

Concerted Effort on Conflict Approaches: An Ubuntu Theory that Generates New Approaches in the Fourth Industrial Revolution Era

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ABSTRACT

The rapid pace of the industrial growth frolicked a crucial role in the previous conflict approaches. However, conflict approaches are expected to transform in terms of technological change and socioeconomic impact. The current conflict approaches are dominated by Western theories created for individualist cultures that stand in contrast to the communal culture of African and Asian citizens. As a result, Afrocentric and Asia centric theories are under threat from the proliferation of foreign ideologies and concepts, which have long influenced conflict approaches. The methodology on the Ubuntu practical applicant generates new perspectives on conflict approaches in the fourth industrial revolution era. Quester-views, focus group discussions (FGD) and discussions were used as data collection tools. The data was managed using the Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) package, which is a qualitative data-management and analysis tool. The tendency has been to concentrate analyses around prevention, management and resolutions with little reference to the fundamental consensus-building blocks of a social value system within the fourth industrial revolution era. As a result, this conflict approaches in this article should be accepted within the African indigenous local knowledge system on Ubuntu in African terms.

Keywords: Ubuntu, consciousness, conflict

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INTRODUCTION

In Africa, revolutionary armed struggle against colonialism marked the genesis of major conflicts on the world map. The revolutionary armed

struggles challenged the colonial system viewpoints. Conflict as it stands is constrictive, destructive, violent and non-violent depending on its nature and approaches to conflict have been marred with different methodologies like conflict prevention, management, resolutions and transformation. These approaches are not an end into themselves but evolutionary and not revolutionary. Ball, Fayemi, Olonisakin and Williams (2003) observed that conflict essentially aims at the efficient and effective provision of state and human security whether violence or non-violence, positive or negative. The general assumption is that conflict seeks to increase the ability of states, communities and individuals to meet the range of both internal and external human security needs. The AU policy framework (2011) assets that, conflict transformation is a process by which countries formulate or re-orientate the policies, structures, and capabilities of institutions and groups engaged in conflict in order to make them more effective, efficient and responsive to national issues. As a result, conflict is evolutionary not revolutionary. This is an Afrocentric ownership of the definition of conflict transformation. The AU's Tripoli Declaration (2009) reinforces the awareness of the aspect of ownership of concepts in that, Africans comprehend the predicaments and challenges better than those who approach conflict in Africa from far away. Africans are on familiar terms with solutions which can be employed, and how they are able to get there, because these challenges are theirs and they will live with the consequences,

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is no single agreed definition of conflict. The challenge relates to ownership of concepts and definitions. As a result, Africans suffer from what is considered as the tyranny of definitions in content, philosophy and ideology. Therefore, conflict (the actor) does not address the needs of Africans (the acted upon), because it is prescriptive in nature and not adapted to local realities, definitions and perceptions of Africans. Fischer (2000) indicates that prescriptive models has inherent limitations and inadequacies, which compromise their acceptance by Africans. As it stands, current conflict perspectives are associated with capitalism and imperialism domination, driven by imperialist state institutions as conflict moguls. The fact is that the current conflict models were not crafted by Africans but by European architects who continue to popularise it and has a reason. This perception of conflict from Europeans needs to be examined in order to reconstruct the fundamental building blocks of conflict as a process within the levels of consciousness from an Afrocentric social value system.

In reality, conflict cannot be resolved and managed because conflict begins with a proposition known as thesis. A nullification of that thesis is antithesis, and the transformative process is synthesis whereby the two conflicting ideas are reconciled to form a new proposition. This philosophical approach to conflict is related to Ubuntu philosophy which has a positive view of self, community, the world and the future. As a result, conflict approaches often fail to resolve protracted conflicts because they assume a pre-given set of disputed goals and ideas and unsatisfied needs. It overlooks the political and social processes through which the events determine the set of disputed goals and ideas which constitute identities of the conflicting parties in relation to both the disputed goals and ideas. As a result, conflict moguls exploit this gap. Conflict moguls have devised words like conflict prevention, resolutions, and management without the philosophical approach of Africans conceptual frameworks within their consciousness.

