



Responsible leadership, an Afrocentric viewpoint: Leadership as a collective effort

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Purpose: Leadership in Africa faces numerous challenges, from famine and inequality to political instability and conflict. To overcome these obstacles, a new generation of leaders who are responsible and dedicated to upholding African traditions and values is needed. The Afrocentric perspective upholds self-versus being a community or team or group member within a leadership process; hence, 'I am because you are' and 'one finger cannot pick grain'. This article argues that humanistic, relational and constructionist leadership theories assist in understanding responsible leadership from its Afrocentric perspective. The study aimed to position the Afrocentric perspective of responsible leadership that emphasises spirituality, connectedness, collective wisdom and consciousness.

Design/methodology/approach: The study involved 10 executives from the public sector who have led core administration departments and entities for at least 4 years.

Findings/results: The Afrocentric perspective on responsible leadership places significant value on interactively considering followers' viewpoints. This approach emphasises humanism as an integral part of the leadership process, which requires spirituality, collective consciousness, a shared vision, collaborative partnerships and respect for the dignity of others as essential aspects of being a responsible leader.

Practical implications: A sense of self is essential to any effort to add value to the community. When one person succeeds, it is a victory for the entire team. Afrocentric responsible leadership emphasises humanism, embedding spirituality, connectedness, collective wisdom and consciousness.

Originality/value: The Afrocentric view of leadership sees leaders and followers as a collective, promoting a sense of connectedness using collective wisdom and consciousness.

Keywords: leadership; responsible leadership; Afrocentric perspective; Afrocentricity; Ubuntu; collective consciousness.

Introduction

South Africa is said to have progressive and effective policies compared to other countries on the continent (Plagerson et al., 2019); yet, it needs more responsible leadership to sustain socio-economic transformation. Being a responsive leader entails ability to attune and acknowledge the followers' perspectives while providing them with relevant information in a non-dictatorial manner, advancing choices, being exemplary and encouraging self-initiation (Bourgeault et al., 2022; Toendepi, 2021). Maak et al. (2016) assert that responsible leadership considers stakeholders' views and incorporates these into decision-making. Furthermore, responsible leadership is rooted in the concept of stakeholder theory, which recognises that leaders are accountable to diverse stakeholder groups. Being mindful of African history and diversity and practising Ubuntu significantly impact responsible leadership development.

The Afrocentric perspective to leading is underpinned by the Ubuntu principles that value humanism and embed collective consciousness in most societal concerns. Mbigi (2005) states that Afrocentricity is an African worldview that questions the veracity of Western knowledge about people of African descent. It is a perspective that seeks to focus on the African experience outside the Western perspective as it delves deep into the values of African knowledge through a comparative analysis of lived experiences (Royster, 2020). The Afrocentric approach to responsible leadership has been practised outside modern-day organisations; hence, its uptake in such organisations is still limited because of modernity, globalisation and coloniality, which position

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the perspective as inferior. The study highlights the Afrocentric perspective of responsible leadership, emphasising humanism (spirituality, connectedness), collective wisdom and consciousness. The article starts with the historical background highlighting the Afrocentric nuances of responsible leadership and discusses the similarities and differences between the Afrocentric perspective and how responsible leadership is used elsewhere. It further discusses the 'me-we-us' aspect, positioning how this unfolds in the Afrocentric perspective.

Background

In recent times, Africa, specifically South Africa, has faced a leadership crisis characterised by corruption, state capture and governance challenges in state-owned institutions and government departments (Felix, 2021). According to Ilo (2012), corrupt leadership significantly contributes to Africa's leadership crisis and hinders its development. Corruption, lack of transparency and failure to build consensus on development goals have caused those in power to become adversaries of progress and the people they lead (Ilo, 2012; Van der Walt, 2019). Corruption and governance issues also affect the private sector in South Africa. The high-profile scandals, such as the Steinhoff accounting irregularities and the Venda Building Society (VBS) Mutual Bank insolvency, have resulted in taxpayers losing roughly R2 billion (Motau, 2018). These incidents highlight a leadership crisis prevalent in all sectors of society.

During times of crisis, it is crucial to take responsibility and make wise choices that consider the impact on all stakeholders (Pounder, 2021). In the African context, it is essential to adopt Afrocentric approaches to successfully navigate through challenges in the discourse (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). From an Afrocentric perspective, responsible decision-making is needed to address the African leadership crisis. Afrocentric leadership entails building relationships with others and is rooted in the social contract of family and society (Sigger et al., 2010). This perspective remains a way of life in Africa, emphasising collective responsibility and empowerment. Afrocentric leadership promotes finding solutions together for the benefit of all (Asamoah & Yeboah-Assiamah, 2019; Toendepi, 2013). Ubuntu is a philosophy that considers everyone in a group and elevates the importance of everyone for the well-being and advancement of the group or community (Msila, 2015). An African saying, 'one finger cannot pick up a grain,' underscores the need for collective intelligence.

