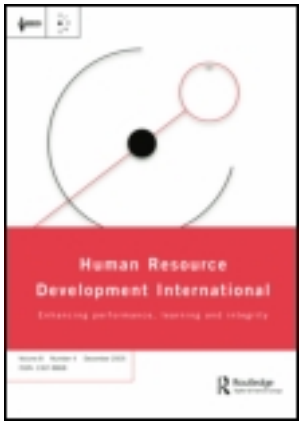

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Exploring excellence in leadership perceptions amongst South African managers

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We apply the excellence in leadership (EIL) framework (Selvarajah, C. T., P. Duignan, C. Suppiah, T. Lane, and C. Nuttman 1995. "In Search of the ASEAN Leader: An Exploratory Study of the Dimensions that Relate to Excellence in Leadership." *Management International Review* 35 (1): 29–44) to surface the implicit views on leadership excellence held by South African managers. Our attempt is informed by an understanding of *ubuntu*, an African world view that draws attention to the symbiotic relationship between individuals and the community they come from. In what is one of the first efforts to empirically test the influence of *ubuntu* in the workplace, we hypothesize that *ubuntu* leads South African managers to value inclusivity and impartiality. Further, we posit that managers from the earlier apartheid-era generations, having witnessed all the inequities, would put a greater premium on *ubuntu*-driven values than will those from the post-apartheid generation. Structural equation modelling of the data obtained through surveying 550 managers from across sectors provided mixed support for our hypotheses. Inclusive communication and impartiality in the workplace were found to be positively associated with excellence-related perceptions. The other findings however raised questions about how *ubuntu* exerts influence in the workplace. We make a case for more empirical work on *ubuntu* and discuss the implications of our work for theory and practice as they pertain to managerial development.

Keywords: managerial leadership; leadership development; excellence in leadership; implicit leadership theory; ubuntu; South Africa

Introduction

It will soon be two decades since South Africa became a democracy and resolved to afford equal opportunity to all its citizens. The dismantling of apartheid in 1994 promised to bring about momentous changes in all walks of life, including in the way the workforce was managed and led in the country. In those heady days, scholars had called for an African renaissance (Koka 1997; Teffo 1997), and the expectation was that South Africa would witness the emergence of a more inclusive workplace with a new kind of managerial leadership informed by traditional sub-Saharan values (Mbigi and Maree 1995). But a review of recent empirical studies on managerial practices suggests that these expectations have been belied. The findings reveal that leadership behaviour preferences of Black and White managers are almost identical, and distinctive African workplace values do not

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exist (Littrell 2011). We however attribute these findings in large measure to the ethnocentric instruments that were used to measure managerial perceptions. Further, we hold that given South Africa's history, differences in perceptions about leadership excellence are likely to be pronounced between the apartheid and post-apartheid generations of managers. And it would be instructive to study these differences rather than concentrate on the differences between Black and White managers.

Individuals tend to hold implicit perceptions about what constitutes excellence in leadership (EIL). One could reasonably assume that to the extent individuals are motivated to strive for excellence, they would, when given an opportunity, aspire to develop characteristics perceived as being critical to attaining EIL (Selvarajah et al. 1995). Therefore, studying excellence-related perceptions could help one generate insights on how one might train and develop effective leaders. But by the same token, the task of developing leaders would become that much more challenging if individuals at a workplace were to hold radically different excellence-related perceptions. In this paper, we posit that the older generation of South African managers with extensive work experience in the apartheid era hold notions of EIL that are different from the ones held by the younger, post-apartheid era generation of managers. Since the onus is on the older generation of South African managers to mentor the next generation of managerial leaders (see Kerr-Phillips and Thomas [2009]), it would be useful to identify the dimensions along which the intergenerational perceptions on EIL differ.

Although leadership is one of the most highly researched areas in organizational studies (Yukl 2010), the fact is that a majority of leadership research is US-centric. South African organizations lack informed prescriptions on developing local leaders (Denton and Vloeberghs 2003; Luthans et al. 2004). Unfortunately, the extant prescriptions are indiscriminately premised on generic approaches from the West (Dalglish 2009). Moreover, because Western managers, unlike their South African counterparts, do not operate in environments undergoing fundamental political, economic and social restructuring all at once, their experiences have limited relevance (Nkomo and Kriek 2011). Responding to calls for developing Afro-centric approaches to studying managerial leadership, we apply the EIL framework that was specifically developed by Selvarajah et al. (1995) for use in the context of developing countries. Unlike other ethno-centric leadership frameworks, the EIL framework allows one to factor in local idiosyncrasies.

We begin by highlighting South Africa's demographic diversity and describing *ubuntu*, a tribal world view that is said to permeate sub-Saharan African cultures, including the cultural values in South Africa (Cunningham et al. 2006); thereafter, we explain the EIL framework and hypothesize that *ubuntu*-driven cultural variables influence EIL perceptions in South Africa, and that South African managers from the apartheid and post-apartheid generations have different perceptions about what constitutes excellence in managerial leadership. We then test our hypotheses and report the results of our study. We conclude by discussing the HRD-related implications of our findings and identifying areas of future research.

The South African context

Demographic diversity

It is with good reason that South Africa is called the rainbow nation. As per the 2011 census (see Mbalo Brief [2012]), the nation's population is 51.8 million with 79.2% being Black, 8.9% Coloured (people of mixed race), 2.5% Indian/Asian and 8.9% White. South Africa's Constitution recognizes 11 languages, amongst which the most spoken are

IsiZulu (22.7%), IsiXosha (16%) and Afrikaans (13.5%). Although English is spoken by only 9.6% of the population, it is widely understood and appears to be the nation's preferred second language. English, along with Afrikaans, is also the most commonly used language in the business world. South Africa, being secular, does not have any state religion. The 2011 census did not collect data on religious faiths. However, as per Census 2001, South Africa has people from eight different religions with 25 denominations (Booysen 2007). To add to the complexity, the nation also experiences large-scale internal migrations, with labour from underdeveloped provinces flocking to urban industrialized centres. South Africa attracts external migrants from other neighbouring African countries as well. This is the labour pool attempting to escape war and famine in its homeland (Moorhouse and Cunningham 2010). One can readily imagine how such diversity in the workplace, coupled with a troubled discriminatory past, would pose unique challenges to South African managers.