According to Searle (2005), consciousness is the state or quality of awareness or of being aware of an external object or something within oneself. It is a process of enlightenment based on two key areas of awareness and skill. As a result, the levels of consciousness within which conflict as a process can be located are based on awareness (practical response) and skills (consciousness). However, there are no approved scholarly definitions about the levels of consciousness and this article is an attempt to present them from an Afrocentric Ubuntu perspective. The idea is to promote dignity and strengthen relations between member of the public (those without the intellect) and the academia (those with the intellect). The challenge is that people no longer seek peace for the noble purpose of serving the public, but as a means of acquiring wealth fraudulently as conflict entrepreneurs. Therefore, a theoretical framework of *Ubuntu* philosophy can help in locating conflict as a process within the levels of consciousness.

Theoretical Framework

Raburu, Okeyo and Kwna (2012) observe that the *Ubuntu* philosophy, which is centered on the family unit, its values and socialization systems, is the foundation of a value system of personhood in the conflict equation. The idea is to meet the human needs of the poorest people using a community centered approach within the conflict process. The challenge, therefore, is to ensure effective structures, processes, values, standards and attitudes that shape decision making about conflict in Africa from an Afrocentric perspective which should be locally owned and driven by Africans.

Africa is still dominated by theories created within and for individualist cultures that are inconsistent with the communal culture of African society. The African *Ubuntu* philosophy is based on oral practice. The fact that African indigenous knowledge is not written down and is mostly transmitted from one generation to the next constitutes creates a major challenge in academic circles. Unlike Western ideologies, which are well documented, the African *Ubuntu* philosophy does not have an ancient written tradition, making it very difficult to implement fully. Lately, various studies have been conducted in order to help people to understand and appreciate *Ubuntu* philosophy, which, albeit associated with positive attributes. However, the philosophy is not well disseminated within African societies but it is gaining ground. The challenge is that students in this fourth industrial era are failed if they do not apply the Western theories that they are taught in schools, and are ill equipped to apply anything else.

The *Ubuntu* philosophy is a value system which forms the backbone of many African societies. According to Hailey (2008), *Ubuntu* is the fountain from which many actions and attitudes flow because it is a family centred method (an African centred approach) which holds that people are made for interdependence. Margaret (2014) assert that *Ubuntu* is a philosophical affinity and kinship process among the indigenous people of Africa. Furthermore, there is a consensus among scholars that *Ubuntu* represents an alternative voice to Western or Eurocentric perspective. The practical application of *Ubuntu* in conflict approaches entails valuing ourselves (conflict prevention) through our relationships in nation-building (conflict resolution) and encouraging collective work (conflict management), consensus- building (conflict transformation) as levels of consciousness which are evolutionary. Shutte (1993:16) observes that,

The *Ubuntu* philosophy is a web of reciprocal relationships in which subject and object become indistinguishable, and in which the western aphorism „I think, therefore I am“ is substituted for „I participate, therefore I am.“ It is a concept that has particular resonance with those concerned about building civil society, enhancing community relations and promoting social cohesion. In this context, *Ubuntu*“s role in community development is about the „we“ and our ability to accomplish things that we can only do with others. It is about building „a network of delicate relationships of interdependence.“ These are networks that are marked by „affirmation and acceptance“ of others.