South Africa's current socio-economic situation is concerning. High unemployment rates of 32.9%, inequality at 0.65 and poverty affecting roughly 55.5% of the population (Statistics SA, 2023) are just a few issues plaguing the country. Poor housing and infrastructure in low-income areas have also caused frequent service delivery protests that have become common in South Africa because of poor policy implementation and a lack of responsible leadership.

With the challenges presented by coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and its long-term effects, the country must promptly address poverty, inequality, service delivery and unemployment to promote recovery, development and improved quality of life for its people. Therefore, for the necessary responsible leadership to drive and maintain socio-economic change in South Africa, support from all sectors of society is vital for rebuilding efforts.

Afrocentric responsible leadership prioritises community interests, connectedness (togetherness) and consensus, like the stakeholder approach that aligns the interests of all stakeholder groups (Brin & Nehme, 2019). According to Civera and Freeman (2019), stakeholder management is critical to modern-day organisations. It involves considering all stakeholders' interests and expectations and integrating them into the organisation's strategy. Consequently, organisations should establish relationships with stakeholders to generate value and address complex challenges (Civera & Freeman, 2019; Pedrini & Ferrie, 2018). Although the Afrocentric approach to responsible leadership shares similarities with other approaches, it is rooted in the interconnectedness of individuals. 'I am because you are, and one finger cannot pick grain', acknowledging mutual dependence and the need for cooperation. It further extends to positioning leadership as a collective activity where the individual is valued as part of the community who contributes to the collective wisdom basket.

Theoretical perspectives

Afrocentric perspective to responsible leadership

The Afrocentric approach to leadership is based on the principles of ubuntu, which prioritises humanism and emphasises the importance of collective consciousness in addressing societal issues. This approach to leadership emphasises dialogue, shared experiences and critical perspectives (Mbigi, 2005). Kamwangamalu (2013) concurs and states that Ubuntu-influenced leadership encompasses self-respect, respect for others, human dignity and life, sharedness, obedience, humility, solidarity, care, hospitality, interdependence and a sense of community. Other fundamental tenets of Ubuntu include religiosity (Gaim & Clegg, 2021), consensus building and dialogue (Toendepi, 2013). Humanism is a controversial, multifaceted concept. Nida-Rumelin and Winter (2024) point to several humanism facets like religious humanism (Hall, 2006), utopian humanism (Berriel, 2022) and existential humanism (Spinelli, 2012). Pless et al. (2021) state that a humane orientation is virtuous and relational with an understanding of others. Afrocentric humanism has mystical elements that go further to embed spirituality and connectedness. Spirituality is an inherent human characteristic that involves a deep connection to something greater than oneself, a belief in intrinsic worth and a sense of purpose in life (Sargeant & Yoxall, 2023). It is a complex and universal aspect of human experience, fundamental to human existence in Afrocentrism.

Leaders who are responsible show a humane approach in their interactions with stakeholders. Such individuals often feel a strong sense of responsibility towards the community, focussing on long-term prosperity (Mbigi, 2005). Afrocentricity advocates for collective welfare and ethical service provision to people and advances a sense of belongingness and a communal notion of human existence and well-being (Asamoah & Yeboah-Assiamah, 2019). It resonates strongly with the notion of 'people first', meaning that what belongs to one belongs to all and must be used for a shared interest. It also foregrounds the notion of community and urges individuals to assist in championing the interests of the collective society (Setlhodi, 2019). Afrocentrism is set to decolonise the Eurocentric (a modern construct consisting of Western prejudices about other people) outlook and ideas of what African means spiritually, ethically, philosophically and intellectually (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). Ubuntu is a worldview founded on the African philosophy whose core tenet is 'I am because we are' and emphasises solidarity and dependability among people (Mbigi, 2000). These principles of Ubuntu, which speak to an individual about how one relates to others and how others build the individual, speak to a value system of what governs African societies. It further advocates for altruistic approaches (Mele, 2009), being pro-people and collectivism as opposed to advancing the interests of a select or elite few (Eyong, 2019).

Key to the Ubuntu approach are people, teamwork, interconnectedness, caring, collective vision, performance and loyalty (Msila, 2022). The Afrocentric worldview recognises life as a cycle of birth, death and rebirth, meaning the spirit cannot be destroyed. Hence, the spirit of a being must be treated with dignity. This is where spirituality and connectedness emanate and connect communities to their ancestral lineage. Pirson et al. (2019) discuss dignity as the ability to establish self-worth, self-respect and appreciation for others, which almost speaks to the Afrocentric responsibility idiom of 'I am because you are'. Dignity in Afrocentrism is earned through behaviours that demonstrate reliability, trustworthiness, respect for others, altruism and all intrinsic values that can be classified as *humhu* (in the Shona language) or *ubuntu* (in the Zulu/Ndebele languages). Laszlo (2019) and Mele (2016) argue that preserving dignity goes beyond self-respect and worthiness to promoting well-being, shared prosperity and social flourishing.