Despite the introduction of several legislative measures to promote affirmative action, Blacks and Coloureds continue to be grossly under-represented at the top management and senior management levels in corporate South Africa (Booysen 2007). The 2011–12 Commission for Employment Equity reports that amongst large employers (i.e. those with over 150 employees), Whites occupy 65.4% and 59.1% of the top and senior management positions, respectively. The corresponding figures for Blacks are 18.5% and 21.8%. The figures would get skewed more heavily in favour of Whites if one were to ignore the public sector. The Equity Commission notes with concern that the four-year trends reveal that Whites at managerial levels consistently enjoy skills development opportunity, and recruitment and promotion rates in excess of 60%. Since senior management positions serve as a conduit to top management positions, the situation is unlikely to improve in the near future (CEE Annual Report 2011–12). *Inter alia*, the implication is that the current crop of South African managers must act as role models and mentor employees from under-represented categories if the rainbow nation is to truly live up to its name.

Traditionally, South African business leaders were required to lead Eurocentric, autocratic and hierarchical conglomerates that were based on Western value systems; but in the post-apartheid era they find themselves leading a multicultural workforce that is more collectivist and less competitive than its Western counterpart (Kerr-Phillips and Thomas 2009; also see Sydhagen and Cunningham [2007]). Cross-cultural studies indicate that workplaces tend to adopt leadership practices that are consistent with prevailing cultural values (House et al. 1999; Booysen 2001). However, the highly diverse South African workplace with apparently conflicting cultural values poses questions with no easy answers. For Whites the change is too fast; and for Blacks it is not fast enough (Booysen 2007). How can South African managers possibly function without ruffling feathers in such a situation? As is often the case, cultures with unique problems have it within them to engender their own unique solutions. The answers to coping with conflicting pressures perhaps lie in age-old African tribal wisdom. The reference here is to *ubuntu* that is described by Africans as either a moral quality possessed by a person or a humanist philosophy (Gade 2012). We focus below on the salient aspects of *ubuntu* with a view to later examining how, if at all, the notion might impact leader behaviour in the South African workplace.

Ubuntu: an African world view

While *ubuntu* may mean different things to different people, the literature suggests a degree of convergence around *ubuntu*-related values. The term *ubuntu* is said to represent

'notions of universal human interdependence, solidarity and communalism which can be traced to small-scale communities in pre-colonial Africa, and which underlie virtually every indigenous African culture' (Roederer and Moellendorf 2004, 441 as cited by Gade [2012]). The colonization of Africa by Europeans from the fifteenth century through to the twentieth century led to delineation of arbitrary borders between colonies that 'broke down many of the cultural mechanisms that had evolved to allow *ubuntu* to exist among different tribal groups' (Wanasika et al. 2011, 239). As Africans begin to rediscover their roots, some Black leaders are connecting workplace transformation efforts to traditional *ubuntu* values (Nkomo and Kriek 2011). There is thus some evidence that *ubuntu* as a personal philosophy can inform individual action in the workplace.

Melo Magolego, a Mandela Rhodes scholar, writes in his personal blog that *ubuntu* has five characteristics: extroverted communities, socialization of prosperity, deference to hierarchy, redemption and humanism (Magolego 2013). Indeed, a deeper appreciation of *ubuntu* can help one understand why Nelson Mandela might have relied on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to heal South Africa. In his book, Desmond Tutu, extolling the virtues of forgiveness, explains that a person with *ubuntu* is always accessible and willing to affirm others; and that such a person draws self-assurance from belonging to a larger community and feels diminished when others in the community are harmed or diminished in any way (Tutu 1999). In theory therefore, *ubuntu* values in the workplace should discourage dwelling on the apartheid era's troubled history and shift the focus to the future. The African tribal saying 'it takes a village to bring up a child' could only be a product of an *ubuntu* culture. Because *ubuntu* encourages the expression of the self through the collective (Mbigi 1997), it should foster teamwork, distributed leadership, co-operation and knowledge sharing in the workplace (Khoza 1994; Avolio 1995).

Notably, while *ubuntu* entails that individuals work for the collective good, the world view does not expect individuals to completely merge their identity with the collective; so in that sense *ubuntu* is different from Hofstede's more popular *collectivism* construct (Booysen 2001). In this context, Lynham et al. (2009, 71) note that while team-building efforts in the West entail shifting individuals along a continuum from the individualistic end to the collectivistic end, in *ubuntu* cultures there is no need to do so. For it is not about the 'I' being sacrificed at the altar of the collective 'we,' instead, it is about the 'I' being within 'us.' In the *ubuntu* world view, 'the individual and the collective co-exist in a shared humanity, as I and us.' As Lutz (2009, 314) explains, 'In a true community, the individual does not pursue the common good *instead of* his or her own good, but rather pursues his or her own good *through pursuing* the common good' (emphasis in original).

Prima facie, solidarity with the collective ought to be welcomed in any modern workplace which puts a premium on collaboration. Sydhagen and Cunningham (2007) note that while *ubuntu* might not be universally applicable, organizations that take the chance and 'move towards a more inclusive structure, may realize that there are many rewards' (131). Wanasika and colleagues (2011), however, caution that the *ubuntu*-driven tendency to support people from one's tribe at all costs can prove potentially harmful. Although their work pertains to the sub-Saharan African region as a whole, it does partially apply to South Africa as well. The authors imply that tribal values often result in leaders being appointed out of tribal allegiance rather than for their ability to lead. They go on to note that tribalism can provide 'a toxic organizational framework for nepotism, intolerance and occasional acts of violence' (Wanasika et al. 2011, 236). How the tribal values manifest themselves in the workplace and whether they influence managerial perceptions about what constitutes effective leadership is ultimately an empirical question.

As stated above, we aim to provide answers to this question through applying the EIL framework (Selvarajah et al. 1995). The framework has been chosen because it enables scholars to incorporate culture-specific variables while studying managerial perceptions.

An *ubuntu*-driven EIL framework

As is well established, the area of cross-cultural leadership gained impetus when Robert House, recognizing the problems associated with studying leadership out of its context, launched the Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness (GLOBE) research programme across nations and continents (see House et al. [1999, 2004] and Chhokar et al. [2007]). The GLOBE project involves administering a questionnaire based primarily on cultural dimensions identified by Hofstede (1980), Hofstede and Bond (1988) and Trompenaars (1993). The project aims to surface implicit leadership theories (ILTs) subscribed to by the respondents to the GLOBE survey. In effect, an ILT is an aggregate of the factors that correspond with a perceiver's image of what makes an effective organizational leader. As mentioned earlier, perceptions associated with leadership effectiveness are important because they hold inspirational value; and also because people tend to respond favourably to leaders perceived to be possessing prototypical effectiveness characteristics (Lord and Maher 1991).