Other studies into the working of *Ubuntu* philosophy have highlighted the different cultural dimensions, and the crucial role of appropriate leadership styles in determining the success of community initiatives. According to Maurice (2010), successful *Ubuntu* communities depend on sensitive and listening leaders in what is known as „responsible leadership“. As a result the values and attributes inherent in *Ubuntu* philosophy can play a valuable role both in helping individuals in a range of community development and nation building initiatives. The philosophy is helpful in that it emphasises reciprocal relationships in that people contribute more to the common good if they are valued, and that goals are more likely to be met when consensus is achieved. Mangalismo (2001: 32) has identified some practical guidelines in implementing *Ubuntu* in conflict approaches namely:

Treat others with dignity and respect (this is a central element of *Ubuntu* and its role in creating the appropriate environment); be willing to negotiate in good faith (taking time to listen when negotiating because listening is essential in the process of acknowledgement, which in turn can then lead to real trust and co-operation); provide opportunities for self-expression (honour achievements, affirm values etc.); understand the beliefs and practices (different cultural perspectives, understand different belief systems, also be careful not to suppress a specific culture in favour of the dominant culture); honour seniority, especially in leadership choices (age, experience, etc.); promote equity (ensure that decisions are clear and fair); be flexible and accommodative (acknowledge the organic nature of *Ubuntu*, which itself is a balanced blend of different approaches and ideas etc).

Mbigi (1997: 32), strengthening the above, referred it as the “collective finger’s theory,” in which he indicates that,

The collective finger’s theory, which is best explained by the African proverb ‘a thumb, although it is strong, cannot kill aphids on its own’. The thumb needs the collective help and co-operation of the other fingers on the hand. The lessons of this proverb are, first, that the fingers are individuals who need to work together to achieve a collective goal, and, second, the fingers represent core values that are interdependent and synergetic and need to

come together to build and maintain the collective culture.

Ubuntu is also about building a collective understanding through the sharing of ideas between community members. This builds on the perception that ideas are not property that can be owned by individuals, but are instead a common resource that should be shared willingly.

The above quotation of promoting dignity through a collective approach by meeting basic human needs (food, health, employment, shelter and security, political and economic), strengthens relations. Agreeing to this idea, Haider (2011) defines it as a social repair approach. According to Brewer (2001), the idea of using collective approach to increase wealth for all and to ensure the balance of power intended for dignity, peace, security and stability for the general populace is the ideal approach to conflict approaches as a process. Concurring to the same issue, Ramsbotham and Wennmann (2014) observe that collective approach is based on capacity building, identifying issues in public relations and providing locally owned outcomes. As a result, applying the *Ubuntu* theoretical framework on conflict does not entail rebuilding conflict approaches from scratch or dismantling what has been instituted by others but is, rather by others but is, rather, viewing conflict process from an Afrocentric theory of *Ubuntu* tenets guided by the levels of consciousness. According to Cuhadar and Dayton (2011), this is what is known as the social psychology of identity and inter-group conflict approaches from theory to practice.

Conferring to theory and practice (Shearer, 1998:44), observed that, “the absence of standards and a common framework of reference, which are locally designed and owned, gives rise to contestation of ideas”. Since African indigenous knowledge is not written down, unlike Western and Eastern ideologies which are well documented, it is necessary to disseminate *Ubuntu* philosophy to scholars, academics, civil society and the general populace, locating conflict as a process within the *Ubuntu* levels of consciousness. This is definitely a value system approach from an African perspective especially within the Southern African region.

Value System

Value systems approach preserves the values and lifestyle that constitute the minimal conditions necessary for human dignity. One might ask about the relationship between conflict and social value systems. The answer is found in the traditional *Ubuntu* philosophy which undertakes to both defend and

uphold human values. The conflict consciousness approach process through Ubuntu is charged with preserving and protecting that way of life, and members of the public are expected to exemplify in their personal lives and those values they have made a clear and overt commitment to uphold. The value system in Ubuntu holds that honesty is better than dishonesty, courage is better than cowardice, truth telling is better than lying, promise keeping is better than promise breaking. These are the fundamental tenants of Ubuntu philosophy.

Doro (2012) observes that the concept of conflict need not be a contentious issue, but rather a part and parcel of national social, health, socio-economic, technology and political consciousness. The debate surrounding conflict has been mostly confined to politics where it is seen as a way of determining political scores. In this terrain of contestation, exclusivist and narrow-minded paradigms of conflict have emerged with new levels. Graves (2005:112) observes that,

As long as human beings continue to exist, new levels will always emerge as new problems are created by the prior level. It is also important to remember that all levels are necessary for the development of humanity. All levels have advantages and all create problems; no level is better than another. We must learn how to apply an understanding of these levels appropriately for the benefit of all people. Our responsibility as shepherds of consciousness is to guide others and ourselves only as and when they are ready to shift, and allow for all the variations of humanity.