Mbigi (1997) asserts that leaders must self-introspect to understand these values, particularly as African culture deeply underpins the collective consciousness of Ubuntu while allowing individual talent and subjectivity to flourish. Msila (2015) reflects that because post-colonial villages actively supported and celebrated individuals, it can be inferred that individual aspirations were reached through the community. Similarly, responsible leaders display the virtues of humility and moderation, allowing them to balance their inner selves with the needs of stakeholders (Pless et al., 2021).

Collectivism and communities

The key for the individual leader is to build a sense of community with others by displaying respect, responsibility and accountability towards self and others and by suspending personal goals and selfishness (Dolamo, 2013). There is an explicit acceptance of collectivism, relationship building and cooperation for the common good (Nzimakwe, 2014). Kamwangamalu (2013) argues that Ubuntu prioritises the group's interests over those of individual members and promotes accountability to each other. It is against this understanding that the achievement of group goals is premised on achieving the goals of individuals in the group (Msila, 2015; Nzimakwe, 2014). Hence, Gaim and Clegg (2021) state that people can pursue their interests by contributing to the community's common interests. In Afrocentricity, accountability is demanded of each community member, particularly regarding self again, through the principle of 'I am because you are', which enhances the dignity of self and others. Pirson et al. (2019) refer to dignity as an intrinsic value. As a result, Afrocentric social accountability inevitably influences organisations to be part of the communities in which they operate (Green-Thompson et al., 2017).

Collective vision

A vision of a group is the embodiment of the individuals forming the group (Pillay et al., 2013). It arises from consensus building through honest and elaborate discussions and the provision of equal opportunities to voice issues until an agreement or group cohesion is reached and a collective vision is formed (Gaim & Clegg, 2021; Toendepi, 2013). Pillay et al. (2013) and Mbigi (2000) explain that the formation of the collective vision and the common good is through the Ubuntu spirit and collective understanding that each one's dignity must be respected, advancing solidarity, teamwork, servicing others and interdependence. Bulti (2020) concurs with Mbigi (2000) that for organisations to thrive, the vision of an organisation must be a product of teamwork and solidarity. Workplaces practising Ubuntu foster a collective vision (Msila, 2015), which leads to their employees identifying as organisational citizens, boosting their collective identity.

Partnership

Steenkamp et al. (2022) and Van Eych and Steenkamp (2021) discuss the multi-stakeholder partnerships founded on sustainability and sustainable development goals (SDGs). Sustainability seeks to achieve the triple bottom line of profits, societal well-being and the environment without negatively influencing the needs of future generations (Scherer & Voegtlin, 2020). This approach advocates for all organisations across the public, private and non-government sectors to infuse the ethos of sustainability in daily operations (Bostrom et al., 2018) with the notion that 'a person is because of the community' or the notion that 'it takes a community to raise a child', all speaking to the common good and a sense of responsibility. It takes a responsible leader to foster

partisanship through open communication for the betterment of the community (Msila, 2015). Afrocentricity embraces forming partnerships among people to advance community aspirations (Jorgensen & Graven, 2021). Partnership in the Afrocentric context is based on communal ties to build permanent relationships and advance community interests. Community members willingly cooperate and form partnerships to achieve a collective vision for survival and sustainability (Dudzai, 2021). Mbigi (2007, p. 297) identifies the primary values of Afrocentric leadership as 'respect for the dignity of others, group solidarity, teamwork, service to others, and interdependence'. Hence, responsible Afrocentric leadership embraces humanistic management practices, balancing self with stakeholders and being sociable, humble and tolerant enough to enhance mutual sympathy and acceptance.

Responsible leadership in general

Responsible leadership is the skill and aptitude that involves establishing, refining and sustaining trustful relationships with diverse stakeholders and coordinating responsible action to achieve a meaningful and commonly shared business vision (Maak, 2007). Ozkan and Uzum (2021) posit that responsible leadership is the ability to design and execute responsibility-orientated activities to create relationships grounded in trust with internal and external stakeholders and create shared values. Toendepi (2021) also argues that responsible leadership is responsive to the needs, concerns and interests of those being led. Responsible leadership proposes the need for organisations to go beyond immediate economic interests and to advance corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Haque et al., 2019; King IV, 2016). It is a concept that describes an organisation's approach to voluntarily integrate stakeholder expectations in its operations to achieve its bottom line (environment, social, economic and sustainability) (Arena et al., 2019; Haque et al., 2019; King IV, 2016). It converges with the Afrocentric perspective because it allows people to shape their reality for a sustainable future.

