



## Examining culturally endorsed leadership theory dimension in Ethiopia: Participative Leadership style Preference Reflected in Amhara Proverbs

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to investigate participatory leadership style as it relates to the six culturally supported leadership theory components portrayed in Amhara proverbs. The study focuses on oral literature, namely proverbs. Because Proverbs are brief sayings capable of expressing truth, wisdom, and widely acknowledged facts or concepts, moreover, highlighting cultural, social, and political norms and standards that have been passed down through generations. Every community has its own proverb, which is used for various purposes and in various contexts. This research examines a few select proverbs that enhance decision-making participation. As a result, the gathered proverbs are centered on decision-making participation. The chosen proverbs were divided into three categories: the first group of proverbs applauded seeking advice, the second criticized resisting advice, and the third emphasized the role of women in decision-making. The proverbs show that the community values collaboration and takes into account subcultural factors such as gender age, and socioeconomic class. To sum up to be a great leader, one must respect their opinions, involve them in decision-making, and regard every level of society, including women and men, elders, farmers, soldiers, spiritual leaders, and so on as essential sources of input. Leaders, who act, autonomously on the other hand, are viewed as ineffective.

**Key Words:** Globalization, Leadership Theory, Participative Leadership, Culture, Sub-Culture, Proverb

### I. Introduction

Globalization demanded leaders to become competent in cross cultural awareness and practice. Culture is the learned beliefs, values, rules, norms, symbols, and traditions that are common to a group of people that make them unique.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand multicultural implies an approach or a system that takes more than one culture into account. It refers to the existence of multiple cultures such as African, American, Asian, European, and Middle Eastern. Multicultural can also refer to a set of

Sub-cultures defined by race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or age.

Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) is a cross-cultural research effort that exceeds all others in scope, depth, duration, and sophistication. The GLOBE researchers studied leadership worldwide; they defined leadership as the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members.<sup>2</sup>

GLOBE's major premise (and finding) is that leader effectiveness is contextual, that is, it is embedded in the societal and organizational norms, values, and beliefs of the people being led.<sup>3</sup> As a first step to measure leader effectiveness across cultures, GLOBE empirically established nine cultural dimensions that make it possible to capture the similarities and/or differences in norms, values, beliefs and practices among societies.

A principal outcome of this huge research effort was the development of six universally shared conceptions of leadership, known most often as "culturally endorsed leadership theory dimensions," also known as "global leadership dimensions" These six culturally endorsed leadership theory dimensions are a direct outgrowth of the research within all 62 societal cultures<sup>4</sup>To describe how different cultures view

<sup>1</sup> Peter G. Nothouse, *Leadership Theory and Practice* (Western Michigan University, 2013), 191

<sup>2</sup> Cornelius N. Grove, Ed.D. Introduction to the GLOBE Research Project on Leadership Worldwide. By GROVEWELL LLC.1

<sup>3</sup> Ibid,1

leadership behaviors in others, GLOBE researchers identified six global leadership behaviors: charismatic/value based, team oriented, participative, humane oriented, autonomous, and self-protective. These global leadership behaviors were defined in these studies as follows:

Charismatic/value-based leadership reflects the ability to inspire, to motivate, and to expect high performance from others based on strongly held core values. This kind of leadership includes being visionary, inspirational, self-sacrificing, trustworthy, decisive, and performance oriented.<sup>5</sup>

Team-oriented leadership reflects the ability to build a team and a common purpose among team members. Team leadership highly values team cohesiveness and a common purpose or goals. This kind of leadership includes being collaborative, integrative, diplomatic, no malevolent, and administratively competent.<sup>6</sup>

Participative leadership reflects the degree to which leaders involve others in making and implementing decisions.<sup>7</sup> This leadership style encourages input from others in decision-making and implementation; and emphasizes delegation and equality. It includes being participative and non-autocratic.

Humane-oriented leadership stresses compassion and generosity; and it is patient, supportive, and concerned with the well-being of others. This type of leadership includes modesty being supportive, considerate, compassionate, and generous and sensitivity to other people.<sup>8</sup>

Autonomous leadership is characterized by an independent, individualistic, and self-centric approach to leadership. It refers to independent and individualistic leadership, which includes being autonomous and unique.<sup>9</sup>

Self-protective emphasizes procedural, status-conscious, and 'face-saving' behaviors; and focuses on the safety and security of the individual and the group.<sup>10</sup> It reflects behaviors that ensure the safety and security of the leader and the group. It includes leadership that is self-

centered, status conscious, conflict inducing, face saving, and procedural.

These six global leadership behaviors emerged from the GLOBE research and were used to assess the different ways in which various cultural clusters viewed leadership. From this analysis, the researchers were able to identify a leadership profile for each cluster.