Interestingly, the GLOBE study of Black managers (Wanasika et al. 2011) does not support the presence of African values in the post-apartheid South African workplace. On the contrary, the GLOBE data imply that Black managers in South Africa aspire to values which are 'antithetical' to traditional African values and which, in fact, mirror Western values (Littrell 2011, 74). It would appear that either the current social reality in the workplace does not demand a context-specific South African response, or there may be no such thing as a distinctive South African response. Or it could well be that the GLOBE conclusions are erroneous. With respect to the latter, it is relevant to note that concerns have been raised about the GLOBE project's measurement instruments (see McSweeny [2002] and Tung and Verbeke [2010]). The project has also been criticized for clustering cultures arbitrarily. Out of the 10 clusters that are said to capture the 62 societies studied thus far, five distinct cultural clusters are identified with Europe, which has only 13% of the world's population (Selvarajah et al. 2013). Further, the South African GLOBE results, as we later explain, might be misleading because only Black managers were surveyed. With a view to providing a more fine-grained analysis of the ILTs of South African managers, we have instead chosen to apply the EIL framework to a more representative sample of managers in terms of ethnicity. The framework offers an alternative to the GLOBE perspective.

Like the GLOBE studies, the EIL framework is based on a rationale which seeks to identify ILTs, but its approach is substantially different from the GLOBE approach in that it does not attempt to identify and label generic cultural labels. As Selvarajah et al. (2013) explain, the EIL framework was developed for studying managerial leadership in Asia and was based on both western and eastern literatures (see Selvarajah et al. [2012] for details). A group of researchers from six ASEAN countries (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand) isolated 94 value statements on leadership (see Selvarajah et al. [1995] and also see Taormina and Selvarajah [2005]), and tasked Asian managers who were attending executive programmes at the Asian Institute of Management in Manila, to capture the statements in one of the following four broad categories: personal qualities (PQs), managerial behaviour (MB), organizational demands (ODs) and environmental influences (EIs). Statements with an agreement of 50% or more

were said to belong to a particular category. This data reduction through a Q-sort procedure resulted in a total of 58 statements being retained. The participants were also tasked to rank the 10 most important statements that they perceived as contributing to EIL. The five constructs central to the EIL framework are defined below (excerpted from Selvarajah et al. [2013, 359]):

> *Excellent Leadership* describes the combination of behaviours and attitudes desirable for good leadership within a certain cultural context. *Personal Qualities* are the personal values, skills, attitudes, behaviour and qualities of an individual. They emphasise morality, religion, inter-personal relationships and communication. *Managerial Behaviours* cover a person's nature, values, attitudes, actions and styles when performing managerial duties. They emphasise persuasive powers. *Organizational Demands* are the ways a manager responds to the goals, objectives, structures and issues in an organisation. They emphasise the importance of organisational prosperity. *Environmental Influences* are external factors that influence the success of the entire organisation. They emphasise the importance of scanning and evaluating the external environment for opportunities.

Further, Selvarajah et al. (2013) observe that organizations vary in the manner in which they respond to the external environment, and also vary in the amount of resources they allocate to monitor the environment. Thus, they imply that *EI* has two sub-dimensions: environmental responsiveness and environmental monitoring. The EIL framework makes the tenable assumption that cultural pressures are ubiquitous and exert their influence on everything that people do. Thus, cultures get manifested through several artefacts including overt MBs. In an organizational context, the framework implies that perceptions about what constitutes *excellent leadership (EL)* are, in the main, driven by *MB,* and *MB* in turn is driven by two external factors – *OD* and *EI* – and one internal factor, *PQ* of the managers. The five constructs as defined above are universally applicable in the sense that the interplay amongst them is critical to understanding ILTs across cultures (irrespective of the nation, society, sector, industry or organization). But this is not to say that perceptions about leadership are not influenced by national or societal culture. As stated above, as per EIL, cultural influence is ubiquitous and the EIL framework recognizes that culture can, and frequently does, bring different and new aspects of *EI, OD* and *PQ* into sharper relief, and this in turn has a bearing on *MB* and *EL* perceptions (see Figure 1 for a generic EIL framework).

The EIL framework has been validated across nations. For example, *PQ* in Thailand includes the sub-dimensions *non-confrontational style* and *respect*; similarly *OD* there includes *deference for authority* (Selvarajah et al. 2013). In Cambodia, *pragmatism* underpinned by Buddhist beliefs influences *MB* (Selvarajah et al. 2012). We posit that if *ubuntu* is as pervasive in South Africa as Confucianism is in the Chinese culture, then it would potentially affect several of the EIL variables. Accordingly, we factor in *ubuntu*-driven values to offer for a more fine-grained analysis of the affected EIL variables.

Ubuntu-driven variables

We theorize that *ubuntu* would, in the main, influence *PQ* and *EL*-related perceptions and discuss each in turn.

Personal quality inclusive communication (PQICom)

Since *ubuntu* is about extroverted communities and entails individuals, especially the elders in the tribe, reaching out to all community members, open and robust

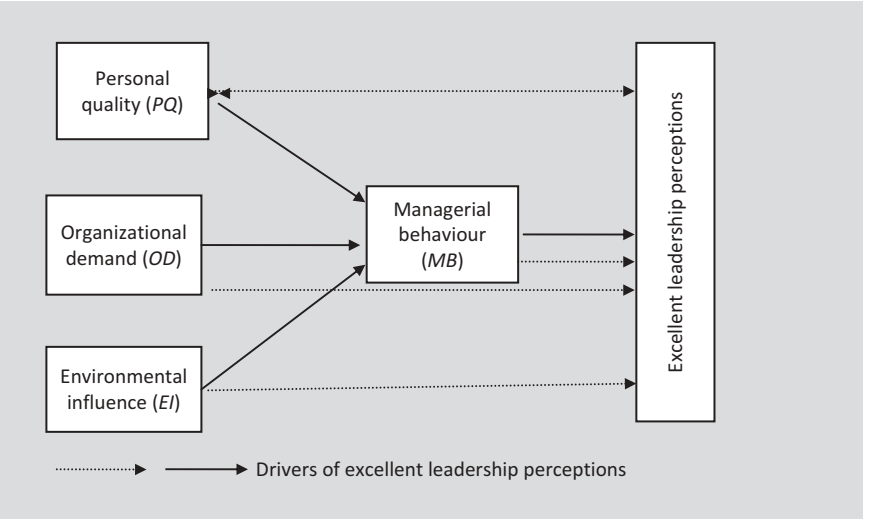


Figure 1. The generic EIL framework.