Singh and Misra (2021) define CSR as an approach that recognises business sustainability as interdependent with society's existence and growth. Hence, responsible leadership connects CSR with stakeholder theory (Stahl & De Luque, 2014). Therefore, CSR and Afrocentric humanism have become similar in their concern for the populace's well-being. Maak et al. (2016) affirm that responsible leadership is concerned with broader outcomes involving stakeholder satisfaction and reaching higher social needs from an organisational and societal perspective. It is about being responsible as an individual leader (possessing values and virtues) and ultimately as a collective through looking after each other. Szczepanska-Woszozyna et al. (2015) state that the significance of responsible leadership in the current volatile environment is an interactive process with stakeholders driven by shared goals while espousing values and principles of ethics as a basis for interactions. In Afrocentric interactions, achieving consensus is where mutual learning takes place.

Muff et al. (2020) assert that modern-time leaders must be weavers, stitching together varying societal stakeholders into a cohesive societal fabric. Afrocentric humanism is also about putting heads together to garner collective intelligence. Ozkan and Uzum (2021) concur that responsible leadership concerns the ability to design and execute responsibility-orientated activities to create relationships grounded in trust with internal and external stakeholders and the creation of shared values. Some crucial facets of responsibility serve as preconditions to responsible leadership, including the responsibility to self, the team, the organisation and the community in which the organisation operates or serves. Responsible leadership depends on stakeholder satisfaction as a crucial aspect of being responsible.

Responsibility to self

In the Afrocentric perspective, understanding self is a virtue required to be a good leader. Hence, self-responsibility and self-awareness become interwoven with spirituality. Emotional intelligence encompassing personal and social competencies (Goleman, 1998) is necessary for a leader's ability to comprehend the necessity for working with, noting the worth of people from different backgrounds and engaging them for a shared goal (Crawford et al., 2020; Maak et al., 2016). Similarly, the responsible leader requires ethical intelligence to manage emerging conflicts of interest and ethical dilemmas and to act according to humane and moral values (Pless & Maak, 2005). However, in Afrocentric responsible leadership, this creates a challenge that weakens the process as balancing conflicting stakeholder interests delays decision-making and almost disempowers the leaders as leadership becomes a shared and/or collective effort. Further, self-responsibility means having the innate drive to take charge and initiate action, especially in a leadership position (Haque et al., 2019). Pedrini and Ferrie (2018) and Civera and Freeman (2019) argue that a responsible leader must have the ability to respond to internal issues or external challenges. Similarly, Sefako (2021) and Maier (2019) state that self-responsibility involves acknowledging that every action comes with consequences, and that accountability is demanded. Taking responsibility for oneself can also cultivate empathy, which is the capacity to understand and relate to the experiences of others (Alam et al., 2018), as in Afrocentric responsible leading.

Responsibility to the team

Leaders do not work alone; they rely on a shared sense of group membership with followers within a specific social setting, such as a team, department or organisation (Van Dick et al., 2018). The Afrocentric perspective emphasises giving a 'voice to the voiceless' by embracing numerous viewpoints to be tabled and then reaching a consensus on the challenge and how it can be solved. This fosters unity, promoting a 'we' mentality instead of a 'me versus them' mindset. Therefore, leadership primarily involves the process of social influence, which may be swayed by an individual's membership in

various social groups (Northouse, 2021). The convergence here is that Afrocentric mutuality in decision-making also views leadership as a social effort. Socially responsible actions include facilitating the free flow of information between leaders and team members, resolving complaints and fostering a culture that promotes employee satisfaction (Singh & Misra, 2021). Pless et al. (2012) argue that a leader's obligation to their team and/or stakeholders drives them to connect with team members to deal with challenges collaboratively. Hence, groups operate on a collective mindset where all members contribute to identifying and solving problems, as in Afrocentric thinking.

Responsibility to the community

Being responsible to the community is central to the Afrocentric responsible leadership. Hence, leaders must ensure that their organisation's actions sustainably benefit the communities in which they operate. By acknowledging the life cycle of birth, death and rebirth, Afrocentrism regards generations as transient caretakers of the organisation and the environment. Sustainable organisations operate with respect, truth and compassion in communities because failure to do so harms sustainability. It thus becomes essential to consider how day-to-day operations and governance unfold for value creation (Voegtlin et al., 2020).

Leadership practices also involve being sensitive to shareholders while considering their interests in tandem with those of other stakeholders (employees, unions, suppliers and communities) in a coherent strategic direction. An Afrocentric perspective on responsible leadership is synonymous with this kind of sensitivity because of its thrust to draw from the African values that have sustained African communities and nations for generations. This perspective is about considering or acknowledging others in relation to self and attaining the common good (Mbigi, 2000). However, the Afrocentric approach to responsible leadership goes further to embrace leaders or heroes as part of the community, thereby collapsing the leadership hierarchy and advancing connectedness, interdependency and collective decision-making informed by collective intelligence.