This paper is intended to analyse the preferred leadership style practice among the six global leadership style in one of Ethiopian ethnic group called Amhara. The analysis is focused on oral literature particularly proverbs. According to the GLOBE researchers Ethiopia is under the category of sub-Saharan African Leadership Profile. The next paragraph explains the finding of the GLOBE researchers in Sub-Saharan Africa Leadership Profile.

## II. Sub-Saharan Africa Leadership Profile

According to the study in Sub-Saharan Africa the GLOBE researchers find out the highest rank is given for human oriented leadership style modest, compassionate, and sensitive to the people. Then they believe a leader should be relatively charismatic/value based team oriented, participative, and self-protective.<sup>11</sup> Leaders who act self-sufficiently or act alone are viewed as less effective in these countries. In short, the Sub-Saharan Africa profile characterizes effective leadership as compassionate leadership. Like many other countries, these countries or populations believe leaders should be inspirational, collaborative, and not excessively self-centered.<sup>12</sup> Therefore leaders who act autonomously are ineffective in Sub-Saharan Africa countries.

Ethiopia is one of the sub-Saharan African countries therefore the ideal leadership practice is the human oriented –caring leadership. However the other leadership styles charismatic/value based, team oriented,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid,416

<sup>5</sup> Ibid,416

<sup>6</sup> Ibid,417

<sup>7</sup> Ibid,417

participative, and self-protective also have equal value next to the first.

This paper focused on one of the ethnic group in Ethiopia; called Amhara and on one of their preferred leadership style: Participative leadership. This leadership style ranked next to the human oriented style and equally valuable with charismatic and team oriented leadership styles. The analyses is focused on oral literature particularly proverbs of Amhara that particularly promote participation in decision making. These proverbs reflect how the Amhara culture encourages participation in leadership. The next topic about an introduction to The Amhara National Regional State

### III. The Amhara National Regional State (ANRS)

The Amhara National Regional State (ANRS) is one of the nine regional states of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE). In geographic terms, the ANRS is located between 9<sup>o</sup> 21' to 14<sup>o</sup> 0' North latitude and 36<sup>o</sup> 20' and 40<sup>o</sup> 20' East longitude.<sup>13</sup> The total area of the Amhara region is estimated to be 170, 752 square kilometers.<sup>14</sup> The region shares borders with Tigray region in the North, Afar and Oromia regions in the East, Oromia region in the South, and Benishangul region and The Sudan Republic in the West. The region is divided into 11 administrative zones including Bahir Dar special administration and 114 Woredas and populated with 19 million for the last Ethiopian fiscal year (BoFED, 2007).<sup>15</sup>

The Amhara societies have their own language and alphabets which called Amharic. Amharic is a Semitic language and the national language of Ethiopia. The majority of the peoples are speakers of Amharic in Ethiopia. These Amhara

societies have their own proverb which used for different purpose and for different context. This paper analyses some selective proverbs which encourages participation in decision making.

### IV. Some Common Features of Proverbs

Proverbs are short sayings capable of expressing truth, wisdom and similar other popularly accepted facts or ideas.<sup>16</sup> Proverbs are also popular sayings which contain advice or state a generally accepted truth used in our day to day communication. Because most proverbs have their origins in oral tradition, they are generally worded in such a way as to be remembered easily and tend to change little from generation to generation, so much so that sometimes their specific meaning is no longer relevant. The people's attitudes and thoughts are better reflected in oral genres. The role of proverbs in pointing out the cultural, social, political and economic relations of a certain community is really significant. This also includes reflecting the accepted or preferred leadership style among the society.

### V. Proverb related with advice( participation in decision making)

Advice implies the act of giving direction for someone who makes decision in his life. This participation in decision making is caused by the sincere request of the one who take advice. Generally elders (shemagla) are the one requested to give advice because of their age advancement they are expected to give direction to the younger generation. In the Amhara culture women have also a great role in giving dignified solution to fix problems.

The Amhara proverbs encourage taking advice someone for doing something regarding issues of life in order to get something and to become successful in life. The Amhara people believe in take advice and participate others in making decisions. The proverbs encourage the one who

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid,400

<sup>9</sup> Ibid,400

<sup>10</sup> Yonas Admamu, *the social implication of some Amharic Proverbs and Their Social Needs for Encouragement*. International Journal of Literature an Arts. 2015:3(5),1

<sup>11</sup> Ibid,2

<sup>12</sup> Ibid,2

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<sup>13</sup> Yaregal Emrie. Analysis of Gender Relations as Reflected in Amharic Proverbs and Oral Poems of West Gojjam Zone.2009,123

take advice and discourage the one who refuse to take advice. The person who does not want to take advice is considered as a fool and unworthy. To be a great man or to be successful in any dimension of life taking advice is crucial. A person may take advice from friends, families, relatives, coworkers, subordinates and from old people. The Ethiopian people, believe that it is always good to take advice to make decisions. To make their idea about taking advice for decision making in life very vivid and much more impacting, the people of this Ethiopian tribe often use proverbs to imprint on the minds of their fellow people.