communication is likely to be highly valued in such cultures. Dialogue and consensus-building are amongst the most critical tenets of *ubuntu* (Bangura 2005). Also relevant is the fact that in *ubuntu* cultures individuals are not expected to merge their identity with the collective; they are merely expected to work towards the larger cause even if it is at the expense of one's self-interest. This implies that the leaders must be able to reach out to and persuade each individual. The need to do so emphasizes the importance of communicating in a manner that is sensitive to individual concerns, respects the self-esteem of others and can deal with disagreements. In other words, communication in such an environment entails negotiation and cannot ignore practical realities. While communication is considered critical for leaders across cultures (see Yukl [2010]), it clearly merits a more nuanced understanding in the *ubuntu*-driven cultures which call for a more inclusive style of communication. We thus hypothesize that:

H1: In South Africa, perceptions of EL will be positively related with the ability to communicate inclusively.

Personal quality inclusive morality (PQIMor)

Ubuntu cultures place a premium on humanism as they recognize the rights of a community of humans to behave in accordance with their set of beliefs, including religious beliefs. The need for compassion towards all in such cultures privileges thinking with the heart over thinking apathetically and exclusively with one's mind. Also, in *ubuntu* cultures, the sense of inclusivity entails putting the interest of one's tribe or larger community ahead of one's narrower self-interests. We label this sense of moral obligation to the collective *inclusive morality* and hypothesize that:

H2: In South Africa, perceptions of EL will be positively related with the ability of leaders to display inclusive morality.

Personal quality impartiality (PQImp)

In a post-apartheid South Africa, *ubuntu*-driven values require of the leaders to forget the past and remain equidistant from all the members of a diverse workforce. To not be so would run counter to the spirit of redemption inherent in the *ubuntu* world view. We thus argue that impartiality would be critical in such an environment. The onus would be on leaders to be consistent and fair at all times and acknowledge that no one may be immune to making mistakes in a highly diverse workplace fraught with competing priorities. We therefore hypothesize that:

> H3: In South Africa, perceptions of EL will be positively related with the ability of leaders to display impartiality.

In addition to influencing *PQ* dimensions, as we argue below, *ubuntu* has a bearing on leadership tasks that leaders emphasize and thus it influences EL perceptions.

Micro-dimensions of EL

In a series of studies that spanned over three decades, the Ohio State University (OSU) administered questionnaires to managers in business, the military and labour unions that asked them to rate a large number of job-related statements (see Fleishman [1953] for a detailed description). The responses were then factor-analysed. The scale started with over 1800 statements. Subject matter experts culled all but 150 of these statements into nine categories, which were again factor analysed to yield two fundamental dimensions: *consideration* (primarily pertaining to integration, communication, representation and fraternization) and *initiating structure* (involving primarily organization, domination, initiation, evaluation and production emphasis). The findings were interpreted to indicate that some leaders showed a lot of *consideration* towards their subordinates while getting a task accomplished whereas others emphasized the task itself and paid greater attention to other systems that could support the accomplishment of the task. Thus, it has been argued in the literature that leaders are either people- or task-oriented. Consistent with the seminal OSU studies, the *EL* dimension may be split into: *people orientation (PO)* and *task orientation (TO)* or *ELPO* and *ELTO*, respectively. Arguably, leaders in *ubuntu* cultures would emphasize the *PO*-related dimensions more than the *TO*-related dimensions. But, the extent to which the *PO*-related dimensions are emphasized would depend upon how strongly the *ubuntu* values are subscribed to. We believe that employees from the older generation are more likely to adhere to *ubuntu* values. This leads us to examining intergenerational differences in the South African workplace.

Intergenerational perceptual differences

There is evidence that generations growing up during periods of war or insecurity learn survival values such as materialism and respect for authority; similarly, generations growing up during periods of socio-economic security are more egalitarian and willing to look beyond their self-interest (Egri and Ralston 2004; also see Cogin [2012]). In the case of South Africa, the apartheid era, for a large majority, was a period of deprivation. In many ways, growing up in the era, for most, was similar to being brought up in a time of war – it was a period of subjugation and insecurity. It would be reasonable to assume that the world view of the generation of workers who worked in the apartheid era would be different from those who joined the workforce in

the post-apartheid era. Indeed, the South African workplace prior to 1994 was very different from today's workplace (Denton and Vloeberghs 2003). It would thus be more instructive to define generations in terms of apartheid and post-apartheid rather than in terms of the US-centric Generation X or Y. Thus, intergenerational differences for the purposes of this study equate to differences between managers who had worked in the apartheid era and those who worked as managers almost exclusively in the post-apartheid era (i.e. post-1994).

Germane to this study is the question about which generation of managers would be more likely to subscribe to *ubuntu* values. In this regard, the literature suggests that 'as people age, they become more collectivistic, conservative, and self-transcendent, and less individualistic, open to change, and self-enhancing' (Erikson 1997; Smith and Schwartz 1997; as cited by Cogin [2012, 2269]). Also relevant in the current context is the fact that concern for community and the need for compassion, two values inherent in *ubuntu*, have universal appeal (Lutz 2009). We thus argue that irrespective of their race, members of the older apartheid generation would hold values more closely aligned with *ubuntu* values. Conversely, members of the younger post-apartheid generation, not having experienced officially sanctioned deprivation, would be more likely to subscribe to individualistic and materialistic values.