In Graves's observation, a proposition of the thesis, synthesis and antithesis is hereby reflected in that *Ubuntu* serves to bring people together on a common course through practical responses (skills) and consciousness (awareness). However, Mactonsh (2007) concludes that, the path of the levels of consciousness is often bidirectional, depending on internal and external conditions, and precipitating a change in reactivity.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this article is according to Creswell (2012) is qualitative inquiry in order to gain insight into attitudes and perceptions

about locating conflict within the *Ubuntu* levels of consciousness. Data collection tools included uester-views (a questionnaire which can also be used for interview purposes), for those strategically positioned in peace building and leadership decision making positions. The information gathered is discussed under the section on data analysis. The units of analysis were the responses of individuals and groups, and their attitudes towards conflict as a process within the levels of consciousness. The data was managed using the Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) package, a qualitative data management and analysis tool. These tools were used to improve the validity of data through triangulation. This was essentially an exploratory qualitative research seeking to draw basic facts about conflict and locating it within the *Ubuntu* levels of consciousness. Perceptions about conflict and its position in the *Ubuntu* levels of consciousness were discussed, evaluated and positioned. The Focus Group Discussions FGDs was a brainstorming exercises using the uester-view in locating conflict in *Ubuntu* levels of consciousness.

DATA ANALYSIS

In the analyses, 30 uester-views were distributed during this research study. Of the 24 uester-views that were completed, four were spoiled, since they did not have any worthwhile data, and were not deemed suitable for analysis. Accordingly, twenty uester-views were considered for analysis and interpretation. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability statistics tool was utilised to gauge the level of reliability of the uester-view. The value of 0.935 obtained was sufficiently high to validate the instrument's reliability.

Quester-View Findings – Tracing Conflict within the *Ubuntu* Level of Consciousness

A myriad of reactions were observed from the uester-view as regards the location of CT within the *Ubuntu* levels of consciousness. Out of the 20 uester-views, 80% of the respondents were of the view that conflict prevention is the first level and as an actor conflict prevention does not occur in a vacuum, but within a specific social and political context. As a result, conflict approaches as they stand, are Eurocentric rather than Afrocentric in nature. The point which was emphasized was that in conflict approaches valuing ourselves entails prevention in a constructive manner. The challenge is about adjusting and aligning Afrocentric perspectives to meet the value

systems. The 77% of the respondents from the uester-views also revealed that conflict approaches should be endogenously driven and locally owned. As it stands, conflict approaches are prescriptive in content, methodology and ideology. Genuine conflict approaches can be achieved by adopting an Afrocentric perspective for Africans and by Africans. Similarly, Bryden and Hanggi (2004: 3) observed that, the absence of locally owned process in conflict equation involves challenging ideological and theoretical viewpoints. This suggests that conflict in its current form is a concept which is not based on African interests and value systems. Appropriately viewed, conflict approaches should be located in level of the *Ubuntu* levels of consciousness as a process which is evolutionary not revolutionary. According to one of the respondents on 10 July 2016 observed that,

Any conflict that relies on political bickering of conflict prevention, conflict management and conflict resolution is a disaster to any nation. Conflict approaches should be a normal enhancement, empowerment and alignment mechanism that should include constructive approaches for modernisation in the fourth industrial revolution through an ownership process that is endogenously driven and evolutionary. If this conflict approach is undertaken through *Ubuntu*, it should identify concerns of the actors, relevance to their requirements

Conflict approaches complement each other from prevention to transformation because conflict prevention, management and resolution are the means and conflict transformation is the goal. If the needs of a society are satisfied and insecurity addressed, an enabling environment for development is created. Therefore, conflict transformation creates a peaceful environment for investment, productivity and economic growth. In this case conflict transformation should be institutionalised with the structures and when it exists, leads to developmental activities. All developmental issues rely on motivated human beings and a contended population with cohesion offers the first line of development. This denotes that a society that has confidence can transform confidence into development.