### VI. Proverbs and their interpretation

The proverbs are collect from the society by asking elders and by referring some books on Amharic proverbs. The Amhara people proverbs are very wide in scope and address almost all political, social, economic and religious aspect of the Amhara culture. However this study is focuses only on the preferred leadership practice in Amhara people among the six leadership styles of the GLOBE study. The Amhara people there are also proverbs which endorse the other five leadership styles, however this study choose to discuss only about the participative leadership style. Therefore the collected proverbs are focused on participation in decisions making. We can categorize the collected proverbs in to three; the first groups of proverbs has the ton of appreciating taking advise, the second criticizing of refusing advise and third the role of women in decision making.

In this section there are some deliberately selected proverbs about taking advice. When a person takes an advice about some issue that person invited others to participate in the decision making. Therefore For this discussion I take advice as equivalent to participation in decision making.

1. መካር የሌለው ንጉስ ፣ አላንድ አመት አይነግስ ።

*Meaning:* A king who have no advisor never reign except for a year

**Interpretation:** the above proverb explains the king needs a good advisor to reign for a long time. The Amhara people believe leadership is a shared practice between the king (leader) and the people (follower). The Amhara people use this proverb to reflect the king should participate his people in his decision making in order to stay on the reign. This saying is also told to encourage people listen what other tell them. Or it is to express a person who was in a good position (status) or wealth has lost his fortune because of his/her naivetés to what they had and lack (absence) of advice.

2. ሸግግሉ ሳለ ምክር አይጠፋም

*Meaning:* As long as an elder is their there will not luck of advise

**Interpretation:** the elders are highly respected in Ethiopian society the same is true in the Amhara people. In the Amhara society elders are the peace makers, wonderful councilors and they are the very respected part of the society. This proverb reflects the elders are the guidance of the younger generation and the Youngers listen and respect the elder’s advice. Thus as long as the elders are among the society the younger generation is not going to lost because of luck of a wise counsel. So leaders (kings) also take advice from this highly valued part of the society in order to be accepted by the community.

3. ለሹመት ካልመከሩሉት ፣ ለጥርስ ካልከደኑሉት ።

*Meaning:* a leader (shome) without advice teeth without protection

**Interpretation:** this proverb explains how much important is advice for the leader. The Amhara people appreciate a leader who is participative and collaborative with the countryman. An autonomous leader is not accepted. Therefore this proverb reflects that if the leader is autonomous and does not want to take advice he/she might fail easily.

4. ቤት በማገር ፣ ንጉስ በባላገር ።

*Meaning:* the house by the column, the king by the countryman

**Interpretation:** this saying explains that the king is dependent on the country man. The Amhara people strongly believes in a strong relationship between the king (leader) and the people (subordinates) thus this proverb relate the king and the country man with the house with a column. In construction of a house the column is caring the other structure. The strength of the hose depends on the columns the same way the king stays on the reign as long as the countryman supports him. This proverb does not directly say about advice but it explains the strong communication and relationship then in a way it explains the Amhara people appreciate the king who work closely with the countrymen. It is also about participation in decision making.

5. በቅሎ እንደ ገራው ፣ ሀዝብ እንደመራው ።

*Meaning:* a mare is like her trainer, people like their leader

**Interpretation:** the Amhara people use this proverb to explain the leader is the one who guide his followers and the followers follow accordingly. This proverb reflects the interaction between the leader and the subordinates. In this proverb the reverse is also true the leader is like his followers. This society wants to work very closely with their leaders.

6. ምክረው ምክረው ፣ እንቢ ቢል መከራ ይምክረው ።

*Meaning:* Advice and advise him. If he refuses let trouble advise him.

**Interpretation:** This means, if you refuse to hear what people advice you, and be stubborn, it's up to you-difficulties will advise you. The Amhara people use this proverb to warn the one who refuse to listen advice because otherwise the next option is learning from trouble. In addition, this proverb also reflects the passions of the advisor to advice again and again while he/she is rejected. The Amharic speaker people use this proverb for the person who doesn't care about peoples who are thinking for himself/herself. At the same time he/she doesn't not only become careless for them but also for their advice. So this likes of person criticizing by using this proverb and makes him to get a lesson and

encouragement. This proverb reflects how much participation in decision making is a core value to the Amhara people.