To exacerbate matters, affirmative action programmes appear to have activated fault lines along racial lines in the post-apartheid South African workplace (Lloyd et al. 2011). Social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979) and social categorization theory (Turner 1987) predict that people can have multiple identities, and that depending on the context, individuals tend to gravitate to similar others (see Booysen [2007] for a discussion of these theories in the South African context). So, a Black woman HR manager could identify with other Blacks when planning a mentorship programme, but identify with other women across the board when drafting parental leave policies. Similarly, Black managers from the post-apartheid generation could identify themselves along racial lines when wishing to avail of the provisions in the affirmative action programme, but see themselves as no different from their White counterparts in their desire for individual growth. This perhaps explains why the recent GLOBE studies found no significant difference amongst the values of Black and White managers (see Littrell [2011] and Wanasika et al. [2011]). But as argued above, we believe the EIL framework can help one tease out the influence of *ubuntu* culture in the workplace. Further, we argue that the influence would emerge more strongly if one were to factor in intergenerational issues and the *PO*-related *EL* dimension (*ELPO*) discussed earlier. Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

> H4: Managers from the apartheid generation will associate excellence in leadership more strongly with the *ELPO*-related and *PQ*-related dimensions than will the post-apartheid managers.
>
> H5a: Managers from the apartheid generation will associate excellence in leadership more strongly with Inclusive Communication than will managers from the post-apartheid generation.
>
> H5b: Managers from the apartheid generation will associate excellence in leadership more strongly with Inclusive Morality than will managers from the post-apartheid generation.
>
> H5c: Managers from the apartheid generation will associate excellence in leadership more strongly with Impartiality than will managers from the post-apartheid generation.

The next section describes the method adopted to test the above hypotheses and discusses the results of structural equation modelling of data obtained through surveying 550 South African managers across levels and sectors.

Method

Procedure and participants

A paper-and-pencil survey was administered to managers from across the public and private sectors across provinces. The responses were anonymous. The majority of respondents (46%) were government employees with 30% employed in the private sector, 13% employed by the NGOs and the remaining 9% employed by universities. Twenty-two per cent of the respondents were employed as senior managers, 41% of the respondents were in middle management and 36% employed as line managers. The organizations were selected on the basis of professional relationships they had with either the university/its students or one of the authors. The convenience aspect notwithstanding, there is no reason to believe that the respondents are non-representative of the managerial cadre in South Africa. Of the 800 surveys administered to individual managers, a total of 550 usable responses were obtained indicating a response rate of 69%. A good ethnic mix was obtained with 52% Blacks, 14% Whites, 8% Coloured and 26% Indians. The gender balance was ideal, with 275 respondents being males. The age distribution was skewed in favour of younger managers, but such a skew is understandable in a developing country. Thirty per cent of the respondents were employed in small organizations with 101 employees or below; 18% of the respondents were employed in organizations with between 102 and 501 employees; and 14% of respondents were employed in organizations with between 502 and 1001 employees. Finally, 37% of the respondents were employed in large organizations with more than 1001 employees. Department sizes tended to be small with 24% of the respondents employed in departments with no more than 10 employees, and 53% of the respondents employed in departments with a maximum of 25 employees. Amongst the 47% employed in departments with more than 25 employees, 29% worked in departments with more than 50 employees, with 18% of them working in departments with more than 100 employees.

Operationalizing apartheid and post-apartheid generations

The 1980s in South Africa culminated with the then President F.W. de Klerk's landmark speech which started the transformation in the country (Denton and Vloeberghs 2003). However, it was only when the ANC was democratically elected as the government of South Africa in 1994 that the apartheid era was really over. Accordingly, we consider those who were 21 years of age or older in 1994 as belonging to the apartheid era. Those who were younger than 21 years in 1994 were considered as belonging to the post-apartheid era. This assumption resulted in 61% of the managers belonging to the apartheid era and 39% to the post-apartheid era. For the apartheid era, 45% of the managers were female, the figure rose to 56% for the post-apartheid era. The change in the gender distribution associated with the post-apartheid era is not surprising because gender equality is an important component of the post-apartheid government policy. These distributional differences, to some extent, had the potential to confound gender and generation effects. Our data analysis addresses this issue.

Measurement

Included in the survey were 94 questions relating to the importance of 94 leadership behaviours with responses coded on a five-interval Likert scale (ranging from *no importance* to *very important*). Based on the initial Q-sort of items (Selvarajah et al. 1995) and later analyses (see especially Selvarajah et al. [2008]) the important items relating to *MB,*

PQs, OD, *EI* and overall *EL Perceptions* were extracted and separately analysed. Exploratory factor analysis with an oblimin rotation determined the number of components for each construct using SPSS version 21. As expected, it was found that the *EL* construct had two components, one relating to *people-oriented* (*ELPO*) leadership and the other relating to *task-oriented* (*ELTO*) *leadership*. Also, as expected, the *PQs* construct had three components, *inclusive communication* (*PQICom*), *inclusive morality* (*PQIMor*) and *impartiality* (*PQImp*). As found in Selvarajah et al. (2013), the *EI* construct contained two sub-dimensions: *environmental monitoring* (*EIMon*) and *environmental responsiveness* (*EIResp*). However, *MB* and *OD* emerged as one-dimensional constructs.

Confirmatory factor analysis using AMOS version 21 was used to validate the constructs and, in particular, to test for discriminant validity and invariance between the apartheid and post-apartheid managerial groups. As recommended by Byrne (2010), goodness-of-fit indices (*GFI*, *AGFI*) and confirmatory fit indices (*TLI*, *CFI*) above 0.90, with root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) of at most 0.08, and normed chi-square of at most 3.0, were judged to provide evidence of validity; while an absence of cross loadings of items across constructs was seen as evidence of discriminant validity. The reliability of the resulting scales was assessed using Cronbach alpha. Values of above 0.60 were considered adequate (Hair et al. 2005), allowing the construction of summated scale for all the constructs. Correlations between the *PQ* and *EL* scales were used to test hypotheses H1 to H3. A between-subjects multivariate analysis of variance was used to test the scales for gender and apartheid-era effects (while controlling for managerial position, department and organization size, and industry). In particular, this allowed the testing of H4. Structural equation modelling was then used to test the appropriateness of the model suggested in Figure 1, with an invariance test used to test hypotheses H5a to H5c.

Results

As indicated in the Appendix section, all the above constructs produced measurement models with good validity. Also, as shown in Table 1, tests of invariance showed that the item weights for each construct did not differ significantly between the apartheid and post-apartheid managerial groups, suggesting that the effects of apartheid on perceptions of leadership excellence were almost uniform across all ages of managers.

The Cronbach alpha values in Table 2 exceeded 0.60 for all the constructs, indicating reasonable reliability for all the nine scales constructed from the items shown in the Appendix. All correlations above 0.341 were significant at the 0.1% significance level; however, none were very strong thereby confirming discriminant validity amongst the

Table 1. Tests of invariance across apartheid and post-apartheid generations for measurement models.