This implies that conflict approaches social, political, cultural, technological and socio-economic issues located and centred on empowerment, based on African value systems. For that reason, conflict approaches require a new consensus that acknowledges the evolutionary aspect and interdependencies

between them because they are inseparable as levels of consciousness, vital and mutually reinforcing factors in social reality. Conflict approaches occurs within a sociological context of needs, motives, values and norms which are always in a dynamic state of relation in the context of improvement that leads to human security and happiness.

Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

The perceptions in respect of conflict approaches were discussed and evaluated. The FGDs were brainstorming exercises which started with conflict approaches as prevention, management, resolution and transformation. After the brain storming exercise participants were involved in discussions. Many thought-provoking ideas and experiences were raised, suggestions and proposals made. The current conflict approaches were observed as an asymmetric warfare, a Western agenda whose goal is to place liberal notions into the system. Therefore, the threat is in reversal of the Afrocentric approaches. FGDs amalgamate perceptions, discussions and draw parallels to this study as a critical thematic content analysis leading to the explanation of facts. The FGDs were of the view that the current conflict approaches is a design to strengthen the pillars of Western ideologies. As a result, locating conflict process within the levels of consciousness were discussed and evaluated. Conflict was viewed as an internal process, not a prescriptive measure by conflict moguls, and that it depends on a threat analysis within a particular socio-political, socio-economic, technological and cultural environment. It was observed that conflict as a process should comprise policies and legislative instruments designed to achieve developmental goals as each levels comes into play. The current conflict approach is still problematic because it is not located within *Ubuntu* theory. In the *Ubuntu* levels of consciousness, conflict approaches should not be prescriptive but an indigenous process located in the level of consciousness.

The FGDs were of the opinion that the conflict approaches should be used in tackling issues which affect security on a daily basis, for instance poverty, inequalities, unemployment, food, health and the lack of access to education, health delivery system and meeting the needs of the poorest (a community centred approach).

The FGDs pointed out that, conflict approach as a process is a political will derived from local leadership to own the process, and to review the capacity and technical needs of the citizens through constructive measures

and not punitive measures. The FGDs raised the idea that conflict approaches is not about rebuilding the conflict approaches from scratch or dismantling them, but is rather a developmental process and inherently a political process that challenges the existing power relationships in a positive and constructive manner. Therefore, liberal political sensitivity of conflict approaches creates resistance because the concepts are not African.

The FGDs observed that Afrocentric approach to conflict as levels of consciousness is a contribution towards human security through equipping and training the citizens for integrity, creativity and leadership development, encompassing respect for human needs, discipline, vigilance and obedience, visionary, loyalty, patriotism and dedication, competence and impartiality, honesty and consistency, fairness and effectiveness, efficiency and transparency. These observations are doctrines of the *Ubuntu* theoretical frameworks in conflict transformation in building bridges not walls.

The focus group discussions also brought to the fore new knowledge in that consciousness, functions as a quality of awareness or of being aware of an external object or something within oneself. The result is self-determination of the mind and soul, free from oppression, deprivation and discrimination for unity, freedom and sound work ethics as essential for conflict transformation. The level of consciousness must find some process of transforming the dynamic power of releasing the conscious within the level of expanding the consciousness to a higher level. This is the result of the philosophical theoretical framework of the thesis - the antithesis and the synthesis aspects thereof. It is a conceptual framework of a qualitative nature on the levels of consciousness based on the elements of *Ubuntu* theory.