Methodology

The research adopted an interpretivist phenomenological strategy, which involves learning and generating knowledge from the experiences of others (Cooper, 2019). Phenomenology refers to how humans make sense of the world around them (Saunders et al., 2019). The researchers sought to extract the experiences and actions of participants and derive meaning through interpretation and narration (Jarvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2020; Saunders et al., 2012). Ten participants who have served at least 4 years in the public sector were purposively sampled. In qualitative research, the sample size depends on the design used; for a phenomenological design, 3–10 participants can yield sufficient data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Purposive sampling required the researchers to use their subjective

judgement in sample selection to effectively respond to the research questions and meet the research objectives (Saunders et al., 2012). Creswell and Poth (2016) concur that purposive sampling is choosing the most appropriate participants to gather comprehensive and relevant data related to the research topic. The goal was to ensure that the data collected were rich, abundant and comprehensive. This allowed the researchers to gain the necessary insights and depth of understanding to respond to the research questions (Creswell, 2014).

Data collection and analysis

Qualitative research data can be collected using interviews, observations, audio-visual materials and documents (Creswell, 2014). Semi-structured interviews were utilised because of the flexibility of adapting the questions from one participant to the next while accommodating the context and the generation of themes (Saunders et al., 2019). An interview guide was designed based on the research questions and research objectives. Most of the questions that controlled the interviewing process were on responsible leadership practices and how these aspects can be used in the transformational processes in the public sector. Table 1 shows some of the controlling questions that resulted in the theme of responsible leadership in communities.

Each participant signed a consent form to be audio-recorded after receiving an information letter about the research and the rights of participants. Microsoft Teams was selected as the platform for this research because of the COVID-19 pandemic and increased demand for virtual interactions. Additionally, the platform offered audio and automated transcript features necessary before data analysis. The rationale for the semi-structured interviews was to attain an in-depth understanding of responsible leadership practices. In the information letter to participants, voluntary participation, confidentiality of data and anonymity of participants were emphasised. The data were analysed using the six stages of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2016). The analysis was done manually using a colour coding system where each colour represented recurring codes, which were regrouped into sub-themes and, subsequently, a theme. In the first stage, the researchers arranged the data for analysis and read over the scripts to understand what was being said before embarking on the initial coding (stage 2). An example of the latter stage is shown in Table 2.

TABLE 1: Questions included in the interview guide.

What kind of leadership do you think is required to spearhead transformation?
What are the responsible leadership practices that can sustain socio-economic transformation?
What constitutes responsible leadership and should be a prerequisite for leaders today?
What behaviours are expected to be displayed by responsible leaders?
What challenges are faced by those who seek to practice responsible leadership?
What are the indicators of success for transforming the socio-economic landscape through responsible leadership?
What recommendations can responsible leaders follow in the sustainable transformation process?

TABLE 2: Example of coding.

Participant script and highlighted codes	Sub-theme
You need one who is highly accessible, accessibility ... This a sign of responsible leadership if you accept that we are about and ought to be about collaborative leadership. You can never collaborate with someone who is inaccessible or is not accessible to you. So, accessibility? Yeah, being accessible and open-door policy. What should define you is what it means to be a responsible leader. Secondly, the ability to communicate, as I said, when things can be done and when they will be done and when things can be done and why they cannot be done. Communication becomes one of your defining features, and thirdly, the ability to maintain tactical strategic awareness. You need to know what changes are happening in the city. The city is hot and cold in different areas. There might be service delivery there and then another there. That is an indication of the temperature. So, if you are not maintaining the tactical, strategic awareness of the temperature, that is the new city-specific point. You are entirely irresponsible leaders. You must sense that temperature and be able to respond to it, both in terms of the needs ... So it is just about being aware of what you are dealing with, being aware of what you are confronted with and being able to respond.	Collaborative responses Leader accessibility A responsible leader Understanding and knowing stakeholder expectations Honest communication with stakeholders Tactical, strategic awareness An irresponsible leader Awareness of the operating environment and politics

The grouping of codes according to their shared meaning and similarity was the basis for forming sub-themes. Stage 3 involved generating themes. The emerging themes were formed by merging sub-themes with similar characteristics, as illustrated in Table 3.

During stage 4, the themes were reviewed to ensure their accuracy and usefulness in answering the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2016). In stage 5, the researchers named and defined the themes by assigning a representative name to the codes in each of them. Stage 6 involved presenting the data based on themes and using direct participant quotes to support the narrative (Percy et al., 2015). Direct quotes ensure credibility and act as a check against the researchers' interpretation of participants' words. Seven themes emerged; however, the narrative is based on the one theme of responsible leadership in communities and its three sub-themes of collectivism and community, collective vision and partnership.