Construct	Chi-squared	df	*p*-Value
Excellent leader	5.542	9	0.785
*PQ*s	16.327	10	0.091
MB	17.288	14	0.241
OD	5.041	7	0.655
EI	6.628	6	0.357

Table 2. Correlations and descriptive statistics.

	ELPO	*ELTO*	EI Mon	EI Resp	*OD*	MB	PQ IMor	PQ Imp	PQ ICom
Mean	4.63	4.60	4.22	4.10	4.28	4.20	3.56	3.66	4.37
Std. Dev.	0.44	0.51	0.66	0.60	0.47	0.42	0.86	0.39	0.52
Alpha	0.73	0.79	0.75	0.62	0.70	0.83	0.61	0.69	0.73
ELPO	1	0.600	0.475	0.491	0.533	0.581	0.112	0.371	0.674
ELTO	0.600	1	0.624	0.435	0.548	0.501	0.061	0.350	0.634
EIMon	0.475	0.624	1	0.452	0.537	0.537	0.152	0.243	0.579
EIResp	0.491	0.435	0.452	1	0.591	0.637	0.345	0.306	0.550
OD	0.533	0.548	0.537	0.591	1	0.715	0.333	0.395	0.620
MB	0.581	0.501	0.537	0.637	0.715	1	0.396	0.451	0.720
PQIMor	0.112	0.061	0.152	0.345	0.333	0.396	1	0.135	0.239
PQImp	0.371	0.350	0.243	0.306	0.395	0.451	0.135	1	0.382
PQICom	0.674	0.634	0.579	0.550	0.620	0.720	0.239	0.382	1

measures. There was strong support for the first hypothesis (H1) in that *PQICom* had a moderate to strong positive correlation with both *ELPO* and *ELTO* perceptions of leadership excellence. There was also some support for the third hypothesis (H3) in that the correlations between *Impartiality* (*PQImp*) and *ELPO* and *ELTO* were significant (although weak). However, there was no support for the second hypothesis (H2) in that the correlations between inclusive morality (*PQIMor*) and both *ELPO* and *ELTO* were not significant.

A multivariate general linear model analysis showed small, but significant differences for gender ($F(9,524) = 2.012$, $p = 0.036$, partial eta-squared = 0.033) and apartheid/post-apartheid era ($F(9,524) = 2.576$, $p = 0.007$, partial eta-squared = 0.042). However, there were no significant effects for type of industry ($F(27,1408) = 1.05$, $p = 0.389$), position ($F(18,964) = 1.06$, $p = 0.388$), organization size ($F(36,1808) = 1.20$, $p = 0.138$) or department size ($F(36,1808) = 0.76$, $p = 0.844$). Also, most importantly there was no significant interaction between the gender and apartheid/post-apartheid effects ($F(9,523) = 1.406$, $p = 0.182$), suggesting that there is no confounding effect despite the difference in gender balance for the apartheid and post-apartheid generations of managers.

Table 3 shows the mean values for generational differences while controlling for gender and making Bonferroni adjustments. The fourth hypothesis (H4) which predicted

Table 3. Marginal means for generation controlling for gender.

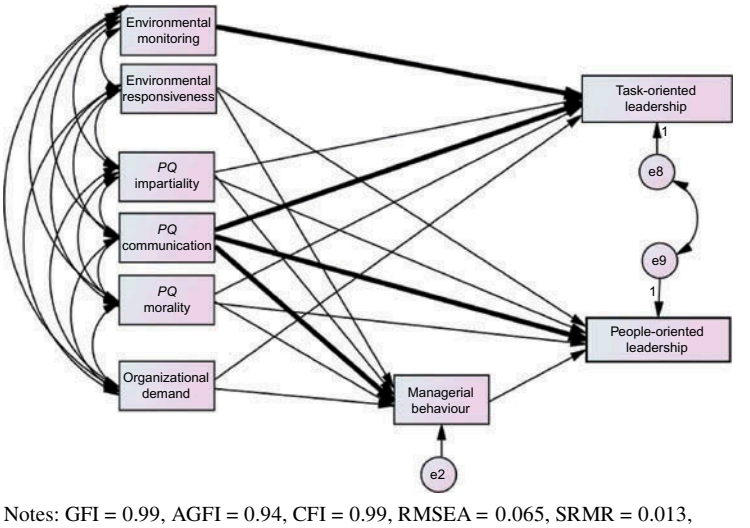
	Post-apartheid generation		Apartheid generation		Test of significance		
	Mean	Std. error	Mean	Std. error	F(1,524)	*p*-Value	Partial η^2
OD	4.25	0.032	4.29	0.026	1.033	0.310	0.002
EIResp	4.07	0.042	4.11	0.033	0.672	0.413	0.001
EIMon	4.30	0.045	4.18	0.036	4.796	0.029	0.009
PQImp	3.61	0.027	3.71	0.021	7.676	0.006	0.014
PQIMor	3.46	0.060	3.62	0.047	4.144	0.042	0.008
PQICom	4.38	0.036	4.36	0.029	0.203	0.652	0.000
MB	4.17	0.029	4.21	0.023	1.256	0.263	0.002
ELPO	4.63	0.031	4.63	0.025	0.001	0.976	0.000
ELTO	4.62	0.035	4.59	0.028	0.630	0.428	0.001

that the earlier apartheid generation would attach greater importance to *ELPO* and to *PQ* was only partially supported. There was some weak evidence to suggest that the apartheid generation attaches more importance to *PQIMor* and *PQImp* than does the post-apartheid generation. However, *PQICom* and *ELPO* appear to have similar levels of importance for the two generations.

A structural model based on Figure 1 and comprising the nine reflective constructs mentioned in Table 3 fits the data well (GFI = 0.993, AGFI = 0.941, TLI = 0.966, CFI = 0.995, RMSEA = −0.065). As shown in Figure 2 by the thicker lines which are associated with loadings above 0.3, *PQICom* is the most important determinant of perceptions of leadership excellence. A bootstrap analysis with 2000 iterations was used to confirm that all the standardized total effect sizes in Table 4 were significant and to provide 95% confidence intervals for these effect sizes.