It was observed that conflict as a process is part of the surrounding political, social, technological and economic process, and its success depends on the professional, educational, physical and moral attributes of the citizens. Therefore, citizens without standards and a common frame of reference are reduced to nothing more than rival factions. Conflict level of consciousness as a process should equip the citizens with attributes such as integrity, creativity and leadership development, respect of human needs, discipline, vigilance and obedience, vision, loyalty and dedication, competence and impartiality, honesty and consistency, fairness and effectiveness, efficiency and transparency. As a result these are the tenants of conflict transformation based on the Afrocentric theory of *Ubuntu*.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The followings are findings from the literature review, quester-views, and focus group discussions:

- a. African citizens are should be equipped with attributes such as integrity, creativity and leadership development, respect of human needs, discipline, vigilance and obedience, vision, loyalty and dedication, competence and impartiality, honesty and consistency, fairness and effectiveness, efficiency and transparency
- b. African citizens intellectuals and academics can be said that they suffer from the tyranny of definition and as a result they can be viewed as chasing the gods which are not theirs because they are not adjusting and aligning conflict approaches into Afrocentric viewpoints to meet their value systems.
- c. Conflict approaches are currently prescriptive and not endogenously driven, located and grounded theoretical, ideological and practical in Afrocentric philosophies.
- d. Conflict approaches are not preserving the values and lifestyle that constitute the minimal conditions necessary for human dignity because they are Eurocentric in nature.
- e. Conflict approaches are impulsive, not self-driven and not coupled with a reconfiguration of identity relations in a way that maintains a stable mental state.
- f. Afrocentric theories are under threat from the proliferation of foreign ideologies, theories and concepts, which have long influenced conflict approaches intellectually and academically.

CONCLUSION

This investigative article aimed to develop *Ubuntu* theory in understanding of conflict approaches in generating new approaches as the social aspect of the fourth industrial revolution by demonstrating how conflict can be approached in solving current societal, technological and socio-economic conflicts. One of the most important critics is the failure to solve inequalities on current and potential social challenges through the social dimensions of new technologies.

As a result, the theoretical framework of *Ubuntu* philosophy helped in locating conflict within the levels of consciousness. The *Ubuntu* philosophy,

is centered on the family unit, its values and socialisation systems, is the foundation of a value system of personhood in conflict approaches as a process. The practical application of *Ubuntu* entails valuing ourselves through our relationships in nation-building and encouraging collective work in locating conflict within the *Ubuntu* levels of consciousness. Since African indigenous knowledge is not written down, unlike Western and Eastern ideologies which are well documented, it is necessary to disseminate *Ubuntu* philosophy to scholars, academics, the conflict practitioners, civil society and the general populace, in locating conflict within *Ubuntu* levels of consciousness. Conflict prevention, management and resolution are the means and conflict transformation as the goal.

Conflict transformation should endure to preserve the values and lifestyle that constitute the minimal conditions necessary for human dignity. As a result, the *Ubuntu* levels of consciousness are an indigenous process located in the levels of consciousness. The concept of conflict through levels of consciousness is built and established from a sense of continuity in regard to the events in one's life. The focus is to transform social conflicts into opportunities for peaceful and positive change whether violent or non-violent, positive or negative.

This paper has drawn on *Ubuntu* theory of identity to suggest a number of ways in which conflict may be reconstructed while preserving the constitutive differences which are essential for conflict prevention, management, resolution and transformation. Certainly, there is a need for more theoretical and empirical investigations into the conditions under which actors and the acted upon must attain and sustain conflict approaches constructively. As a result, the practical application of *Ubuntu* in conflict approach entails valuing ourselves (conflict prevention) through our relationships in nation-building (conflict management) and encouraging collective work, (conflict resolution) consensus-building (conflict transformation) as levels of consciousness. Afrocentric approaches are the means and human security is the goal in conflict approaches.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- a. Develop a reflexive, self-driven conflict approaches as a process that maintains a stable mental state from an African perspective.
- b. Adjusting and aligning African theories to meet the value systems in conflict approaches in creating peace, security and development programs.

c. Equip citizens with attributes and tenants of African through the education system in conceptualising conflict approaches as levels of consciousness with the ultimate goal of conflict transformation.

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