Ethical considerations

The institution's IPPM Ethics Committee granted ethical clearance on 28 June 2021 IPPM-2021-522(M). Permission to conduct research was sought from the organisation under study. The critical ethical considerations applied in the study included obtaining informed consent, voluntary participation, data confidentiality and anonymity (Gray, 2019). The informed consent from participants was used to ensure voluntary participation. The document also detailed the participants' rights to either agree or decline to be audio recorded and to withdraw from the study without any consequence. Saunders et al. (2019) state that ensuring the integrity of the information collected in research is the researcher's responsibility, as they should guarantee confidentiality and anonymity to participants. All participants were identified with a pseudonym, X1–X10.

Measures were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative research. The criteria assessed credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability (Connelly, 2016). Nowell et al. (2017) state that trustworthiness involves establishing if the research findings are worth noting and considering. Hence, credibility refers to the degree of trust that can be placed in the research accurately reflecting the participants' experiences (Moon et al., 2016). The researchers explained the qualitative research procedures used, ensuring transparency and authenticity while checking for biases.

TABLE 3: Generating themes.

Theme	Sub-theme
Collaborative response to challenges	Collaborative responses
	Leader accessibility
Understanding stakeholder expectations	Understanding and knowing stakeholder expectations
	Honest communication with stakeholders
Facets of responsible leadership	A responsible leader
	An irresponsible leader
Strategic awareness of the environment	Tactical strategic awareness
	Awareness of the operating environment and politics

Transferability was ensured through thick descriptions of the context, population characteristics and sample because transferability measures the extent to which the findings can be helpful in other settings (Connelly, 2016).

Confirmability refers to how others can verify research findings. In this study, the researchers maintained a transparent record of the methodology and analysis procedures to ensure the findings were reliable and reproducible (Connelly, 2016). Ensuring dependability in research involves maintaining consistency and adhering to the accepted standards for the chosen research design. The analysis process was logical, clear and in line with the research methods and plans established from the study's outset. Moon et al. (2016) and Nowell et al. (2017) emphasise the importance of aligning the research process with these standards to ensure dependability.

Results

Table 4 shows the overarching theme of responsible leadership in communities and its sub-themes.

The study explored responsible leadership from an Afrocentric viewpoint to understand how leadership is a collective effort and to position the responsibilities of the self in the collective.

Collectivism and community

The findings showed that one must prioritise the group's interests and identify as a group member to achieve self-actualisation. Hence, leaders achieve responsible citizenship by prioritising their citizen role through self-responsibility. The participants understood that responsibility extends beyond the organisation into the families of the employees and the communities and is a reciprocal process:

TABLE 4: Theme and sub-themes.

Theme	Sub-themes
Responsible leadership in communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collectivism and community • Collective vision • Partnership

'From my understanding, it starts with being responsible. To yourself and for yourself because when you are given that responsibility, you are not leading only the team or leading an organisation, you are also responsible for the families of those individuals you lead.' (X9, female, age range 45–55)

'Responsible for others, especially me as a leader, being responsible for my team, but also, I am responsible for myself.' (X5, female, age range 40–50)

'The responsibility and my understanding of responsibility is you make others responsible as well as much as you are responsible.' (X7, male, age range 60–70)

Being responsible to self and taking responsibility allows leaders to show empathy, care for others and lead from a space of collectivism. The participants acknowledged that decisions cannot be made in isolation, as the group and/or team must be involved in the decision-making process. Afrocentrism encourages involvement; hence, decision-making is based on a collective understanding and consensus; both require a humanistic inclination to achieve the best results:

'Include people in decision making, include them in planning. Once they understand that they are included, they also take ownership.' (X3, male, age range 40–45)

'You need someone with empathy as well for others and that you do not just decide and then move, and because your decisions matter, you also have to bring in the team, ... so, consensus-seeking.' (X1, male, age range 40–50)

Participants kept referring to empathy, which is feeling for others, a humanistic characteristic:

'Empathy becomes very important because it delves into the emotional understanding of people that you deal with, whether it is a public or governmental department or your colleagues' (X7, male, age range 60–70)

In an Afrocentric collective, everyone adds value to the progress of a group/team/community. In this context, it is essential to maintain a certain level of reciprocal accountability. This means group members must be honest and hold each other accountable for the decisions made. It involves being responsible to oneself and others within the group and the whole group. After all, the group can only succeed through collective efforts and commitment; hence, 'I am because you are'. Participant X1 said:

'And then there is responsibility amongst your colleagues, as a member of the executive you have to keep each other accountable, and you also be kept by them accountable' (X1, male, age range 40–50)

'There should be some form of collective responsibility and collective accountability.' (X3, male, age range 40–45)

'To be responsible for the staff or human capital that you manage but being responsible in the first instance in the way services are delivered ethically and responsibly, you align the primary needs of the community.' (X8, male, age range 50–60)