This model explains 69% of the variation in the importance of MB, 50% of the variation in the importance of *ELPO* and 53% of the variation in the importance of *ELTO*. Inclusive communication is the most important predictor of *ELPO* ($\eta^2 = 0.54$), but this construct is less important as a predictor of *ELTO* ($\eta^2 = 0.34$) and MB ($\eta^2 = 0.34$). Also of interest are the relatively small positive effect of *Impartiality* and the small negative effect of *Inclusive morality*. These results confirm the previously found moderate support for H1, weak support for H3 and lack of support for H2 when other aspects of leadership excellence are controlled.

Finally, hypotheses H5a, H5b and H5c were tested by comparing the coefficients of the above model for the two groups of managers, the post-apartheid managers who were younger than 21 years in 1994 when the new post-apartheid government took control and the other older managers who would have worked during the apartheid years. This invariance test showed no significant difference between the post-apartheid and the older group of managers (chi-square = 14.288, df = 15, $p = 0.504$), suggesting absence of intergenerational effects. The estimated effects of *PQ*s on perceptions of leadership excellence are quite similar for these two groups of managers as shown in Table 5.



Notes: GFI = 0.99, AGFI = 0.94, CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.065, SRMR = 0.013,
Thicker lines for loadings > 0.30

Figure 2. The fitted EIL model for South Africa.

Table 4. Total standardized effect sizes with 95% confidence intervals and *R*-square values.

	Managerial behaviour	People-oriented leadership excellence	Task-oriented leadership excellence
	(*MB*)	(*ELPO*)	(*ELTO*)
OD	0.289 (0.219–0.371)	0.049 (0.020–0.084)	0.157 (0.079–0.233)
EIResp	0.185 (0.119–.249)	0.163 (0.091–0.235)	
EIMon			0.330 (0.253–0.412)
PQImp	0.125 (0.064–0.187)	0.111 (0.036–0.185)	0.097 (0.016–0.178)
PQIMor	0.133 (0.082–0.185)	−0.104 ((–0.160)–(–0.048))	−0.137 ((−0.191)–(–0.078))
PQICom	0.360 (0.286–0.429)	0.537 (0.452–0.617)	0.344 (0.256–0.423)
MB		0.170 (0.069–0.262)	
R-square	69.2%	50.3%	53.3%

Table 5. A generational comparison of total standardized effects of *PQ*s on perceptions of leadership excellence.

	Post-apartheid generation of managers			Earlier generation of managers		
Leadership excellence	Impartiality	Inclusive morality	Inclusive communication	Impartiality	Inclusive morality	Inclusive communication
People-oriented	0.106	−0.088	0.510	0.117	−0.110	0.548
Task-oriented	0.129	−0.083	0.304	0.088	−0.162	0.340

Discussion, implications and conclusion

The EIL model was generally supported in the South African context as almost 70% of the variance in MB in general, and over 50% of the variance in excellence-related perceptions, as they related to both people- and task-oriented leadership, could be accounted for by the variables related to *PQ*, *EI* and *OD* included in the EIL framework. We had also hypothesized that in South Africa, leadership excellence perceptions would be linked to specific *PQ*s (namely, inclusive communication, inclusive morality and impartiality). The mixed and somewhat weak support for the influence of personal *ubuntu*-driven values calls for greater scrutiny of the way we operationalized the constructs' influence. Although *ubuntu* has been discussed extensively in the literature, empirical work on the value system is virtually non-existent. We believe that ours was one of the first attempts to gather evidence on how *ubuntu* might manifest itself in the South African workplace.

The empirical results show that the ability to communicate inclusively is critical to South African managers. As one of the more experienced OD consultants in the country observed in an interview, the culturally diverse environment made it very easy for co-employees to 'be offensive and hurtful sometimes through ignorance and sometimes through thoughtlessness or perversity' (Mitchell 2001, 134). It is thus not surprising that EL perceptions were found to be linked to inclusivity in communication and also to impartiality. Given the inequities perpetrated during apartheid, it is hardly surprising that South African managers value *impartiality*. But why was there no support for *inclusive morality*? On reflection, we conclude that either our measurement did not adequately reflect what *inclusive morality* might mean in an *ubuntu*-driven culture or

employees from different religions and ethnicities have very different notions of morality which makes it difficult to measure the construct.

Irrespective of the real reason behind our failure to find support for the hypothesis related to *inclusive morality*, the message perhaps is that as long as employees are 'kept in the loop' (the reference here is to *inclusive communication*) and treated fairly, the religious affiliation and personal belief system of managerial leaders does not really matter. Such a message is not necessarily counter to *ubuntu.* One could argue that *ubuntu* in fact implies a notion of *inclusive morality* which is about a secular workplace that is equidistant from all religions, as opposed to a secular workplace that completely ignores religious sentiments. The latter view seems to be prevalent in workplaces in most liberal Western democracies, but may not be appropriate for a highly diverse South Africa. Thus, the *inclusive morality* measure perhaps needs to be revisited and anchored to a view that accommodates and celebrates religious differences.

Counter to our expectations, intergenerational differences in *ubuntu*-driven values amongst the South African managers were almost negligible. The importance of inclusive morality and impartiality was slightly higher for the apartheid generation of managers; otherwise the two generations seem to have similar perceptions of leadership excellence. We however believe that a different measure of *inclusive morality*, as discussed above, could have potentially led to some support for hypothesis H5, bringing intergenerational differences into sharper relief.

Researchers could take the next step and consider developing measures that directly tap into the *ubuntu*-belief system. They could then test whether managers who subscribe more strongly to *ubuntu* values also display different workplace *behaviours* in terms of greater inclusivity and impartiality. But a word of caution is in order. Social desirability effects may lead managerial leaders to rate the *ubuntu* ideals highly, but in practice these ideals may fail to inform their action. Argyris (1991) draws attention to the typically large gap between one's espoused theory and one's theory in action. People do not always walk the talk, and there is no reason to believe that South African managers would be any different. But this somewhat pessimistic view of human nature should not prevent organizations from trying to develop their human resources in general, and managerial leaders in particular. Argyris, in the same context, also notes that all humans show a tendency to link their self-esteem to performing effectively. It is this tendency that organizations can leverage.

Our study implies that South African managerial leaders need to be particularly sensitive about how they communicate with their diverse workforce. Apart from training and developing managers in this area, the organizations also need to pay particular heed to how managers might demonstrate their impartiality through action. The apartheid legacy makes it incumbent upon all to strive towards an inclusive workplace. Legislation and affirmative action programmes, if not implemented sensibly, can engender resentment against the very cause (alleviating differences in the workplace) that they are meant to address. It would be a mistake to rely solely on such programmes. Conceptually, this study implies that workplaces must eventually find their own indigenous solutions if HRD initiatives are to gain widespread acceptance.