7. ሞኝ ከመካረው ፣ እውር ከመራው (ይጣላል) ።

*Meaning:* the fool stand against his advisor and the blind fight against his guider

**Interpretation:** the Amhara people use this proverb to explain rejecting advice is deciding to go as a blind without the guider. Rejecting advice is equivalent to rejecting wisdom that is why the one who reject intelligence is the fool. This proverb has a negative tone to dampen the one who dis-value counsel. The above proverb shows that the person who doesn't listen his/her elder or experienced and professionals advise his/her problem will be advice himself/herself more. But the Amhara society uses this proverb to teach and encourage their people before fall and affected by his/her obstacles.

8. መላ እንደ ሴት ግርማ እንደሌሊት።

*Meaning:* Mala (solution) is to a woman as glory is to a night

**Interpretation:** these proverbs indicate that women are the best councilors. In Ethiopia including Amhara there are a number of proverbs that disgrace women, however in case of advice women can serve as a counselor to a man. There are also common beliefs that even kings and famous warriors get advice from their wives whenever they face critical problems. Mala refers to the wisest idea forwarded to solve a certain problem. In these proverbs the advice to be obtained from women is implied to be dignified and desirable. Thus the Amhara people put women significant place for decision making with elders and wise men.

9. የሴት መላ የሾህ አጥር ነው።

*Meaning:* Mala (Solution) of women is like a thorn fence.

**Interpretation:** this saying is like the above reflect the role of the women advice is the best key to solve a problem. It identifies with the thorn fence. The proverb indicates nobody tries

to pass through or jump over such a fence. This is because it is dangerous. The implication is that a woman's advice is very useful to attain a certain goal. The method devised by a woman protects not only a man but also a community at large. This proverb also magnifies the role of women participation in decision making protect the community.

10. ሴት ምትናገረው መፍትሄ ነው።

*Meaning:* Whatever a woman says is a solution.

**Interpretation:** this saying reflects that whatever advice women proposed is effective and shows the solution to a problem. This puts a women advice in important part of decision making. This proverb shows that the Amhara people gave attention to the women opinion and considered as always the best way to fix a problem.

The above three proverbs reflect the role of women counsel are very significant for a family, for a community and for the king. In this respect the Amhara proverbs reflect the highest position of a women advice in decision making among the society. According to these proverbs the Amhara people believe the leader should participate women in his decision to have the best solution.

## VII. Reflection on the proverbs

The above proverbs reflect how much Ethiopians believes in participating in decision making. The society does not want to put in the darkness while the leader make decisions alone and implemented. Rather they want to participate by giving advice. The first proverb clearly indicates if the king does not take advice his reign will not last long.

The proverbs also explain the society wants a leader who is close to his/her people and very relational and respect full. For example the proverb that relates the king with the countryman reflects how much the leader dependent on his people (subordinates). As the proverb also point out the people are like their

king (leader) the reverse is also true the leader should be like his followers.

In addition the proverbs also reflect the important role of women in giving advice. With this aspect the society give high value for women participation in decision making. The society believes the advice to be obtained from women is implied to be dignified and desirable, very useful to attain a certain goal within a family, a community and for the king (country). In this respect the Amhara proverbs reflect the highest position of a women advice in decision making among the society. According to the above three proverbs relate to women the people believe the leader should participate women in his decision to have the best solution. Thus the people put women significant place for decision making with elders and wise men.

Therefore to be successful leader among the Amhara people one of the leadership style the leader should adopt is giving respect for their opinion, participating them in decision making, considering every class of the society whether women or men, educated or not, elders, farmers soldiers as important to give inputs accordingly. This will build trust between the leader and the follower if the Amhara society will be a fence to protect their leaders to lead for long years otherwise the leader will fail.

## VIII. conclusion

In conclusion, the Amhara people of Ethiopia value taking advice and participation in decision making. the use of proverbs so much, and so often use proverbs as weapon of putting people and leaders (kings) on the right track in terms of behavior, particularly in making them to realize the fact that taking advice is a matter of extreme importance to be successful. According to the GLOBE researchers finding Ethiopia Particularly the Amhara region is located under the sub-Saharan Africa group among the ten country cluster and leadership style. The research finding also present the highest rank is given for human oriented leadership style. Then Participative leadership style ranked second with equal value with the other leader ship styles charismatic/value based, team oriented, and

self-protective leadership style. The proverbs about taking advice are also reflecting supportive, considerate which the elements of human oriented leadership style are.

My conclusion also agreed with the GLOBE findings Leaders who act independently or act alone are viewed as less effective in these countries. Leaders who act autonomously are seen as ineffective in Sub-Saharan Africa countries.

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