For members of an executive team, it is crucial to understand that one is part of the leadership community and responsible for all aspects of the organisation. It is not about serving a particular niche but all stakeholders, including those outside the immediate circle. A strong sense of altruism and willingness to serve others must exist, which collapses the silo mentality:

'I may be in finance if I get a call from one of the citizens. Uh, saying ... I have got a pothole next to my house ... I am not usually the one that handles it. It is not management's responsibility ... So much that I can easily say to that person. Sorry, you have called the wrong number; however, you cannot do that as a leader. Irrespective of whether this person has called the wrong department, they have called the right organisation. I must take responsibility for that call and make sure that the call is addressed.' (X10, male, age range 40–50)

'You are not only responsible for making sure that the organisation is not brought into disrepute, but you are carrying the hope of the people out there because we are called to serve; we are public servants.' (X9, female, age range 45–55)

Collective vision

Moreover, the vision of the group/team/community must be a product of the diverse members. Therefore, putting heads together for collective intelligence is a basis for a humanistic approach to developing a collective vision. However, the individual leader who introduces an option must be passionate about their proposal and be able to listen to the variation of the vision by giving a voice to the voiceless:

'So, all I am saying is that you must build a team. To be united, loyal, and passionate about your shared vision.' (X7, male, age range 60–70)

'Pulling your team, getting them to understand your vision, getting their vision as well, and seeing how all these visions can work together.' (X5, female, age range 40–50)

It is also the responsibility of each leader to see that the vision is clearly understood at all levels to channel resources towards worthy causes that benefit the community. Responsible Afrocentrism values honesty and equal opportunities for group members:

'You are clear about what should happen because you have listened to your people. You have a vision: to improve your people's livelihoods and ensure the government purse is protected and cared for ... we are not abusing government money.' (X5, female, age range 40–50)

Bulti (2020), Pillay et al. (2013) and Mbigi (2000) agree that for consensus to be achieved, each member of the community must be given a voice and dignity to enhance teamwork and solidarity:

'Bottom-up approach and top-down, whatever you do is to cascade to the lowest level within the organisation. Suppose people at the lowest level within the organisation do not understand your vision and mission; in that case, having a common approach and understanding becomes challenging.' (X3, male, age range 40–45)

Partnerships

The mantras of Ubuntu are 'I am because we are', 'it takes a community to raise a child' or 'hands wash each other'. These mantras foreground the crucial nature of stakeholder engagement platforms in building partnerships to achieve a collective vision and maximise scarce resources. Partnership in the Afrocentric approach is based on how the community is connected in continuously evolving relationships:

'Having a functioning, social, economic partnership, particularly with your industry leaders, be it socially, NGOs, civic society. However, having just taught your citizens to be more responsible.' (X1, male, age range 40–50)

'Have some form of strategic partnerships. You can look at NGOs within specific areas.' (X3, male, age range 40–45)

'... and networking with other spheres of government, including the private sector and most importantly the NGOs.' (X7, male, age range 60–70)

Responsible leaders prioritise being accessible and collaborating with stakeholders to create a functional partnership that is mutually beneficial. With limited resources and increasing demands, effective collaboration is essential to pull resources and respond to challenges collectively. Hence, the African saying, 'one finger cannot pick up a grain', emphasises the collective partnership efforts:

'To be present in the moment with everybody, and that only happens when you identify whom to collaborate- with? On what projects and on what programs.' (X1, male, age range 40–50)

'Partnering with big businesses to develop the region.' (X4, male, age range 40–50)

'... here will be those that bring their money, and others will bring time and themselves, and then it does not feel unequal or without feeling more important than the rest.' (X5, female, age range 40–50)

'So, we want to have a partnership with the people that are affected so that the solution is relevant.' (X10, male, age range 40–50)

Partnerships with key stakeholders allow for collaborative responses to challenges:

'They come from various stakeholders; the private sector, for example, provides solutions, communities themselves provide solutions, and the entire spectrum of collaborative leadership. Other spheres of government provide leadership in their specific areas. Accessibility, both upward and downward.' (X1 male, age range 40–50)

'The collaboration between the different departments and entities is about being able to operate in a highly complex environment, so that must be understood. So, you need a leader who can tiptoe around all those things and still provide leadership because, as I said earlier, our day-to-day job is never the same.' (X3, male, age range 40–45)

Honest communication is premised on the acceptance that while there is a partnership, there are diverse views from the different stakeholders or those serviced by the partnership.