Our exploratory study and the preliminary findings show that a deeper appreciation of *ubuntu* values can help South African organizations respond to the challenge of developing managerial leaders. Consistent with our findings, Nafukho (2006) draws attention to *ubuntugogy*, an all-encompassing pedagogical technique derived from, as the name suggests, the *ubuntu* world view. Nafukho implies that the emphasis placed on dialogue and consensus-building in *ubuntu* cultures makes *ubuntugogy* particularly suited for fostering communities of learning and informal training initiatives in the workplace.

The technique is also said to be ideal for encouraging self-directed learning and teaching how to create a co-operative work environment. Again, this is not surprising given that the *ubuntu* world view respects individuality even as it emphasizes interdependence (for more details on *ubuntugogy*, see Bangura [2005]).

The flipside of using *ubuntu*-driven HRD techniques, of course, is that such techniques, being highly culture-specific, may not appeal to everyone in the workforce. For example, expatriate managers of global organizations operating in South Africa may disapprove of the decision-making styles advocated by trainers in *ubuntu* cultures. Thus, obtaining senior management support and neutralizing political resistance may be even more critical for *ubuntu*-driven HRD initiatives than is normally the case. To enhance their credibility, the HRD initiatives would also need to be alive to the potential downsides of *ubuntu* cultures. For instance, it would be advisable for trainers to acknowledge that beyond a point, levels of collaboration and kinship could encourage groupthink (see Janis [1972]); or that the need for consensus could potentially paralyse decision-making. Clearly, scholars need to do more empirical work if they are to generate *ubuntu*-based prescriptions for management in general and managerial development in particular.

In this paper, we made an attempt to surface the ILTs of the South African managers by applying the EIL framework. Although Selvarajah et al. (1995) had developed the framework for use in the context of developing nations in Asia, the framework was found to be valid in South Africa as well. Using our understanding of the *ubuntu* world view, we found evidence that South African managers associate EL with the *PQ*s of communicating inclusively and behaving impartially. Thus, South African managers can be expected to respond positively to training efforts that are directed towards helping them attain excellence in these two critical areas. Some scholars have questioned the existence of distinctive South African values in the workplace (e.g. Littrell 2011). We believe that we have furnished some evidence to the contrary that supports the application of the *ubuntu* lens to study and develop South Africa-specific workplace practices. Indeed, further interest from our colleagues can provide the much needed impetus for developing a South African view for studying South African organizations.

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Appendix. CFA results: measurement models

Two-dimensional leadership.

	People	Task
People-oriented	1.000	0.764
Task-oriented	0.764	1.000
Create a sense of purpose and enthusiasm in the workplace	0.631	
Have a strategic vision for the organization	0.664	
Give recognition for good work	0.625	
Be honest	0.480	
Motivate employees	0.566	
Develop strategies to gain competitive edge in the industry		0.555
Continue to learn how to improve performance		0.684
Have confidence when dealing with work and with people		0.763
Organize work time effectively		0.854

Note: Leadership standardized regression weights: (RMSEA = 0.056, normed chi-square = 2.737, *GFI* = 0.972, *AGFI* = 0.951, *TLI* = 0.958 and *CFI* = 0.970).

Personal quality: three dimensions.

	Inclusive communication	Inclusive morality	Impartiality
Be practical	0.579		
Deal calmly with tense situations	0.637		
Write clearly and concisely	0.506		
Respect the self-esteem of others	0.504		
Speak clearly and concisely	0.684		
Listen to the advice of others	0.519		
Follow the heart – not the head – in compassionate matters		0.603	
Behave in accordance with his or her religious beliefs		0.464	
Follow what is morally right: not what is 'right' for self or organization		0.712	
Be dependable and trustworthy			0.398
Be consistent in dealing with people			0.468
Accept responsibility for mistakes			0.732
Accept that others will make mistakes			0.756

Note: Personal qualities standardized weights (RMSEA = 0.039, normed chi-square = 1.831, *GFI* = 0.969, *AGFI* = 0.954, *TLI* = 0.951 and *CFI* = 0.962).

Organizational demand.

	Estimate
Focus on maximizing productivity	0.496
Sell the professional or corporate image to the public	0.572
Support decisions made jointly by others	0.592
Adapt to changing working conditions	0.356
Adjust organizational structures and rules to the realities of practice	0.476
Give priority to long-term goals	0.328
Act as a member of the team	0.549
Share power	0.481

Note: Organizational demand standardized weights (RMSEA = 0.047, normed chi-square = 2.198, *GFI* = 0.980, *AGFI* = 0.964, *TLI* = 0.937 and *CFI* = 0.955).

Environmental influence.

	Monitoring	Responsiveness
Use economic indicators for planning purposes	0.603	
Study laws and regulations which may have an impact on work	0.584	
Constantly evaluate emerging technologies	0.709	
Check consistently for problems and opportunities	0.753	
Be responsive to political realities in the environment		0.443
Foster an international perspective in the organization		0.503
Have a multicultural orientation and approach		0.670
Identify social trends which may have an impact on work		0.535

Note: Environmental influence standardized weights (RMSEA = 0.062, normed chi-square = 3.103, *GFI* = 0.974, *AGFI* = 0.950, *TLI* = 0.935 and *CFI* = 0.956).

Managerial behaviour.

	Estimate
Use initiatives and take risks	0.388
Delegate	0.426
Be strict in judging the competence of employees	0.435
Trust those to whom work is delegated	0.477
Think about the specific details of any particular problem	0.511
Be logical in solving problems	0.486
Consider suggestions made by employees	0.583
Keep up to date on management literature	0.544
Be formal when dealing with employees at work	0.351
Focus in the task-in-hand	0.494
Be consistent with making decisions	0.451
Select work wisely to avoid overload	0.475
Allow subordinates authority and autonomy	0.300
Listen to and understand the problems of others	0.601
Make work decisions quickly	0.344

Note: Managerial behaviour standardized weights (RMSEA = 0.047, normed chi-square = 2.19, *GFI* = 0.953, *AGFI* = 0.938, *TLI* = 0.898 and *CFI* = 0.912).