'Communicate when things can be done and when they will be done and when things can be done and why they cannot be done.' (X1, male, age range 40–50)

'Communication and building of trust that if I say roads shall be built, that road must be built. We must not make promises we cannot fulfil because that undermines confidence. The truth of the matter is that communities will only forgive us if they truly know the mammoth task that we are confronted with and the lack of resources to fulfil that mammoth task; it is going to be about honesty and integrity, it is going to be about being true to the moment.' (X1, male, age range 40–50)

'Provide that feedback, and it is all about that feedback loop and continuous stakeholder engagement through your stakeholder matrix so that people understand where you are and what you will be doing at any particular time.' (X3, male, age range 40–45)

According to the Afrocentric perspective, dialogue is highly regarded for achieving consensus. When group members appreciate their diversity, it enhances self-dignity and dignifies the contributions:

'... and honest communication claims no easy victory speak.' (X7, male, age range 60–70)

'So, when you go into a community, we should be, as a leader, able to have our finger on the pulse. Who is X or the family that X comes from? What are the cultural norms and standards? What is acceptable or not acceptable? How do I link up with her? So when I go to the Afrikaans community in the city, I come out with pamphlets in Afrikaans ... I come from ... I was born in ... , so I need to speak Afrikaans because I know it ... we need to be able to communicate and pass on information in the language that people understand.' (X7, male, age range 60–70)

The Afrocentric approach converges with other views about responsible leadership in advancing CSR and paying particular attention to the aspirations of communities. However, it goes further to embrace spirituality, connectedness and interdependence, thus collapsing the leadership hierarchy.

Discussion

The study highlighted the Afrocentric perspective of responsible leadership, which views responsible leadership as a collective effort. The main finding was that Afrocentric responsible leadership is similar to how responsible leadership is viewed elsewhere in many respects, except that it is underpinned by Ubuntu principles that value humanism. Hence, it differs from how it is viewed elsewhere in that it emphasises spirituality, connectedness, collective wisdom and consciousness. Spirituality involves a deep connection to something greater than oneself, a belief in intrinsic worth and a sense of purpose in life. Transcendence is identified as a critical spiritual characteristic (Sargeant & Yoxall, 2023). It gives a responsible leader a sense of self-worth and self-responsibility. In the Afrocentric perspective, understanding self is a virtue required to be a good leader. Hence, self-responsibility and self-awareness become interwoven with spirituality.

Mbigi (2005) and Msila (2022) state that the strength of Afrocentric leadership is in embracing humanistic management practices, which balance self and stakeholders with humility and tolerance to enhance mutual understanding. The Afrocentric perspective upholds self-versus being a community/team/group member within a leadership process; hence, 'I am because you are' and 'one finger cannot pick grain'. The findings show that Afrocentric humanism is also about putting heads together to garner collective intelligence, hence connectedness, collective wisdom and consciousness. The leadership learning process from the Afrocentric perspective is embedded in continuous deliberations, where everybody has a right to be heard before a consensus is reached. It is quite a lengthy process, and the downside is the loss of lead time. As a result, achieving consensus in a crisis becomes a challenge. Secondly, stakeholders' interests vary, and a challenge is reaching a middle ground. Thirdly, Afrocentric responsible leadership promotes power sharing, which involves the top leader being vulnerable and disempowered in favour of a collective leadership model.

However, its hallmark is that self-champions the interests of the collective (Setlhodi, 2019), are altruistic (Mele, 2009), pro-people (Eyong, 2019) and put people first (Ayony, 2019). Kamwangamalu (2013) argues that prioritising group interests in Afrocentric leadership breed accountability to each other. Sefako (2021) and Maier (2019) agree that taking responsibility means accepting the consequences of one's decisions and being accountable for them. Hence, leadership is regarded as a collective effort where decisions require a collective understanding (Msila, 2015; Nzinakwe, 2014; Pless et al., 2021). Therefore, the Afrocentric view of responsible leadership values harmony, dialogue and interdependence (Mbigi, 2005); hospitality (Gaim & Clegg, 2021) and interconnectedness and celebrating achievements (Msila, 2022), which requires a close partnership and collective ownership of decisions.

Conclusion

The study explored responsible leadership from an Afrocentric perspective. The findings showed that the Afrocentric perspective of responsible leaders genuinely considers the welfare of the team/community. Humane, highly consultative and inclusive management practices constitute the centrepiece of responsible leadership from an Afrocentric perspective. Such an approach creates a sense of belonging, corresponding to organisational citizenship. From an Afrocentric angle, responsible leadership is a collective effort where individual leaders advance group interests because *I am because you are*, and *one finger cannot pick grain*. As a result, the sense of self is embedded in the community because responsible leaders must have responsible followers, creating a dove-tailing sequence of taking responsibility and being accountable and inclusive. Afrocentric leaders can juggle cultural diversity and varied stakeholder demands because of their people centeredness. The differentiator from

an Afrocentric angle is that responsible leadership is a collective humane effort where individual leaders bring value to advance group interests because 'I am because you are' and 'one finger cannot pick grain'; hence, we need each other in all we do.

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Authors' contributions

J.T. supervised the research process, reviewed the literature and wrote the article. K.C. conceptualised the research and collected and analysed the data.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, J.T., upon reasonable request.

Disclaimer

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